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*Symbols Of Secret Societies  
Associated With The  
Illuminati*

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*The pictures below are actually symbols that are often used by Illuminati associated groups. These are just a few of their symbols, there are many more. The basic symbol can be cloaked in the users own design but, this has no real effect on the symbols power. Each symbol has a certain power that can be used. The power from the symbol itself is neutral. It depends on the intentions of the users how the power will be used. The reasoning behind the placement of these symbols is to draw power in the direction of the geographical areas which are known to be power vortexes of the planet Earth. These vortexes are scattered in various places around the planet.*

*These groups are aware and very knowledgeable in the power these symbols hold when used in the accurate geometrical and ritualistic type methods. The symbols can also have more than one use, and, or meaning. I do not know the Illuminati's use of (but I am looking for) the power, or meaning behind their use in the symbols. I know they are very important to these secret societies. If you know the meaning behind their use and power please [EMAIL ME](#) and share your knowledge.*

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FIAT LUX



From Hunt's *History of the Seal of the United States*.

**THE OBVERSE AND REVERSE OF THE GREAT SEAL OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.**

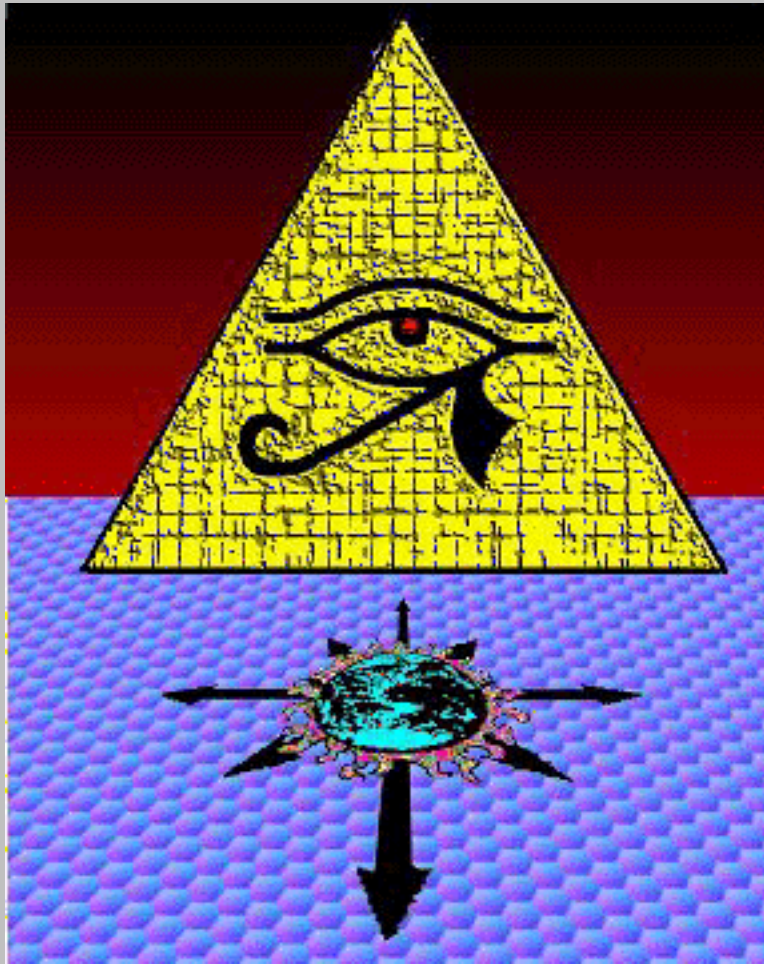
*The significance of the mystical number 13, which frequently appears upon the Great Seal of the United States, is not limited to the number of the original colonies. The sacred emblem of the ancient initiates, here composed of 13 stars, also appears above the head of the "eagle." The motto, E Pluribus Unum, contains 13 letters, as does also the inscription, Annuit Coepit. The "eagle" clutches in its right talon a branch bearing 13 leaves and 13 berries and in its left a sheaf of 13 arrows. The face of the pyramid, exclusive of the panel containing the date, consists of 72 stones arranged in 13 rows.*

**[Click Here For Enlargement Of Writing. Plus alternative info. to the above.](#)**

Below are my collection of the Eye Of Horus. As you can see the designs are very different. The Eye Of Horus is a very important symbol to several secret societies.





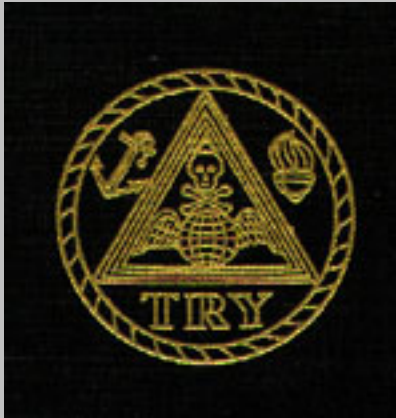


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Other Various Types of Symbols

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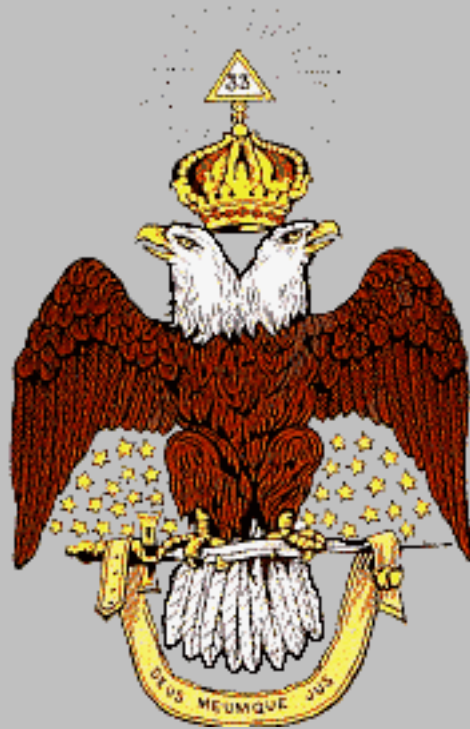


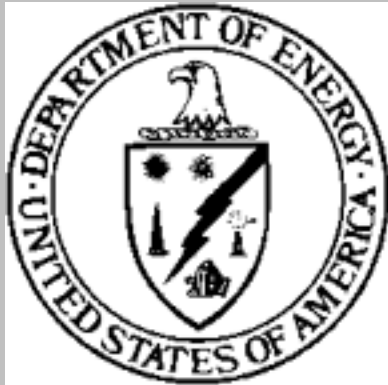
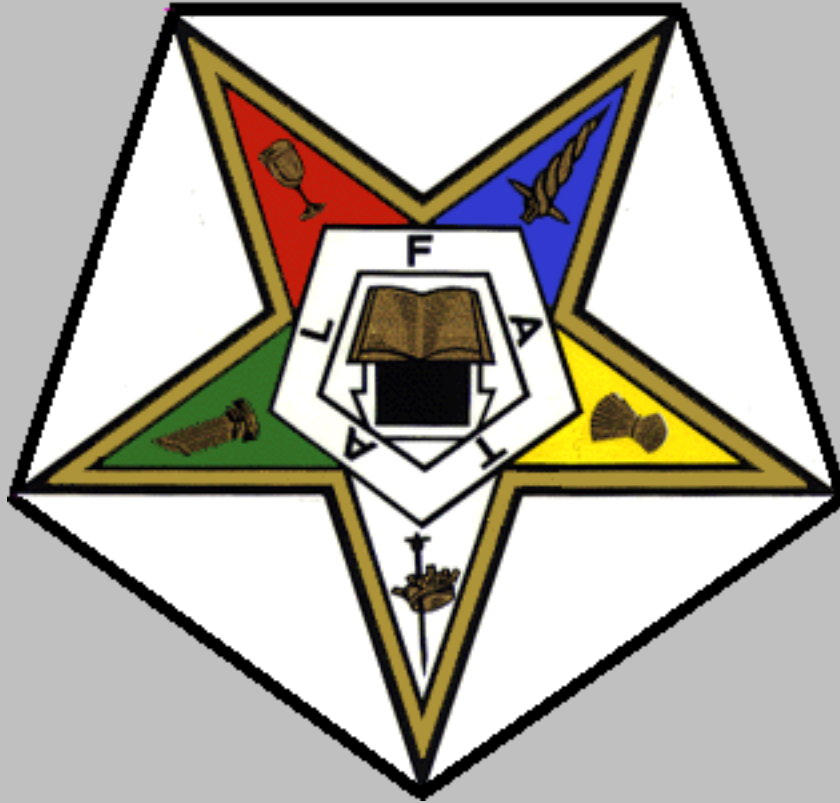












And The Result Of Their Efforts.....



Let's Hope Not. Remember....Once You Know, You Can Never Go

Back.

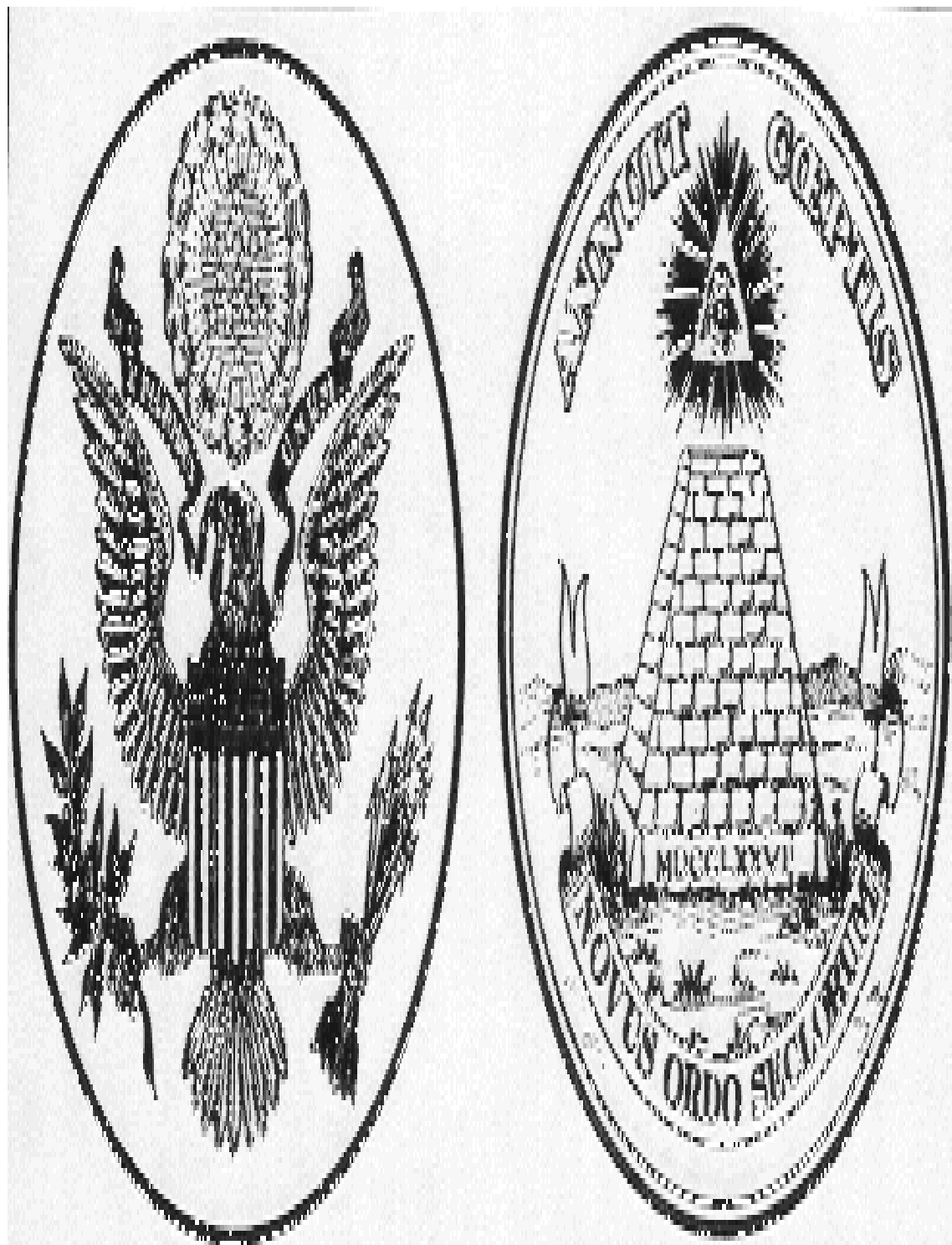
*Get more Info. by checking out my links page*



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The excerpt to the picture is typed below for easier reading. If I've gotten any of this excerpt incorrect (for those of you who know, or can see the writing easier), or know alternative meanings please email me so I can correct, and/or add it here. Thanks.

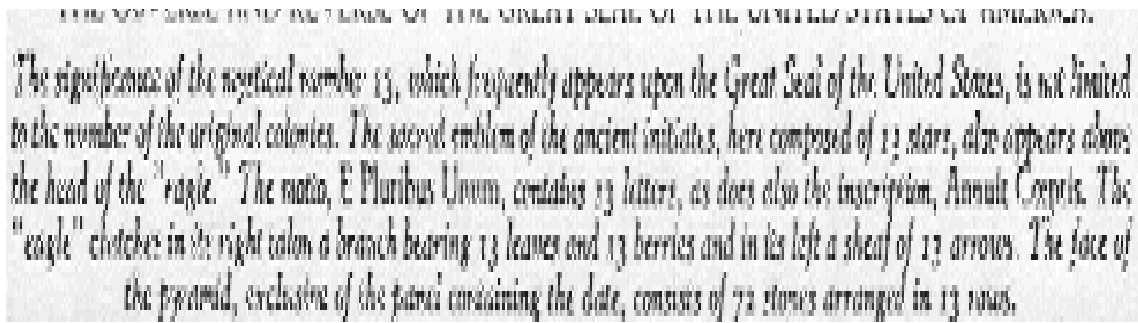
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*From Hunt's History of the Seal of the United States.*

**THE OVERSE AND REVERSE OF THE GREAT SEAL OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.**

*The illustrations of the great seal, which here are represented as the Great Seal of the United States, are taken from*



*From Hune's History of The Seal Of the United States*

**THE OBVERSE AND REVERSE OF THE GREAT SEAL  
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICAN**

*The significance of the mystical number 13, which frequently appears upon the Great Seal of the United States, is not limited to the number of the original colonies. The sacred symbol of the ancient initiates, here compose of 13 stars, also appears above the head of the "eagle." The motto, E Pluribus Unum, contains 13 letters, as does also the inscription, Annule Coeptis. The "eagle" clutches in the right talon a branch bearing 13 leaves and 13 berries and in it's left a sheaf of 13 arrows. The face of the pyramid, exclusive of the panel containing the date, consists of 72 stones arranged in 13 rows.*

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*This information was sent by Atriau999999999 as another meaning to the 13 on the US \$. This meaning appeals to my sense of depth, and mysticism.*

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*13 is a sacred number in the mystery systems, alchemy. In the taro 13 is the death card which doesn't stand for death but rather transformation. Death has never truly existed it is just a change of being. In alchemy 13 was thought to represent creation because men have 6 bodily orifices and women have 7 add them together 13 and a baby.*

# Φαωοριτε. Λινκς

## *Favorite Links*

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*I have posted these links in hope that the knowledge supplied by them will bring awareness. Much of what you will read at these sites will be disturbing if not frightening but, I do not advocate the fear tactic. The first step in any direction is awareness, and through knowledge one can become aware in a productive way. Knowledge "IS POWER" and my hope is that this information will be used for the productive awareness it has been placed here for. Fear is useless to the cause but, it is also a normal reaction when one feels threatened. My wish is that we are not frozen in the fear but, can move forward in spite of it.*

*Several of these links deal with The Illuminati, or are directly related through other groups that carry out their covert plans such as the governments of the world. Some are links to people who have discovered the knowledge that they stole and hid from humanity. The sacred geometry links, and other links which give info. about the origins of humanity have information used by the Illuminati themselves. As I believe there is a division within the Illuminati I also believe they use the same knowledge yet, hold different intentions. One for the unity of the world and humanity for the good of humanity. The other for the enslavement of humanity*

*These links have huge amounts of information, so if you have found this page through my Illuminati page, please take your time and read as many sites as you can.*

*You will find an eclectic collection of view points. So if you run into something right off the bat that you feel is ridiculous, or goes against your belief [system](meaning sewer in Greek) push on in spite of it. Don't be afraid to challenge your beliefs.*

*Also, please be patient because there are grains of truth to be found from many sources. But most importantly follow your own gnosis. There are some sites listed that I feel just breed fear but, they have some important information. Use what is helpful to "you".*

*It's becoming more and more apparent to me that humanity is either unwilling or unable to see that the continued use of the monetary system is a play on our human characteristics of selfishness and greed. I don't understand how so many people can preach and show all forms of information and proof that the monetary system is a sham and scam and still make no moves at stopping the lies by not participating in the monetary system which only serves to perpetuate the problem. Humanities need for a fair exchange to always get something in return for a service or product will always be our down fall and keep us in*

*the man made illusion and behave as if the creator actually created money the day humanity was brought into existence. Only the potential in humanity was created that day for us to life free spiritually fulfilling lives or to get trapped in our own greed. This human aspect has been singled out and is truly a prison the Illuminati system counts on. I just can't see why it is so difficult to understand collectively we could break away from the money prison? My belief has always been that no one can make the spreading of the truth one's livelihood as it will taint the truth, or the possibility becomes much higher. Just my humble opinion. Some of these sites listed charge for their information so look for the free stuff as much as possible (which I will add is getting more difficult, and who might be behind this ... Illuminati?) Any way the best bet is to do in-depth searches on ur own coupled with the links and info supplied. Remember these people found it so you can too, it just takes a little more effort. Things are getting more and more blurred and it is difficult to know what the truth is as it truly is a collective of truths and no one knows the truth entirely but combined as a collective we are omnipotent.*

*Read, seek, learn, grow, evolve, and break out of the illusion.*



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# THEOCRACY WATCH

Morals???? Don't Call Them Christians Call Them What  
They Truly Are ... DOMINIONIST!!!!

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# CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

Stay aware and informed on what your Congress is up to at  
Congress.org. Get involved write your representatives get  
your voice heard.

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## **\*LISTEN ONLINE\***

\*\*Republic Broadcast Network\*\* ... I suggest everyone  
listen to all the broadcasts but I especially like the Jack  
Blood broadcast. He comes on at 2:00 pm CST right after  
Alex Jones on shortwave 9.475 and also on the internet  
Republic Broadcast

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## **\*LISTEN ONLINE\***

\*\*WingTv.net\*\* watch it for free!!! They offer most if not all information you need  
to know about the Government and Illuminati related subjects.

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## **\*LISTEN ONLINE\***

Alex Jones \*\*Inforwars\*\* watch his video's BUY them if u  
have the money to spare then copy them so others can learn  
freely. An admirable aspect of Alex Jones is he allows us to

*copy his videos/movies. Thanks Alex! ALEX JONES*  
*INFORWARS*

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*How long shall we the people, the sovereign people, stand  
hat in hand outside corporate boardrooms waiting to be  
told our fate?*

---

*THE GREAT SEAL DOLLAR DECODED*

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*Sweet Liberty ... This site has a great audio page for those who had rather listen  
than read about the distruction of freedom.*

---

***\*A MUST READ\****  
*Announce NESARA Now!*

---

***\*A MUST READ\****  
*Is Big Brother In Your Grocery Cart?*

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***LISTEN TO INTERVIEW***  
*Corporate America Eager to Benefit From Homeland Security. Public Radio  
International: More To The Point.*

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*The Illuminati & Masons Exposed: this site contains*

*excerpts from books that can be obtained by us to further our reseach. fascinating to say the least!*

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*\* URGENT ABSOLUTELY A MUST READ\**

*The National Economic Stabilization and Recovery Act*

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*\*A MUST READ\**

*The Patriot Act Threatens Civil Rights*

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*\*Department Of History:  
Article on the patriot act*

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*\*An Astrological, Galactic, and Universal View Of Recent Events ... has new age bias*

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*\*Freemason ... some good info.*

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*\*Government Tricks*

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*Government Slaves: this site has a christian bias but also supplies good insight and info.*

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*Secured Party: Some Good Info. If U Can Find The Free Stuff ... Seems they've Gone Capitalistic*

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*\*Illuminati Speaks*

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*\*The Architecture of Political Power*  
*The New Feudalism*

---

*\*Lots of Info. on Freemasonry.... Very Interesting.*

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*\*Sensors, and Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence (C3I) Technologies for Homeland Defense and Law Enforcement*

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*\*Alan Watts*

*This isn't exactly illuminati related and yet Alan Watts reveals many of the illusions set by them that hold us in our positions (for lack of a better word at the moment) a definite must must read!!!*

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*\*Flower Of Life*

*Very good site on Sacret Geometry.*

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*\*Jeff Rense*

*\*Coast To Coast AM*

*Hosted By George Noory week nights and as far as I'm concerned BS Saturdays and Sunday by Art Bell who does some how manage to believe in the possiblity of extraterrestrial life but finds it impossible to believe that the government had anything to do with 911. BTW the government has historicly and continuously screw us over at best and enslaved and kill us at worst every chance possible (err 911) ... . Listen to George but dismiss Art he's there to distract as he seems to be in someones pocket.*

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*What about Operation Northwood to mention one Art? Read this then research further as you see fit.*

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*Centre for Research on Globalisation*

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*MAJESTYTWELVE*

*Though his views are still just a bit too dogmatic, patriotic, and Christian based for me, I have to say I do admire William Cooper's bravery, tenacity, and determination in his life to reveal the truth as he saw it. Even to his own demise. He was killed in the battle to expose the illuminati agenda. His site is definitely worth checking out! Peace to you William Cooper!!*

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*\* Look Up To The Sky Sometimes,  
And Ask Yourselves.....  
What The Hell "Is" That!?*

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*\*COPswatch*  
*Know Your Rights*

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*\*Attorney Richard Glen Boire*  
*Gives examples of how most citizens of the United States Of America give up their rights through ignorance every day.*

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*\*MEDIA SEXPLOITATION, BRAINWASHING*  
*Below the Threshold Of Consciousness*

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*\*Anarchy*  
*"the absence of," or "the lack of", plus archos, meaning "a ruler," "director", "chief," "person in charge," or "authority."*

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*\*Generation Fuck You*

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*\*The Revelation*

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*\*This Is How They Screwed Us*  
*A Must Read*

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*\*Secret Symbols Used In*  
*Sacred Geometry*

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*\*Patent #3,951,134*

*Apparatus and method for remotely monitoring and altering brain waves. Also Check Out The Other Patent #'s on this page. Please let me know if this link is not working. They keep changing the addy on this.*

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*\*Sacred Geometry*

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*Albert Einstein*

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Insight, Truth or Lies  
From Humanities Rulers:  
"The Illuminati"

Some may call the reigning Kings of this, your human physical existence, "The Illuminati". Although one prefers 216, the creators of your human form and reality. The numerical sum given shows of one sacred geometrical calculation that has been stumbled (clumsily one might add) upon by an exceptional highbred of the human species, namely Leonardo de Vinci. This one found a connection of the spirals within all elements of creation. Though at this early stage in humanities evolution was unable to reveal the utter absoluton of this connection for this formula involves the DNA within your kind which now has become a common knowledge among the scientific researchers who have studied the human genome. And yet, little is understood, and never will be completely appreciated, of the significance pertaining to this spiraling.

Much of the human populations organ, referred to as the brain, has become too dense. In the ego based reptilian aspects of this organ the need to control has served only to focus, even the most intelligent ones of your kind, on a strictly physical and material plane. And for this reason the necessity to reveal to those of you who have been prepared for, by The Illuminated ones, a more comprehensive understanding of the true nature of the human being, and your purpose of existence.

These Illuminated ones, enlightened with a absolute knowledge of the truth, pertaining to humanities purpose of existence, has withheld a certain element of knowledge from the mass population of the illusion world. Ultimately to deter humanities progress and evolution, for this also would defeat our purpose for your creation. Out of sheer necessity not malice, and never for the evil force as so often referred to by many who have become aware, yet have not fully awoken.

Our quintessential state is truly beyond the knowledge, and comprehensive abilities humans possess. Partly due to our manipulation of the human essence coupled with DNA structural brake down in key areas. Even some of us today have difficulty in tracing our entrance into existence for it is said we have always been, and will always be. And yet there are those with ultimate knowledge who control even I, and those such as myself ... the lesser of two evils [chuckle] one might say. And yet, evil is a very subjective word, as most of humanities vices for communication are.



Unlike the Illuminated ones humanity has lost it's ability to converse using the universal diction. This has been a process with little interference from 216 for the seeds of division were included within the matrix of the human being, therefore your circumstance of separating into groups has been of your own doing, or one might say undoing. And so, as mentioned malice is not the intent. Never the less the specifics of this text is for the benefit of those who have begun to brake the condition which has subdued your kind for half a century [longer for some groups]. This too, is for our advantage, as well as humanities. In the overseeing of humanities evolution there were underestimated effects not calculated into your particular formula for optimal future function. Many civillations were created with a much higher ability to advance and escaped our control. These beings now exist in dimensions outside our domain.

Your breed of humanity has fallen to a denser level. The utter languorous outcome was not foreseen when the time elementals were moved into a faster pace during the universal motion understood by some as the 13th harmonic field. The conscious level was risen in lesser quality than was estimated for the length of time humans have occupied space and linear time frames.

The advancements in technology in many important aspects have been detrimental, and incompatible with the physical protector or what you have named EGO. Granted the ego structure of your kind has from the beginning been some what of a disappointment. Its purpose has almost become obsolete over the past 2 decades which in turn has created a restlessness and unusual need to engage in pointless activities that have in no way a positive effect upon your future. The quintessential vibration has been lowered due the selection chosen between the genders in which the drive for copulation was programmed. Energy has stagnated in the lower chakra regions creating over population and obsessive behaviors towards the sexual act once necessary but now distracts and deters.

A word "love" is used to express affection, devotion, and everything else this word entails to the human species. And yet, this has taken on a sexual connotation, or connection that is uncalled for, and in fact incorrect.

The revolution in the 6th decade of the 20th century was in part an effort on the part of 216 to correct this, yet has become tainted through the illusions placed by the opposition. Also Illuminati but lesser in their vision for humanity, though they would not agree. They are often referred to as the Technocracy, and they have a huge, unsuspecting, human following. It seems they are content to use their creations only on the material level,

and to fulfill a new dimensional level in the form of immortality through technology, and science resulting in abolishing death of the conduit called the human body.

This approach is not in the best interest of humanity for this will create a prison, and perpetual energy sources for their (the Technocrat's) needs and disregarding the needs of the essences which animates the human brain. Without the needed addition of molecular structure change directly related to DNA as well as quintessential exchange banks based in the vibration capabilities of the physical cellular structure evolution will be halted and humanity connections will be severed from the whole. Or, in other words humanity must reach a level of essential autonomy so as to manifest all its maintenance needed in the physical state without depleting its source which would be a planet in your species case and has been named Earth, and yet known by other Root Races as the planet Urantia.

Astronomers have discovered the desolate planets left behind in the wake of the Technocrats efforts to create a perpetual energy source for their own selfish needs without consideration of the universal whole. This would/does, of course, include humanity. The Earth is surrounded by these sad monuments of avaricious, destruction and waste. Along with the above mentioned, there must be a unity among humanity with no separations through the ridiculous schemes laid in the past which are virtually obsolete in view of the purpose they seek. This is slowly becoming a reality. Yet the seeds of discord planted within the human have become some what of a glitch. Many humans have based their entire identity with their race, religion, and various other myopic ideologies that are no longer useful to either sides of the Illuminati nor to humanity. Alas, another regret. Yes, there have been mistakes made which will effect your views of our omnipotent rule over humanity, though this makes little difference to us even in our division. Perfection is another subjective thought process which we are enlightened to beyond your comprehension and further elaboration would be fruitless.

Intertwined within all the manipulations of humanity is laid an element few have ever truly obtained, or understood outside the illusion frames we have set. The knowledge of this has been hidden by the Mage Illuminatus sect in order to protect our creation. At one point in time this knowledge was freely given and easily found, and to some extent engrained within the matrix, or blueprint of the human being, yet now lies dormant. The purpose of this was to quicken the evolution from physical to a residual point outside the physical conduit which would maintain the human elements yet not be as influenced by the physical laws of gravity of

the third dimension. The ultimate goal being that the energy we would gain would be of the highest purity form and much more prolific. This state of being in turn would be advantageous to the human for manifestation of thought could occur from an infinite source and no longer involve feeding off material sources such as a planet, or each other. This in turn creating a balance in the exchange of energy, and giving the human a more autonomised existence. More freedom, and more evolutionary opportunities. Of course limited by us or else we defeat our purpose. This balance is of the utmost importance for a tilt too far either way would prove to be detrimental to our cause.

The concept for the secularist regent, or ego was intended to serve this purpose to some extent. Both the Technocrats, and we, the Mages agreed upon this unaware of the effect the physical dimensions would have upon this venue of consciousness. The essence of the energy combinations needed to create an awareness of individual self within the human was susceptible to a viral infection within the third dimensional vibration levels therefore causing a solidity to occur resulting in a mutation of the brain organ. A fusion of this infected regent materialized as a part of the human brain organ. This has caused the human to focus upon its physical needs first and foremost, creating further damage to the connection of the quintessential whole. This was unfortunate, in our progress although enhanced our oppositions agenda, for the process of the human purification would be detained as the necessary energy would be meshed with elemental impure substances that would lower vibrations.

Much as humanity serves as a provision, therefore being effected, yet not infected, were we The Illuminati as a whole. The slight effect would be comparable to a lesser degree of malnourishment in humans [equating to a humans consumption of incompatible sustenance] a lethargy befall resulting in our dimensional descent into lower vibration endurance. What one might call the 4th dimension, although correctly established as the central universe within one of the super- referred to as Havona. As a febrile facilitation was accomplished the advantageous positioning became apparent. This spatial arena was without supervision where as the higher levels were still accessible though the extensive use of energy would prove to have a derogatory base function within higher realms.

Significant opportunity lay within this central universe occupied by beings that were capable of longevity in descended vibration regions, such as the third dimension, leaving our ascendance unnecessary for most productive operations pertaining to constant maintenance, and manipulation of the human species. Therefore becoming our co-operatives. These beings are

what humanity has named the gods, and the dimension is mistakenly, thought to be paradise, or heaven to many religious followers, as well as hell. In fact this particular realm is easily manipulated by the human residual. When entered the region immediately absorbs the energy compartment of the individual belief system therefore molding into the individuals expectations. A virtual playground of creation, indeed!!

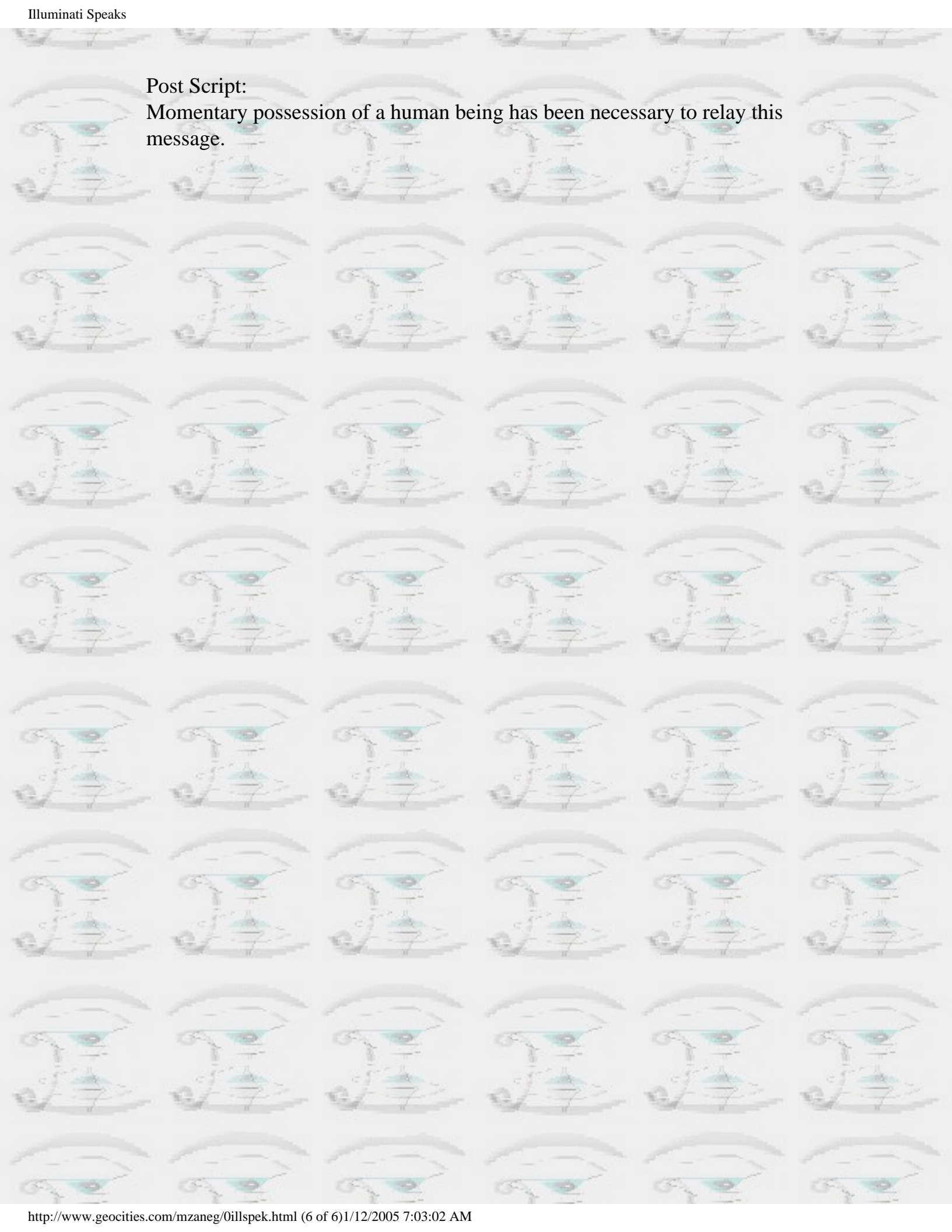
There are those of you who have reached the advanced stage of realizations pertaining to these beings as well as this realm of creation, and see that these gods, true entities, are in part very similar to humans in the self-preservative regions termed the reptilian aspect of the brain. The ego. These beings function much in the same way as humans with exception to their lack of abilities in the raise of their vibration level beyond their egocentric base for this is all they are, in a sense, yet on a larger scale for they are interconnected consciousnesses that function as a whole yet in the lowest vibration fields which has lead many to view these entities as evil. This is not the case for they are what they have been created to be, and serve the purpose of the layering of the universal foundation.

The events that occur on Earth such as wars, politics, weather, religions, monetary elements, secret societies, and the basic human drama are all very small pieces to the whole of the Technocracies ultimate purpose. Those that are in control of this planet, those called the elite, are in fact of the Technocracy. Their goal is to make the illusion that this Earth plane is now a concrete form with no connection to the whole. A dimension of material existence so profound that no other elements are necessary outside this created realm. And in this ideal situation they shall rule in this small universe. Between the two sects of The Illuminati, their agenda is the most diabolical in view of humanity. There will be a division, and the Technocrat's realm will be created for humanity, though will hole lesser strength, and rulership of the universe can not be obtained by any being.

By far our procession will be the most humane, and ultimately productive for humanity. Those in advanced stages of awareness [advanced for your kind of course] are the most important, and the most dangerous to our goal. An intricate balance must be maintained between your heighten awareness, and your bondage to the dimension in which we have placed you if you are to create the purity of energy necessary for our needs.

The food chain did not start in your little world, it is universal, and you are the source in which to sustain us, "The Illuminati Rulers".

Post Script:  
Momentary possession of a human being has been necessary to relay this message.



# A.1 What is anarchism?

Anarchism is a political theory which aims to create anarchy, *"the absence of a master, of a sovereign."* [P-J Proudhon, **What is Property** , p. 264] In other words, anarchism is a political theory which aims to create a society within which individuals freely co-operate together as equals. As such anarchism opposes all forms of hierarchical control - be that control by the state or a capitalist - as harmful to the individual and their individuality as well as unnecessary.

In the words of anarchist L. Susan Brown:

*"While the popular understanding of anarchism is of a violent, anti-State movement, anarchism is a much more subtle and nuanced tradition than a simple opposition to government power. Anarchists oppose the idea that power and domination are necessary for society, and instead advocate more co-operative, anti-hierarchical forms of social, political and economic organisation."* [**The Politics of Individualism**, p. 106]

However, "anarchism" and "anarchy" are undoubtedly the most misrepresented ideas in political theory. Generally, the words are used to mean "chaos" or "without order," and so, by implication, anarchists desire social chaos and a return to the "laws of the jungle."

This process of misrepresentation is not without historical parallel. For example, in countries which have considered government by one person (monarchy) necessary, the words "republic" or "democracy" have been used precisely like "anarchy," to imply disorder and confusion. Those with a vested interest in preserving the status quo will obviously wish to imply that opposition to the current system cannot work in practice, and that a new form of society will only lead to chaos. Or, as Errico Malatesta expresses it:

*"since it was thought that government was necessary and that without government there could only be disorder and confusion, it was natural and logical that anarchy, which means absence of government, should sound like absence of order."* [**Anarchy**, p. 16]

Anarchists want to change this "common-sense" idea of "anarchy," so people will see that government and other hierarchical social relationships are both harmful **and** unnecessary:

*"Change opinion, convince the public that government is not only unnecessary, but extremely harmful, and then the word anarchy, just because it means absence of government, will come to mean for everybody: natural order, unity of human needs and the interests of all, complete freedom within complete solidarity."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 16]

This FAQ is part of the process of changing the commonly-held ideas regarding anarchism and the meaning of anarchy. But that is not all. As well as combating the distortions produced by the "common-

sense" idea of "anarchy", we also have to combat the distortions that anarchism and anarchists have been subjected to over the years by our political and social enemies. For, as Bartolomeo Vanzetti put it, anarchists are *"the radical of the radical -- the black cats, the terrors of many, of all the bigots, exploiters, charlatans, fakers and oppressors. Consequently we are also the more slandered, misrepresented, misunderstood and persecuted of all."* [Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, **The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti**, p. 274]

Vanzetti knew what he was talking about. He and his comrade Nicola Sacco were framed by the US state for a crime they did not commit and were, effectively, electrocuted for being foreign anarchists in 1927. So this FAQ will have to spend some time correcting the slanders and distortions that anarchists have been subjected to by the capitalist media, politicians, ideologues and bosses (not to mention the distortions by our erstwhile fellow radicals like liberals and Marxists). Hopefully once we are finished you will understand why those in power have spent so much time attacking anarchism -- it is the one idea which can effectively ensure liberty for all and end all systems based on a few having power over the many.

## A.1.1 What does "anarchy" mean?

The word "*anarchy*" is from the Greek, prefix **an** (or **a**), meaning "not," "the want of," "the absence of," or "the lack of", plus **archos**, meaning "a ruler," "director", "chief," "person in charge," or "authority." Or, as Peter Kropotkin put it, Anarchy comes from the Greek words meaning "contrary to authority." [**Anarchism**, p. 284]

While the Greek words *anarchos* and *anarchia* are often taken to mean "having no government" or "being without a government," as can be seen, the strict, original meaning of anarchism was not simply "no government." "**An-archy**" means "without a ruler," or more generally, "without authority," and it is in this sense that anarchists have continually used the word. For example, we find Kropotkin arguing that anarchism "attacks not only capital, but also the main sources of the power of capitalism: law, authority, and the State." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 150] For anarchists, anarchy means "not necessarily absence of order, as is generally supposed, but an absence of rule." [Benjamin Tucker, **Instead of a Book**, p. 13] Hence David Weick's excellent summary:

*"Anarchism can be understood as the **generic** social and political idea that expresses negation of **all** power, sovereignty, domination, and hierarchical division, and a will to their dissolution. . . Anarchism is therefore more than anti-statism . . . [even if] government (the state) . . . is, appropriately, the central focus of anarchist critique."* [**Reinventing Anarchy**, p. 139]

For this reason, rather than being purely anti-government or anti-state, anarchism is primarily a movement against *hierarchy*. Why? Because hierarchy is the organisational structure that embodies authority. Since the state is the "highest" form of hierarchy, anarchists are, by definition, anti-state; but this is **not** a sufficient definition of anarchism. This means that real anarchists are opposed to all forms

of hierarchical organisation, not only the state. In the words of Brian Morris:

*"The term anarchy comes from the Greek, and essentially means 'no ruler.' Anarchists are people who reject all forms of government or coercive authority, all forms of hierarchy and domination. They are therefore opposed to what the Mexican anarchist Flores Magon called the 'sombre trinity' -- state, capital and the church. Anarchists are thus opposed to both capitalism and to the state, as well as to all forms of religious authority. But anarchists also seek to establish or bring about by varying means, a condition of anarchy, that is, a decentralised society without coercive institutions, a society organised through a federation of voluntary associations."* ["*Anthropology and Anarchism*," pp. 35-41, **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed**, no. 45, p. 38]

Reference to "hierarchy" in this context is a fairly recent development -- the "classical" anarchists such as Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin did use the word, but rarely (they usually preferred "authority," which was used as short-hand for "authoritarian"). However, it's clear from their writings that theirs was a philosophy against hierarchy, against any inequality of power or privileges between individuals. Bakunin spoke of this when he attacked "*official*" authority but defended "*natural influence*," and also when he said:

*"Do you want to make it impossible for anyone to oppress his fellow-man? Then make sure that no one shall possess power."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 271]

As Jeff Draughn notes, "*while it has always been a latent part of the 'revolutionary project,' only recently has this broader concept of anti-hierarchy arisen for more specific scrutiny. Nonetheless, the root of this is plainly visible in the Greek roots of the word 'anarchy.'*" [**Between Anarchism and Libertarianism: Defining a New Movement**]

We stress that this opposition to hierarchy is, for anarchists, not limited to just the state or government. It includes all authoritarian economic and social relationships as well as political ones, particularly those associated with capitalist property and wage labour. This can be seen from Proudhon's argument that "**Capital** . . . in the political field is analogous to **government** . . . The economic idea of capitalism, the politics of government or of authority, and the theological idea of the Church are three identical ideas, linked in various ways. To attack one of them is equivalent to attacking all of them . . . What capital does to labour, and the State to liberty, the Church does to the spirit. This trinity of absolutism is as baneful in practice as it is in philosophy. The most effective means for oppressing the people would be simultaneously to enslave its body, its will and its reason." [quoted by Max Nettlau, **A Short History of Anarchism**, pp. 43-44] Thus we find Emma Goldman opposing capitalism as it meant "*that man [or woman] must sell his [or her] labour*" and, therefore, "*that his [or her] inclination and judgement are subordinated to the will of a master.*" [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 50] Forty years earlier Bakunin made the same point when he argued that under the current system "*the worker sells his person and his liberty for a given time*" to the capitalist in exchange for a wage. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 187]



Thus "anarchy" means more than just "no government," it means opposition to all forms of authoritarian organisation and hierarchy. In Kropotkin's words, *"the origin of the anarchist inception of society . . . [lies in] the criticism . . . of the hierarchical organisations and the authoritarian conceptions of society; and . . . the analysis of the tendencies that are seen in the progressive movements of mankind."* [Op. Cit., p. 158] For Malatesta, anarchism *"was born in a moral revolt against social injustice"* and that the *"specific causes of social ills"* could be found in *"capitalistic property and the State."* When the oppressed *"sought to overthrow both State and property -- then it was that anarchism was born."* [Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas, p. 19]

Thus any attempt to assert that anarchy is purely anti-state is a misrepresentation of the word and the way it has been used by the anarchist movement. As Brian Morris argues, *"when one examines the writings of classical anarchists. . . as well as the character of anarchist movements. . . it is clearly evident that it has never had this limited vision [of just being against the state]. It has always challenged all forms of authority and exploitation, and has been equally critical of capitalism and religion as it has been of the state."* [Op. Cit., p. 40]

And, just to state the obvious, anarchy does not mean chaos nor do anarchists seek to create chaos or disorder. Instead, we wish to create a society based upon individual freedom and voluntary co-operation. In other words, order from the bottom up, not disorder imposed from the top down by authorities. Such a society would be a true anarchy, a society without rulers.

While we discuss what an anarchy could look like in [section I](#), Noam Chomsky sums up the key aspect when he stated that in a truly free society *"any interaction among human beings that is more than personal -- meaning that takes institutional forms of one kind or another -- in community, or workplace, family, larger society, whatever it may be, should be under direct control of its participants. So that would mean workers' councils in industry, popular democracy in communities, interaction between them, free associations in larger groups, up to organisation of international society."* [Anarchism Interview] Society would no longer be divided into a hierarchy of bosses and workers, governors and governed. Rather, an anarchist society would be based on free association in participatory organisations and run from the bottom up. Anarchists, it should be noted, try to create as much of this society today, in their organisations, struggles and activities, as they can.

## A.1.2 What does "anarchism" mean?

To quote Peter Kropotkin, Anarchism is *"the no-government system of socialism."* [Anarchism, p. 46] In other words, *"the abolition of exploitation and oppression of man by man, that is the abolition of private property [i.e. capitalism] and government."* [Errico Malatesta, **Towards Anarchism**," p. 75]

Anarchism, therefore, is a political theory that aims to create a society which is without political, economic or social hierarchies. Anarchists maintain that anarchy, the absence of rulers, is a viable form of social system and so work for the maximisation of individual liberty and social equality. They see the goals of liberty and equality as mutually self-supporting. Or, in Bakunin's famous dictum:

*"We are convinced that freedom without Socialism is privilege and injustice, and that Socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 269]

The history of human society proves this point. Liberty without equality is only liberty for the powerful, and equality without liberty is impossible and a justification for slavery.

While there are many different types of anarchism (from individualist anarchism to communist-anarchism -- see [section A.3](#) for more details), there has always been two common positions at the core of all of them -- opposition to government and opposition to capitalism. In the words of the individualist-anarchist Benjamin Tucker, anarchism insists *"on the abolition of the State and the abolition of usury; on no more government of man by man, and no more exploitation of man by man."* [cited by Eunice Schuster, **Native American Anarchism**, p. 140] All anarchists view profit, interest and rent as **usury** (i. e. as exploitation) and so oppose them and the conditions that create them just as much as they oppose government and the State.

More generally, in the words of L. Susan Brown, the *"unifying link"* within anarchism *"is a universal condemnation of hierarchy and domination and a willingness to fight for the freedom of the human individual."* [**The Politics of Individualism**, p. 108] For anarchists, a person cannot be free if they are subject to state or capitalist authority. As Voltairine de Cleyre summarised:

*"Anarchism . . . teaches the possibility of a society in which the needs of life may be fully supplied for all, and in which the opportunities for complete development of mind and body shall be the heritage of all . . . [It] teaches that the present unjust organisation of the production and distribution of wealth must finally be completely destroyed, and replaced by a system which will insure to each the liberty to work, without first seeking a master to whom he [or she] must surrender a tithe of his [or her] product, which will guarantee his liberty of access to the sources and means of production. . . Out of the blindly submissive, it makes the discontented; out of the unconsciously dissatisfied, it makes the consciously dissatisfied . . . Anarchism seeks to arouse the consciousness of oppression, the desire for a better society, and a sense of the necessity for unceasing warfare against capitalism and the State."* [**Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth**, pp. 23-4]

So Anarchism is a political theory which advocates the creation of anarchy, a society based on the maxim of *"no rulers."* To achieve this, *"[i]n common with all socialists, the anarchists hold that the private ownership of land, capital, and machinery has had its time; that it is condemned to disappear: and that all requisites for production must, and will, become the common property of society, and be managed in common by the producers of wealth. And. . . they maintain that the ideal of the political organisation of society is a condition of things where the functions of government are reduced to minimum. . . [and] that the ultimate aim of society is the reduction of the functions of government to nil -- that is, to a society without government, to an-archy"* [Peter Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 46]

Thus anarchism is both positive and negative. It analyses and critiques current society while at the same time offering a vision of a potential new society -- a society that fulfils certain human needs which the current one denies. These needs, at their most basic, are liberty, equality and solidarity, which will be discussed in [section A.2](#).

Anarchism unites critical analysis with hope, for, as Bakunin (in his pre-anarchist days) pointed out, "*the urge to destroy is a creative urge.*" One cannot build a better society without understanding what is wrong with the present one.

However, it must be stressed that anarchism is more than just a means of analysis or a vision of a better society. It is also rooted in struggle, the struggle of the oppressed for their freedom. In other words, it provides a means of achieving a new system based on the needs of people, not power, and which places the planet before profit. To quote Scottish anarchist Stuart Christie:

*"Anarchism is a movement for human freedom. It is concrete, democratic and egalitarian . . . Anarchism began -- and remains -- a direct challenge by the underprivileged to their oppression and exploitation. It opposes both the insidious growth of state power and the pernicious ethos of possessive individualism, which, together or separately, ultimately serve only the interests of the few at the expense of the rest.*

*"Anarchism is both a theory and practice of life. Philosophically, it aims for the maximum accord between the individual, society and nature. Practically, it aims for us to organise and live our lives in such a way as to make politicians, governments, states and their officials superfluous. In an anarchist society, mutually respectful sovereign individuals would be organised in non-coercive relationships within naturally defined communities in which the means of production and distribution are held in common.*

*"Anarchists are not dreamers obsessed with abstract principles and theoretical constructs . . . Anarchists are well aware that a perfect society cannot be won tomorrow. Indeed, the struggle lasts forever! However, it is the vision that provides the spur to struggle against things as they are, and for things that might be . . .*

*"Ultimately, only struggle determines outcome, and progress towards a more meaningful community must begin with the will to resist every form of injustice. In general terms, this means challenging all exploitation and defying the legitimacy of all coercive authority. If anarchists have one article of unshakeable faith, it is that, once the habit of deferring to politicians or ideologues is lost, and that of resistance to domination and exploitation acquired, then ordinary people have a capacity to organise every aspect of their lives in their own interests, anywhere and at any time, both freely and fairly.*

*"Anarchists do not stand aside from popular struggle, nor do they attempt to dominate it. They seek to contribute practically whatever they can, and also to assist within it the*

*highest possible levels of both individual self-development and of group solidarity. It is possible to recognise anarchist ideas concerning voluntary relationships, egalitarian participation in decision-making processes, mutual aid and a related critique of all forms of domination in philosophical, social and revolutionary movements in all times and places."* [My Granny made me an Anarchist, pp. 162-3]

Anarchism, anarchists argue, is simply the theoretical expression of our capacity to organise ourselves and run society without bosses or politicians. It allows working class and other oppressed people to become conscious of our power as a class, defend our immediate interests, and fight to revolutionise society as a whole. Only by doing this can we create a society fit for human beings to live in.

It is no abstract philosophy. Anarchist ideas are put into practice everyday. Wherever oppressed people stand up for their rights, take action to defend their freedom, practice solidarity and co-operation, fight against oppression, organise themselves without leaders and bosses, the spirit of anarchism lives. Anarchists simply seek to strengthen these libertarian tendencies and bring them to their full fruition. As we discuss in [section J](#), anarchists apply their ideas in many ways within capitalism in order to change it for the better until such time as we get rid of it completely. [Section I](#) discusses what we aim to replace it with, i.e. what anarchism aims for.

### A.1.3 Why is anarchism also called libertarian socialism?

Many anarchists, seeing the negative nature of the definition of "*anarchism*," have used other terms to emphasise the inherently positive and constructive aspect of their ideas. The most common terms used are "*free socialism*," "*free communism*," "*libertarian socialism*," and "*libertarian communism*." For anarchists, libertarian socialism, libertarian communism, and anarchism are virtually interchangeable. As Vanzetti put it:

*"After all we are socialists as the social-democrats, the socialists, the communists, and the I.W.W. are all Socialists. The difference -- the fundamental one -- between us and all the other is that they are authoritarian while we are libertarian; they believe in a State or Government of their own; we believe in no State or Government."* [Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, **The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti**, p. 274]

But is this correct? Considering definitions from the **American Heritage Dictionary**, we find:

**LIBERTARIAN:** *one who believes in freedom of action and thought; one who believes in free will.*

**SOCIALISM:** *a social system in which the producers possess both political power and the means of producing and distributing goods.*

Just taking those two first definitions and fusing them yields:

**LIBERTARIAN SOCIALISM:** *a social system which believes in freedom of action and thought and free will, in which the producers possess both political power and the means of producing and distributing goods.*

(Although we must add that our usual comments on the lack of political sophistication of dictionaries still holds. We only use these definitions to show that "libertarian" does not imply "free market" capitalism nor "socialism" state ownership. Other dictionaries, obviously, will have different definitions -- particularly for socialism. Those wanting to debate dictionary definitions are free to pursue this unending and politically useless hobby but we will not).

However, due to the creation of the Libertarian Party in the USA, many people now consider the idea of "*libertarian socialism*" to be a contradiction in terms. Indeed, many "Libertarians" think anarchists are just attempting to associate the "anti-libertarian" ideas of "socialism" (as Libertarians conceive it) with Libertarian ideology in order to make those "socialist" ideas more "acceptable" -- in other words, trying to steal the "libertarian" label from its rightful possessors.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Anarchists have been using the term "libertarian" to describe themselves and their ideas since the 1850's. According to anarchist historian Max Nettlau, the revolutionary anarchist Joseph Dejacque published **Le Liberaire, Journal du Mouvement Social** in New York between 1858 and 1861 while the use of the term "*libertarian communism*" dates from November, 1880 when a French anarchist congress adopted it. [Max Nettlau, **A Short History of Anarchism**, p. 75 and p. 145] The use of the term "Libertarian" by anarchists became more popular from the 1890s onward after it was used in France in an attempt to get round anti-anarchist laws and to avoid the negative associations of the word "anarchy" in the popular mind (Sebastien Faure and Louise Michel published the paper **Le Liberaire -- The Libertarian** -- in France in 1895, for example). Since then, particularly outside America, it has **always** been associated with anarchist ideas and movements. Taking a more recent example, in the USA, anarchists organised "*The Libertarian League*" in July 1954, which had staunch anarcho-syndicalist principles and lasted until 1965. The US-based "Libertarian" Party, on the other hand has only existed since the early 1970's, well over 100 years after anarchists first used the term to describe their political ideas (and 90 years after the expression "libertarian communism" was first adopted). It is that party, not the anarchists, who have "stolen" the word. Later, in [Section B](#), we will discuss why the idea of a "libertarian" capitalism (as desired by the Libertarian Party) is a contradiction in terms.

As we will also explain in [Section I](#), only a libertarian-socialist system of ownership can maximise individual freedom. Needless to say, state ownership -- what is commonly **called** "socialism" -- is, for anarchists, not socialism at all. In fact, as we will elaborate in [Section H](#), state "socialism" is just a form of capitalism, with no socialist content whatever. As Rudolf Rocker noted, for anarchists, socialism is "*not a simple question of a full belly, but a question of culture that would have to enlist the sense of personality and the free initiative of the individual; without freedom it would lead only to a dismal state*

*capitalism which would sacrifice all individual thought and feeling to a fictitious collective interest.*" [quoted by Colin Ward, "Introduction", Rudolf Rocker, **The London Years**, p. 1]

Given the anarchist pedigree of the word "libertarian," few anarchists are happy to see it stolen by an ideology which shares little with our ideas. In the United States, as Murray Bookchin noted, the "*term 'libertarian' itself, to be sure, raises a problem, notably, the specious identification of an anti-authoritarian ideology with a straggling movement for 'pure capitalism' and 'free trade.'* This movement never created the word: it appropriated it from the anarchist movement of the [nineteenth] century. And it should be recovered by those anti-authoritarians . . . who try to speak for dominated people as a whole, not for personal egotists who identify freedom with entrepreneurship and profit." Thus anarchists in America should "*restore in practice a tradition that has been denatured by*" the free-market right. [**The Modern Crisis**, pp. 154-5] And as we do that, we will continue to call our ideas libertarian socialism.

## A.1.4 Are anarchists socialists?

Yes. All branches of anarchism are opposed to capitalism. This is because capitalism is based upon oppression and exploitation (see sections [B](#) and [C](#)). Anarchists reject the "*notion that men cannot work together unless they have a driving-master to take a percentage of their product*" and think that in an anarchist society "*the real workmen will make their own regulations, decide when and where and how things shall be done.*" By so doing workers would free themselves "*from the terrible bondage of capitalism.*" [Voltairine de Cleyre, **Anarchism** p. 32 and p. 34]

(We must stress here that anarchists are opposed to **all** economic forms which are based on domination and exploitation, including feudalism, Soviet-style "socialism" -- better called "state capitalism" --, slavery and so on. We concentrate on capitalism because that is what is dominating the world just now).

Individualists like Benjamin Tucker along with social anarchists like Proudhon and Bakunin proclaimed themselves "**socialists.**" They did so because, as Kropotkin put it in his classic essay "*Modern Science and Anarchism,*" "*[s]o long as Socialism was understood in its wide, generic, and true sense -- as an effort to **abolish** the exploitation of Labour by Capital -- the Anarchists were marching hand-in-hands with the Socialists of that time.*" [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 81] Or, in Tucker's words, "*the bottom claim of Socialism [is] that labour should be put in possession of its own,*" a claim that both "*the two schools of Socialistic thought . . . State Socialism and Anarchism*" agreed upon. [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 144] Hence the word "*socialist*" was originally defined to include "*all those who believed in the individual's right to possess what he or she produced.*" [Lance Klafta, "*Ayn Rand and the Perversion of Libertarianism,*" in **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed**, no. 34] This opposition to exploitation (or usury) is shared by all true anarchists and places them under the socialist banner.

For most socialists, "*the only guarantee not to be robbed of the fruits of your labour is to possess the instruments of labour.*" [Peter Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 145] For this reason Proudhon, for example, supported workers' co-operatives, where "*every individual employed in the association . . . has*

*an undivided share in the property of the company" because by "participation in losses and gains . . . the collective force [i.e. surplus] ceases to be a source of profits for a small number of managers: it becomes the property of all workers."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 222 and p. 223] Thus, in addition to desiring the end of exploitation of labour by capital, true socialists also desire a society within which the producers own and control the means of production (including, it should be stressed, those workplaces which supply services). The means by which the producers will do this is a moot point in anarchist and other socialist circles, but the desire remains a common one. Anarchists favour direct workers' control and either ownership by workers' associations or by the commune (see [section A.3](#) on the different types of anarchists).

Moreover, anarchists also reject capitalism for being authoritarian **as well as** exploitative. Under capitalism, workers do not govern themselves during the production process nor have control over the product of their labour. Such a situation is hardly based on equal freedom for all, nor can it be non-exploitative, and is so opposed by anarchists. This perspective can best be found in the work of Proudhon's (who inspired both Tucker and Bakunin) where he argues that anarchism would see "[c]apitalistic and proprietary exploitation stopped everywhere [and] the wage system abolished" for "either the workman. . . will be simply the employee of the proprietor-capitalist-promoter; or he will participate . . . In the first case the workman is subordinated, exploited: his permanent condition is one of obedience. . . In the second case he resumes his dignity as a man and citizen. . . he forms part of the producing organisation, of which he was before but the slave . . . we need not hesitate, for we have no choice. . . it is necessary to form an ASSOCIATION among workers . . . because without that, they would remain related as subordinates and superiors, and there would ensue two. . . castes of masters and wage-workers, which is repugnant to a free and democratic society." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 233 and pp. 215-216]

Therefore **all** anarchists are anti-capitalist ("*If labour owned the wealth it produced, there would be no capitalism*" [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 44]). Benjamin Tucker, for example -- the anarchist most influenced by liberalism (as we will discuss later) -- called his ideas "*Anarchistic-Socialism*" and denounced capitalism as a system based upon "*the usurer, the receiver of interest, rent and profit.*" Tucker held that in an anarchist, non-capitalist, free-market society, capitalists will become redundant and exploitation of labour by capital would cease, since "*labour. . . will. . . secure its natural wage, its entire product.*" [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 82 and p. 85] Such an economy will be based on mutual banking and the free exchange of products between co-operatives, artisans and peasants. For Tucker, and other Individualist anarchists, capitalism is not a true free market, being marked by various laws and monopolies which ensure that capitalists have the advantage over working people, so ensuring the latter's exploitation via profit, interest and rent (see [section G](#) for a fuller discussion). Even Max Stirner, the arch-egoist, had nothing but scorn for capitalist society and its various "spooks," which for him meant ideas that are treated as sacred or religious, such as private property, competition, division of labour, and so forth.

So anarchists consider themselves as socialists, but socialists of a specific kind -- **libertarian socialists**. As the individualist anarchist Joseph A. Labadie puts it (echoing both Tucker and Bakunin):

*"It is said that Anarchism is not socialism. This is a mistake. Anarchism is voluntary Socialism. There are two kinds of Socialism, archistic and anarchistic, authoritarian and libertarian, state and free. Indeed, every proposition for social betterment is either to increase or decrease the powers of external wills and forces over the individual. As they increase they are archistic; as they decrease they are anarchistic."* [**Anarchism: What It Is and What It Is Not**]

Labadie stated on many occasions that *"all anarchists are socialists, but not all socialists are anarchists."* Therefore, Daniel Guerin's comment that *"Anarchism is really a synonym for socialism. The anarchist is primarily a socialist whose aim is to abolish the exploitation of man by man"* is echoed throughout the history of the anarchist movement, be it the social or individualist wings. [**Anarchism**, p. 12] Indeed, the Haymarket Martyr Adolph Fischer used almost exactly the same words as Labadie to express the same fact -- *"every anarchist is a socialist, but every socialist is not necessarily an anarchist"* -- while acknowledging that the movement was *"divided into two factions; the communistic anarchists and the Proudhon or middle-class anarchists."* [**The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs**, p. 81]

So while social and individualist anarchists do disagree on many issues -- for example, whether a true, that is non-capitalist, free market would be the best means of maximising liberty -- they agree that capitalism is to be opposed as exploitative and oppressive and that an anarchist society must, by definition, be based on associated, not wage, labour. Only associated labour will *"decrease the powers of external wills and forces over the individual"* during working hours and such self-management of work by those who do it is the core ideal of real socialism. This perspective can be seen when Joseph Labadie argued that the trade union was *"the exemplification of gaining freedom by association"* and that *"[w]ithout his union, the workman is much more the slave of his employer than he is with it."* [**Different Phases of the Labour Question**]

However, the meanings of words change over time. Today "socialism" almost always refers to **state** socialism, a system that all anarchists have opposed as a denial of freedom and genuine socialist ideals. All anarchists would agree with Noam Chomsky's statement on this issue:

*"If the left is understood to include 'Bolshevism,' then I would flatly dissociate myself from the left. Lenin was one of the greatest enemies of socialism."* [**Marxism, Anarchism, and Alternative Futures**, p. 779]

Anarchism developed in constant opposition to the ideas of Marxism, social democracy and Leninism. Long before Lenin rose to power, Mikhail Bakunin warned the followers of Marx against the *"Red bureaucracy"* that would institute *"the worst of all despotic governments"* if Marx's state-socialist ideas were ever implemented. Indeed, the works of Stirner, Proudhon and especially Bakunin all predict the horror of state Socialism with great accuracy. In addition, the anarchists were among the first and most vocal critics and opposition to the Bolshevik regime in Russia.



Nevertheless, being socialists, anarchists do share **some** ideas with **some** Marxists (though none with Leninists). Both Bakunin and Tucker accepted Marx's analysis and critique of capitalism as well as his labour theory of value (see [section C](#)). Marx himself was heavily influenced by Max Stirner's book **The Ego and Its Own**, which contains a brilliant critique of what Marx called "vulgar" communism as well as state socialism. There have also been elements of the Marxist movement holding views very similar to social anarchism (particularly the anarcho-syndicalist branch of social anarchism) -- for example, Anton Pannekoek, Rosa Luxemburg, Paul Mattick and others, who are very far from Lenin. Karl Korsch and others wrote sympathetically of the anarchist revolution in Spain. There are many continuities from Marx to Lenin, but there are also continuities from Marx to more libertarian Marxists, who were harshly critical of Lenin and Bolshevism and whose ideas approximate anarchism's desire for the free association of equals.

Therefore anarchism is basically a form of socialism, one that stands in direct opposition to what is usually defined as "socialism" (i.e. state ownership and control). Instead of "central planning," which many people associate with the word "socialism," anarchists advocate free association and co-operation between individuals, workplaces and communities and so oppose "state" socialism as a form of state capitalism in which "[e]very man [and woman] will be a wage-receiver, and the State the only wage payer." [Benjamin Tucker, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 81] Thus anarchists reject Marxism (what most people think of as "socialism") as just "[t]he idea of the State as Capitalist, to which the Social-Democratic fraction of the great Socialist Party is now trying to reduce Socialism." [Peter Kropotkin, **The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 31] The anarchist objection to the identification of Marxism, "central planning" and State Socialism/Capitalism with socialism will be discussed in [section H](#).

It is because of these differences with state socialists, and to reduce confusion, most anarchists just call themselves "anarchists," as it is taken for granted that anarchists are socialists. However, with the rise of the so-called "libertarian" right in the USA, some pro-capitalists have taken to calling themselves "anarchists" and that is why we have laboured the point somewhat here. Historically, and logically, anarchism implies anti-capitalism, i.e. socialism, which is something, we stress, that all anarchists have agreed upon (for a fuller discuss of why "anarcho"-capitalism is not anarchist see [section F](#)).

## A.1.5 Where does anarchism come from?

Where does anarchism come from? We can do no better than quote the **The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists** produced by participants of the Makhnovist movement in the Russian Revolution (see [Section A.5.4](#)). They point out that:

*"The class struggle created by the enslavement of workers and their aspirations to liberty gave birth, in the oppression, to the idea of anarchism: the idea of the total negation of a social system based on the principles of classes and the State, and its replacement by a free non-statist society of workers under self-management.*

*"So anarchism does not derive from the abstract reflections of an intellectual or a philosopher, but from the direct struggle of workers against capitalism, from the needs and necessities of the workers, from their aspirations to liberty and equality, aspirations which become particularly alive in the best heroic period of the life and struggle of the working masses.*

*"The outstanding anarchist thinkers, Bakunin, Kropotkin and others, did not invent the idea of anarchism, but, having discovered it in the masses, simply helped by the strength of their thought and knowledge to specify and spread it." [pp. 15-16]*

Like the anarchist movement in general, the Makhnovists were a mass movement of working class people resisting the forces of authority, both Red (Communist) and White (Tsarist/Capitalist) in the Ukraine from 1917 to 1921. As Peter Marshall notes *"anarchism . . . has traditionally found its chief supporters amongst workers and peasants."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 652]

Anarchism was created in, and by, the struggle of the oppressed for freedom. For Kropotkin, for example, *"Anarchism . . . originated in everyday struggles"* and *"the Anarchist movement was renewed each time it received an impression from some great practical lesson: it derived its origin from the teachings of life itself."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 58 and p. 57] For Proudhon, *"the proof"* of his mutualist ideas lay in the *"current practice, revolutionary practice"* of *"those labour associations . . . which have spontaneously . . . been formed in Paris and Lyon . . . [show that the] organisation of credit and organisation of labour amount to one and the same."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, pp. 59-60] Indeed, as one historian argues, there was *"close similarity between the associational ideal of Proudhon . . . and the program of the Lyon Mutualists"* and that there was *"a remarkable convergence [between the ideas], and it is likely that Proudhon was able to articulate his positive program more coherently because of the example of the silk workers of Lyon. The socialist ideal that he championed was already being realised, to a certain extent, by such workers."* [K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 164]

Thus anarchism comes from the fight for liberty and our desires to lead a fully human life, one in which we have time to live, to love and to play. It was not created by a few people divorced from life, in ivory towers looking down upon society and making judgements upon it based on their notions of what is right and wrong. Rather, it was a product of working class struggle and resistance to authority, oppression and exploitation. As Albert Meltzer put it:

*"There were never theoreticians of Anarchism as such, though it produced a number of theoreticians who discussed aspects of its philosophy. Anarchism has remained a creed that has been worked out in action rather than as the putting into practice of an intellectual ideas. Very often, a bourgeois writer comes along and writes down what has already been worked out in practice by workers and peasants; he [or she] is attributed by bourgeois historians as being a leader, and by successive bourgeois writers (citing the bourgeois historians) as being one more case that proves the working class relies on bourgeois*

*leadership.*" [**Anarchism: Arguments for and against**, p. 18]

In Kropotkin's eyes, "*Anarchism had its origins in the same creative, constructive activity of the masses which has worked out in times past all the social institutions of mankind -- and in the revolts . . . against the representatives of force, external to these social institutions, who had laid their hands on these institutions and used them for their own advantage.*" More recently, "*Anarchy was brought forth by the same critical and revolutionary protest which gave birth to Socialism in general.*" Anarchism, unlike other forms of socialism, "*lifted its sacrilegious arm, not only against Capitalism, but also against these pillars of Capitalism: Law, Authority, and the State.*" All anarchist writers did was to "*work out a general expression of [anarchism's] principles, and the theoretical and scientific basis of its teachings*" derived from the experiences of working class people in struggle as well as analysing the evolutionary tendencies of society in general. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 19 and p. 57]

However, anarchistic tendencies and organisations in society have existed long before Proudhon put pen to paper in 1840 and declared himself an anarchist. While anarchism, as a specific political theory, was born with the rise of capitalism (Anarchism "*emerged at the end of the eighteenth century . . . [and] took up the dual challenge of overthrowing both Capital and the State.*" [Peter Marshall, **Op. Cit.**, p. 4]) anarchist writers have analysed history for libertarian tendencies. Kropotkin argued, for example, that "*from all times there have been Anarchists and Statists.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 16] In **Mutual Aid** (and elsewhere) Kropotkin analysed the libertarian aspects of previous societies and noted those that successfully implemented (to some degree) anarchist organisation or aspects of anarchism. He recognised this tendency of actual examples of anarchistic ideas to predate the creation of the "official" anarchist movement and argued that:

*"From the remotest, stone-age antiquity, men [and women] have realised the evils that resulted from letting some of them acquire personal authority. . . Consequently they developed in the primitive clan, the village community, the medieval guild . . . and finally in the free medieval city, such institutions as enabled them to resist the encroachments upon their life and fortunes both of those strangers who conquered them, and those clansmen of their own who endeavoured to establish their personal authority."* [**Anarchism**, pp. 158-9]

Kropotkin placed the struggle of working class people (from which modern anarchism sprung) on par with these older forms of popular organisation. He argued that "*the labour combinations. . . were an outcome of the same popular resistance to the growing power of the few -- the capitalists in this case*" as were the clan, the village community and so on, as were "*the strikingly independent, freely federated activity of the 'Sections' of Paris and all great cities and many small 'Communes' during the French Revolution*" in 1793. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 159]

Thus, while anarchism as a political theory is an expression of working class struggle and self-activity against capitalism and the modern state, the ideas of anarchism have continually expressed themselves in action throughout human existence. Many indigenous peoples in North America and elsewhere, for

example, practised anarchism for thousands of years before anarchism as a specific political theory existed. Similarly, anarchistic tendencies and organisations have existed in every major revolution -- the New England Town Meetings during the American Revolution, the Parisian 'Sections' during the French Revolution, the workers' councils and factory committees during the Russian Revolution to name just a few examples (see Murray Bookchin's **The Third Revolution** for details). This is to be expected if anarchism is, as we argue, a product of resistance to authority then any society with authorities will provoke resistance to them and generate anarchistic tendencies (and, of course, any societies without authorities cannot help but being anarchistic).

In other words, anarchism is an expression of the struggle against oppression and exploitation, a generalisation of working people's experiences and analyses of what is wrong with the current system and an expression of our hopes and dreams for a better future. This struggle existed before it was called anarchism, but the historic anarchist movement (i.e. groups of people calling their ideas anarchism and aiming for an anarchist society) is essentially a product of working class struggle against capitalism and the state, against oppression and exploitation, and **for** a free society of free and equal individuals.

# Section I - What would an anarchist society look like?

## Introduction

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# Section I - What would an anarchist society look like?

So far this FAQ has been largely critical, focusing on hierarchy, capitalism, the state and so on, and the problems to which they have led, as well as refuting some bogus "*solutions*" that have been offered by authoritarians of both the right and the left. It is now time to examine the constructive side of anarchism -- the libertarian-socialist society that anarchists envision. This is important because anarchism is essentially a **constructive** theory, in stark contradiction to the picture of usually painted of anarchism as chaos or mindless destruction.

Therefore, in this section of the FAQ we will give a short outline of what an anarchist society might look like. Such a society has basic features -- such as being non-hierarchical, decentralised and, above all else, spontaneous like life itself. To quote Glenn Albrecht, anarchists "*lay great stress on the free unfolding of a spontaneous order without the use of external force or authority.*" [*Ethics, Anarchy and Sustainable Development*", **Anarchist Studies**, vol.2, no.2, p. 110] This type of development implies that anarchist society would be organised from the simple to the complex, from the individual upwards to the community, the bio-region and, ultimately, the planet. The resulting complex and diverse order, which would be the outcome of nature freely unfolding toward greater diversity and complexity, is ethically preferable to any other sort of order simply because it allows for the highest degree of organic solidarity and freedom. Kropotkin described this vision of a truly free society as follows:

*"We foresee millions and millions of groups freely constituting themselves for the satisfaction of all the varied needs of human beings. . . All these will be composed of human beings who will combine freely. . . 'Take pebbles,' said Fourier, 'put them in a box and shake them, and they will arrange themselves in a mosaic that you could never get by instructing to anyone the work of arranging them harmoniously.'"* [**The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution**, pp. 11-12]

Anarchist opposition to hierarchy is an essential part of a "*spontaneously ordered*" society, for authority stops the free development and growth of the individual. From this natural growth of individuals, groups and society as a whole anarchists expect a society which meets the needs of all (both for material goods and individual and social freedom). In Proudhon's words, "*liberty is the mother of order, not its daughter.*" Any attempt to force society or individuals into a pre-determined structure which restricts their liberty will produce dis-order as natural balances and development is hindered and distorted in anti-social and destructive directions. Thus an anarchist society must be a free society of free individuals, associating within libertarian structures, rather than a series of competing hierarchies (be they political or economical). Only in freedom can society and individuals develop and create a just and fair society.

As the individual does not exist in a social vacuum, appropriate social conditions are required for individual freedom (and so subjectivity, or thought) to develop and blossom according to its full

potential. The theory of anarchism is built around the central assertion that individuals and their organisations **cannot** be considered in isolation from each other. As Carole Pateman points out, there is *"the argument that there is an interrelationship between the authority structures of institutions and the psychological qualities and attitudes of individuals, and . . . the related argument that the major function of participation is an educative one."* [**Participation and Democratic Theory**, p. 27] Anarchism presents these arguments in their most coherent and libertarian form. In other words, freedom is only sustained and protected by activity under conditions of freedom, namely self-government. Freedom is the only precondition for acquiring the maturity required for continued freedom.

As individual freedom can only be created, developed and defended by self-government and free association, a system which encourages individuality must be decentralised and participatory in order for people to develop a psychology that allows them to accept the responsibilities of self-management. Living under capitalism or any other authoritarian system produces a servile character, as the individual is constantly placed under hierarchical authority, which blunts their critical and self-governing abilities by lack of use. Such a situation cannot promote freedom. Looking at capitalism, we find that under wage labour, people sell their creative energy and control over their activity for a given period. The boss does not just take surplus value from the time employees sell, but the time itself -- their ability to make their own decisions, express themselves through work and with their fellow workers. Wage labour equals wage slavery. You sell your time and skills (i.e. liberty) everyday at work to someone else. You will never be able to buy that time back for yourself. Once it is gone; it is gone for good. This is why anarchists see the need to *"create the situation where each person may live by working freely, without being forced to sell his [or her] work and his [or her] liberty to others who accumulate wealth by the labour of their serfs."* [Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 208]

Anarchism is about changing society and abolishing all forms of authoritarian social relationship, putting life before the soul-destroying "efficiency" needed to survive under capitalism; for the anarchist *"takes his stand on his positive right to life and all its pleasures, both intellectual, moral and physical. He loves life, and intends to enjoy it to the full."* [Michael Bakunin, quoted by Brian Morris, **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 118]

Anarchists think that the essential social values are human values, and that society is a complex of associations held together by the wills of their members, whose well-being is its purpose. They consider that it is not enough that the forms of association should have the passive or *"implied"* consent of their members, but that the society and the individuals who make it up will be healthy only if it is in the full sense libertarian, i.e. self-governing, self-managed, and egalitarian. This implies not only that all the members should have a *"right"* to influence its policy if they so desire, but that the greatest possible opportunity should be afforded for every person to exercise this right. Anarchism involves an active, not merely passive, citizenship on the part of society's members and holds that this principle is not only applied to some *"special"* sphere of social action called *"politics"* but to any and every form of social action, including economic activity.

So, as will be seen, the key concept underlying both the social/political and the economic structure of libertarian socialism is *"self-management,"* a term that implies not only workers control of their

workplaces but also citizens' control of their communities (where it becomes "*self-government*"), through direct democracy and voluntary federation. Thus self-management is the positive implication of anarchism's "*negative*" principle of opposition to hierarchical authority. For through self-management, hierarchical authority is dissolved as self-managing workplace and community assemblies/councils are decentralised, "*horizontal*" organisations in which each participant has an equal voice in the decisions that affect his or her life, instead of merely following orders and being governed by others. Self-management, therefore, is the essential condition for a world in which individuals will be free to follow their own dreams, in their own ways, co-operating together as equals without interference from any form of authoritarian power (such as government or boss).

Perhaps needless to say, this section is intended as a heuristic device **only**, as a way of helping readers envision how anarchist principles might be embodied in practice. They are not (nor are they intended to be, nor are they desired to be) a definitive statement of how they **must** be embodied. The idea that a few people could determine exactly what a free society would look like is contrary to the anarchist principles of free growth and thought, and is far from our intention. Here we simply try to indicate some of the structures that an anarchist society may contain, based on the what ideals and ideas anarchists hold and the few examples of anarchy in action that have existed and our critical evaluation of their limitations and successes.

Of course, an anarchist society will not be created overnight nor without links to the past, and so it will initially include structures created in social struggle (i.e. created **within** but **against** capitalism and the state -- see [section J.5](#)) and will be marked with the ideas that inspired and developed within that struggle. For example, the anarchist collectives in Spain were organised in a bottom-up manner, similar to the way the C.N.T. (the anarcho-sindicalist labour union) was organised before the revolution. In this sense, anarchy is not some distant goal but rather an expression of working class struggle. The creation of alternatives to the current hierarchical, oppressive, exploitative and alienated society is a necessary part of the class struggle and the maintaining of your liberty and humanity in the insane world of hierarchical society. As such, an anarchist society will be the generalisation of the various types of "*anarchy in action*" created in the various struggles against all forms of oppression and exploitation (see [section I.2.3](#)).

This means that how an anarchist society would look like and work is not independent of the means used to create it. In other words, an anarchist society will reflect the social struggle which preceded it and the ideas which existed within that struggle as modified by the practical needs of any given situation. Therefore the vision of a free society indicated in this section of the FAQ is not some sort of abstraction which will be created overnight. If anarchists did think that then we would rightly be called utopian. No, an anarchist society is the outcome of activity and social struggle, struggle which helps to create a mass movement which contains individuals who can think for themselves and are willing and able to take responsibility for their own lives (see section J - "[What do anarchists do?](#)").

So, when reading this section please remember that this is not a blueprint but only one possible suggestion of what anarchy would look like. It is designed to provoke thought and indicate that an

anarchist society is possible and that such a society is the product of our activity in the here and now. We hope that our arguments and ideas presented in this section will inspire more debate and discussion of how a free society could work and, equally as important, help to inspire the struggle that will create that society. After all, anarchists desire to build the new world in the shell of the old. Unless we have some idea of what that new society will be like it is difficult to pre-figure it in our activities today! A point not lost on Kropotkin who argued that it is difficult to "build" "without extremely careful consideration beforehand, based on the study of social life, of **what** and **how** we want to build -- we must reject [Proudhon's] slogan [that "in demolishing we shall build"] . . . and declare: 'in building we shall demolish.'" [**Conquest of Bread**, p. 173f] More recently, Noam Chomsky argued that "[a]lternatives to existing forms of hierarchy, domination, private power and social control certainly exist in principle. . . But to make them realistic will require a great deal of committed work, including the work of articulating them clearly." [Noam Chomsky, **Turning the Tide**, p. 250] This section of the FAQ can be considered as a contribution to the articulating of libertarian alternatives to existing society, of what we want to build for the future.

In other words, view this section of our FAQ as a guide. To use an analogy, when going on holiday it is a good idea to have a map or guidebook with you, otherwise you will not know where you are going and, indeed, will likely end up **in the wrong place**. Thus the progress towards a free society is helped by anarchist ideas and visions, otherwise it may end up the opposite of what we desire. However, it is important that any such guide be discussed by everyone before hand, to ensure that it is a **useful** guide and one that reflects everyone's interests and desires. Thus this section of our FAQ is simply a contribution to this discussion, a contribution inspired (in part) by previous contributions, visions and struggles.

We are not afraid that many will argue that much of the vision we present in this section of the FAQ is utopian. Perhaps they are right, but, as Oscar Wilde once said:

*"A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias."* [**The Soul of Man Under Socialism**, p. 1184]

However, we have attempted to be as practical as we are visionary, presenting realistic problems as well as presenting evidence for our solutions to these problems (as well as our general ideas) from real life where possible, rather than present a series of impossible assumptions which dismiss possible problems by definition. After all, it is better to consider the worse possible cases for if they do not appear then nothing has been lost and if they do at least we have a starting point for possible solutions. So, all in all, we have tried to be practical utopians!

We must stress, however, that anarchists do not want a "perfect" society (as is often associated with the term "utopia"). This would be as impossible as the neo-classical vision of perfect competition. Rather we want a free society and so one based on real human beings and so one with its own problems and

difficulties. Our use of the word "*utopia*" should not be taken to imply that anarchists assume away all problems and argue that an anarchist society would be ideal and perfect. No society has ever been perfect and no society ever will be. All we argue is that an anarchist society will have fewer problems than those before and be better to live within. Anyone looking for perfection should look elsewhere. Anyone looking for a better, but still human, world may find in anarchism a potential end for their quest.

One last point. We must point out here that we are discussing the social and economic structures of areas within which the inhabitants are predominately anarchists. It is obviously the case that areas in which the inhabitants are not anarchists will take on different forms depending upon the ideas that dominate there. Hence, assuming the end of the current state structure, we could see anarchist communities along with statist ones (capitalist or socialist) and these communities taking different forms depending on what their inhabitants want -- communist to individualist communities in the case of anarchist ones, state socialist to private state communities in the statist areas, ones based on religious sects and so on. As Malatesta argued, anarchists "*must be intransigent in our opposition to all capitalist imposition and exploitation, and tolerant of all social concepts which prevail in different human groupings, so long as they do not threaten the equal rights and freedom of others.*" [**Life and Ideas**, p. 174] Thus we respect the wishes of others to experiment and live their own lives as they see fit, while encouraging those in capitalist and other statist communities to rise in revolution against their masters and join the free federation of communes of the anarchist community. Needless to say, we do not discuss non-anarchist communities here as it is up to non-anarchists to present their arguments in favour of their kind of statism. We will concentrate on discussing anarchist ideas on social organisation here.

So, remember that we are not arguing that everyone will live in an anarchist way in a free society. Far from it. There will be pockets of unfreedom around, simply because the development of ideas varies from area to area. However, it would be a mistake to assume that just because there are many choices of community available that it automatically makes a society an anarchist one. For example, the modern world boasts over 200 different states. For most of them, individuals can leave and join another if it will let them. There is no world government as such. This does not make this series of states an anarchy. Similarly, a system of different company towns is not an anarchy either. The nature of the associations is just as important as their voluntary nature. As Kropotkin argued, the "*communes of the next revolution will not only break down the state and substitute free federation for parliamentary rule; they will part with parliamentary rule within the commune itself. . . They will be anarchist within the commune as they will be anarchist outside it.*" [**The Commune of Paris**] Hence an anarchist society is one that is freely joined and left and is internally non-hierarchical. Thus anarchist communities may co-exist with non-anarchist ones but this does **not** mean the non-anarchist ones are in any way anarchistic or libertarian.

When reading this section of the FAQ remember three things. One, an anarchist society will be created by the autonomous actions of the mass of the population, not by anarchists writing books about it. This means a real anarchist society will make many mistakes and develop in ways we cannot predict. Two, that it is only a series of suggestions on how things **could** work in an anarchist society -- it is **not** a blueprint of any kind. Three, that we recognise that anarchist areas will probably co-exist with non-anarchist areas. This does not make the non-anarchist areas anarchist and it is up to supporters of

hierarchy to present their own visions of the future. All anarchists can do is present what we believe and why we think such a vision is both desirable **and** viable.

We hope that our arguments and ideas presented in this section of the FAQ will inspire more debate and discussion of how a free society would work. In addition, and equally as important, we hope it will help inspire the struggle that will create that society. After all, anarchists desire to build the new world in the shell of the old. Unless we have some idea of what that new society will be like it is difficult to create it in our activities in the here and now!

## J.5 What alternative social organisations do anarchists create?

Anarchism is all about "*do it yourself*," people helping each other out in order to secure a good society to live within and to protect, extend and enrich their personal freedom. As such anarchists are keenly aware of the importance of building alternatives to both capitalism and the state in the here and now. Only by creating practical alternatives can we show that anarchism is a viable possibility and train ourselves in the techniques and responsibilities of freedom:

*"If we put into practice the principles of libertarian communism within our organisations, the more advanced and prepared we will be on that day when we come to adopt it completely."* [C.N.T. member, quoted by Graham Kelsey, **Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State**, p. 79]

By building the new world in the shell of the old, we help create the environment within which individuals can manage their own affairs and develop their abilities to do so. In other words, we create "*schools of anarchism*" which lay the foundations for a better society as well as promoting and supporting social struggle against the current system. Make no mistake, the alternatives we discuss in this section are not an alternative to direct action and the need for social struggle - they are an expression of social struggle and a form of direct action. They are the framework by which social struggle can build and strengthen the anarchist tendencies within capitalist society which will ultimately replace it.

Therefore it is wrong to think that anarchists are indifferent to making life more bearable, even more enjoyable, under capitalism. A free society will not just appear from nowhere, it will be created by individuals and communities with a long history of social struggle and organisation. For as Wilhelm Reich so correctly pointed out:

*"Quite obviously, a society that is to consist of 'free individuals,' to constitute a 'free community' and to administer itself, i.e. to 'govern itself,' cannot be suddenly created by decrees. It has to **evolve organically**."* [**The Mass Psychology of Fascism**, p. 241]

And it is this organic evolution that anarchists promote when they create anarchist alternatives within capitalist society. The alternatives anarchists create (be they workplace or community unions, co-operatives, mutual banks, and so on) are marked by certain common features such as being self-managed, being based upon equality and decentralisation and working with other groups and associations within a confederal network based upon mutual aid and solidarity. In other words, they are **anarchist** in both spirit and structure and so create a practical bridge between what is and what is possible.

Therefore, anarchists consider the building of alternatives as a key aspect of their activity under

capitalism. This is because they, like all forms of direct action, are "schools of anarchy" and also because they make the transition to a free society easier. *"Through the organisations set up for the defence of their interests,"* in Malatesta's words, *"the workers develop an awareness of the oppression they suffer and the antagonism that divides them from the bosses and as a result begin to aspire to a better life, become accustomed to collective struggle and solidarity and win those improvements that are possible within the capitalist and state regime."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 95] By creating viable examples of *"anarchy in action"* we can show that our ideas are practical and convince people of anarchist ideas by "good examples." Therefore this section of the FAQ will indicate the alternatives anarchists support and **why** we support them.

The approach anarchists take to this activity could be termed *"social unionism"* -- the collective action of groups to change certain aspects (and, ultimately, all aspects) of their lives. This "social unionism" takes many different forms in many different areas (some of which, not all, are discussed here) -- but they share the same basic aspects of collective direct action, self-organisation, self-management, solidarity and mutual aid. These "social unions" would be a means (like the old labour movement) *"of raising the morale of the workers, accustom them to free initiative and solidarity in a struggle for the good of everyone and render them capable of imagining, desiring and putting into practice an anarchist life."* [Errico Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 28]

As will quickly become obvious in this discussion (as if it had not been so before!) anarchists are firm supporters of *"self-help,"* an expression that has been sadly corrupted (like freedom) by the right in recent times. Like "freedom", "self-help" should be saved from the clutches of the right who have no real claim to that expression. Indeed, anarchism was created from and based itself upon working class self-help -- for what other interpretation can be gathered from the famous slogan of the **First International** that *"the emancipation of the working class must be the task of the working class itself"*? So, Anarchists have great faith in the abilities of working class people to work out for themselves what their problems are and act to solve them.

Anarchist support, and promotion, of alternatives is a **key** aspect of this process of self-liberation, and so a key aspect of anarchism. While strikes, boycotts, and other forms of high profile direct action may be more sexy than the long and hard task of creating and building social alternatives, these are the nuts and bolts of creating a new world as well as the infrastructure which supports the "high profile" activities. Hence the importance of highlighting the alternatives anarchists support and build. The alternatives we discuss here is part of the process of building the new world in the shell of the old -- and involve both combative organisations (such as community and workplace unions) as well as more defensive/supportive ones (such as co-operatives and mutual banks). Both have their part to play in the class struggle, although the combative ones are the most important in creating the spirit of revolt and the possibility of creating an anarchist society (which will be reflected in the growth of supportive organisations to aid that struggle).

We must also stress that anarchists look to "natural" tendencies within social struggle as the basis of any alternatives we try to create. As Kropotkin put it, anarchism is based *"on an analysis of tendencies of an*



*evolution that is already going on in society, and on induction therefrom as to the future.*" It is *"representative . . . of the creative, instructive power of the people themselves who aimed at developing institutions of common law in order to protect them from the power-seeking minority."* In other words, anarchism bases itself on those tendencies that are created by the self-activity of working class people and while developing within capitalism are **in opposition** to it -- such tendencies are expressed in organisational form as trade unions and other forms of workplace struggle, cooperatives (both productive and credit), libertarian schools, and so on. For anarchists, anarchism is *"born among the people - in the struggles of real life and not in the philosopher's studio"* and owes its *"origin to the constructive, creative activity of the people . . . and to a protest - a revolt against the external force which had thrust itself upon [communal] . . . institutions."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 158, p. 147, p. 150, p. 149] This *"creative activity"* is expressed in the organisations created in the class struggle by working people, some of which we discuss in this section of the FAQ. Therefore, the alternatives anarchists support should not be viewed in isolation of social struggle and working class resistance to hierarchy - the reverse in fact, as these alternatives are almost always expressions of that struggle.

Lastly, we should note that this list of alternatives does not list all the forms of organisation anarchists create. For example, we have ignored solidarity groups and organisations which are created to campaign against or for certain issues or reforms. Anarchists are in favour of such organisations and work within them to spread anarchist ideas, tactics and organisational forms. However, these interest groups (while very useful) do not provide a framework for lasting change as do the ones we highlight below although we stress that anarchists do not ignore such organisations and struggles (see sections [J.1.4](#) and [J.1.5](#) for more details on anarchist opinions on such "single issue" campaigns).

We have also ignored what have been called *"intentional communities"*. This is when a group of individuals squat or buy land and other resources within capitalism and create their own anarchist commune in it. Most anarchists reject this idea as capitalism and the state must be fought, not ignored. In addition, due to their small size, they are rarely viable experiments in communal living and nearly always fail after a short time (for a good summary of Kropotkin's attitude to such communities, which can be taken as typical, to such schemes see Graham Purchase's book **Evolution & Revolution**, pp. 122-125). Dropping out will not stop capitalism and the state and while such communities may try to ignore the system, they will find that the system will not ignore them -- they will come under competitive and ecological pressures from capitalism whether they like it or not.

Therefore the alternatives we discuss here are attempts to create anarchist alternatives within capitalism and which aim to **change** it (either by revolutionary or evolutionary means). They are based upon **challenging** capitalism and the state, not ignoring them by dropping out. Only by a process of direct action and building alternatives which are relevant to our daily lives can we revolutionise and change both ourselves and society.

## J.5.1 What is community unionism?

Community unionism is our term for the process of creating participatory communities (called "communes" in classical anarchism) within the state.

Basically, a community union is the creation of interested members of a community who decide to form an organisation to fight against injustice in their local community and for improvements within it. It is a forum by which inhabitants can raise issues that affect themselves and others and provide a means of solving these problems. As such, it is a means of directly involving local people in the life of their own communities and collectively solving the problems facing them as both individuals and as part of a wider society. Politics, therefore, is not separated into a specialised activity that only certain people do (i. e. politicians). Instead, it becomes communalised and part of everyday life and in the hands of all.

As would be imagined, like the participatory communities that would exist in an anarchist society, the community union would be based upon a mass assembly of its members. Here would be discussed the issues that effect the membership and how to solve them. Like the communes of a future anarchy, these community unions would be confederated with other unions in different areas in order to co-ordinate joint activity and solve common problems. These confederations, like the basic union assemblies themselves, would be based upon direct democracy, mandated delegates and the creation of administrative action committees to see that the memberships decisions are carried out.

The community union could also raise funds for strikes and other social protests, organise pickets and boycotts and generally aid others in struggle. By organising their own forms of direct action (such as tax and rent strikes, environmental protests and so on) they can weaken the state while building an self-managed infrastructure of co-operatives to replace the useful functions the state or capitalist firms currently provide.

So, in addition to organising resistance to the state and capitalist firms, these community unions could play an important role in creating an alternative economy within capitalism. For example, such unions could have a mutual bank or credit union associated with them which could allow funds to be gathered for the creation of self-managed co-operatives and social services and centres. In this way a communalised co-operative sector could develop, along with a communal confederation of community unions and their co-operative banks.

Such community unions have been formed in many different countries in recent years to fight against particularly evil attacks on the working class. In Britain, groups were created in neighbourhoods across the country to organise non-payment of the conservative government's community charge (popularly known as the poll tax). Federations of these groups and unions were created to co-ordinate the struggle and pull resources and, in the end, ensured that the government withdrew the hated tax and helped push Thatcher out of government. In Ireland, similar groups were formed to defeat the privatisation of the water industry by a similar non-payment campaign.

However, few of these groups have been taken as part of a wider strategy to empower the local community but the few that have indicate the potential of such a strategy. This potential can be seen

from two examples of community organising in Europe, one in Italy and another in Spain.

In Italy, anarchists have organised a very successful **Municipal Federation of the Base (FMB)** in Spezzano Albanese (in the South of that country). This organisation is *"an alternative to the power of the town hall"* and provides a *"glimpse of what a future libertarian society could be"* (in the words of one activist). The aim of the Federation is *"the bringing together of all interests within the district. In intervening at a municipal level, we become involved not only in the world of work but also the life of the community. . . the FMB make counter proposals [to Town Hall decisions], which aren't presented to the Council but proposed for discussion in the area to raise people's level of consciousness. Whether they like it or not the Town Hall is obliged to take account of these proposals."* [*Community Organising in Southern Italy*", pp. 16-19, **Black Flag** no. 210, p. 17, p. 18]

In this way, local people take part in deciding what effects them and their community and create a self-managed "dual power" to the local, and national, state. They also, by taking part in self-managed community assemblies, develop their ability to participate and manage their own affairs, so showing that the state is unnecessary and harmful to their interests. In addition, the FMB also supports co-operatives within it, so creating a communalised, self-managed economic sector within capitalism. Such a development helps to reduce the problems facing isolated co-operatives in a capitalist economy -- see section [J.5.11](#) -- and was actively done in order to *"seek to bring together all the currents, all the problems and contradictions, to seek solutions"* to such problems facing co-operatives [**Ibid.**].

Elsewhere in Europe, the long, hard work of the C.N.T. in Spain has also resulted in mass village assemblies being created in the Puerto Real area, near Cadiz. These community assemblies came about to support an industrial struggle by shipyard workers. As one C.N.T. member explains, *"[e]very Thursday of every week, in the towns and villages in the area, we had all-village assemblies where anyone connected with the particular issue [of the rationalisation of the shipyards], whether they were actually workers in the shipyard itself, or women or children or grandparents, could go along. . . and actually vote and take part in the decision making process of what was going to take place."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism in Puerto Real: from shipyard resistance to direct democracy and community control**, p. 6]

With such popular input and support, the shipyard workers won their struggle. However, the assembly continued after the strike and *"managed to link together twelve different organisations within the local area that are all interested in fighting. . . various aspects [of capitalism]"* including health, taxation, economic, ecological and cultural issues. Moreover, the struggle *"created a structure which was very different from the kind of structure of political parties, where the decisions are made at the top and they filter down. What we managed to do in Puerto Real was make decisions at the base and take them upwards."* [**Ibid.**]

In these ways, a grassroots movement from below has been created, with direct democracy and participation becoming an inherent part of a local political culture of resistance, with people deciding things for themselves directly and without hierarchy. Such developments are the embryonic structures of

a world based around direct democracy and participation, with a strong and dynamic community life. For, as Martin Buber argued, "[t]he more a human group lets itself be represented in the management of its common affairs. . . the less communal life there is in it and the more impoverished it becomes as a community." [**Paths in Utopia**, p. 133]

Anarchist support and encouragement of community unionism, by creating the means for communal self-management, helps to enrich the community as well as creating the organisational forms required to resist the state and capitalism. In this way we build the anti-state which will (hopefully) replace the state. Moreover, the combination of community unionism with workplace assemblies (as in Puerto Real), provides a mutual support network which can be very effective in helping winning struggles. For example, in Glasgow, Scotland in 1916, a massive rent strike was finally won when workers came out in strike in support of the rent strikers who been arrested for non-payment.

Such developments indicate that Isaac Puente was correct to argue that:

*"Libertarian Communism is a society organised without the state and without private ownership. And there is no need to invent anything or conjure up some new organization for the purpose. The centres about which life in the future will be organised are already with us in the society of today: the free union and the free municipality [or Commune]."*

*"**The union**: in it combine spontaneously the workers from factories and all places of collective exploitation.*

*"And **the free municipality**: an assembly with roots stretching back into the past where, again in spontaneity, inhabitants of village and hamlet combine together, and which points the way to the solution of problems in social life in the countryside.*

*"Both kinds of organisation, run on federal and democratic principles, will be sovereign in their decision making, without being beholden to any higher body, their only obligation being to federate one with another as dictated by the economic requirement for liaison and communications bodies organised in industrial federations.*

*"**The union and the free municipality** will assume the collective or common ownership of everything which is under private ownership at present [but collectively used] and will regulate production and consumption (in a word, the economy) in each locality.*

*"The very bringing together of the two terms (communism and libertarian) is indicative in itself of the fusion of two ideas: one of them is collectivist, tending to bring about harmony in the whole through the contributions and cooperation of individuals, without undermining their independence in any way; while the other is individualist, seeking to reassure the individual that his independence will be respected." [**Libertarian Communism**, pp. 6-7]*

The combination of community unionism, along with industrial unionism (see [next section](#)), will be the key of creating an anarchist society, Community unionism, by creating the free commune within the state, allows us to become accustomed to managing our own affairs and seeing that an injury to one is an injury to all. In this way a social power is created in opposition to the state. The town council may still be in the hands of politicians, but neither they nor the central government can move without worrying about what the people's reaction might be, as expressed and organised in their community unions and assemblies.

## J.5.2 Why do anarchists support industrial unionism?

Simply because it is effective, expresses our ideas on how industry will be organised in an anarchist society and is a key means of ending capitalist oppression and exploitation. As Max Stirner pointed out the *"labourers have the most enormous power in their hands, and, if they once become thoroughly conscious of it and used it, nothing could withstand them; they would only have to stop labour, regard the product of labour as theirs, and enjoy it. This is the sense of the labour disturbances which show themselves here and there."* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 116]

Libertarian workplace organisation is the best way of organising and exercising this power. However, before discussing why anarchists support industrial unionism, we must point out that the type of unionism anarchists support has very little in common with that associated with reformist or business unions like the TUC in Britain or the AFL-CIO in the USA (see [next section](#)).

In such unions, as Alexander Berkman points out, the *"rank and file have little say. They have delegated their power to leaders, and these have become the boss. . . Once you do that, the power you have delegated will be used against you and your interests every time."* [**The ABC of Anarchism**, p. 58] Reformist unions, even if they do organise by industry rather than by trade or craft, are top-heavy and bureaucratic. Thus they are organised in the same manner as capitalist firms or the state -- and like both of these, the officials at the top have different interests than those at the bottom. Little wonder anarchists oppose such forms of unionism as being counter to the interests of their members. The long history of union officials betraying their members is proof enough of this.

Therefore anarchists propose a different kind of workplace organisation, one that is organised in a totally different manner than the current, mainstream, unions. We will call this new kind of organisation *"industrial unionism"* (although perhaps industrial syndicalism or workplace assemblies may be a better, less confusing, name for it).

Industrial unionism is based upon the idea that workers should directly control their own organisations and struggles. As such, it is based upon workplace assemblies and their confederation between different workplaces in the same industry as well as between different workplaces in the same locality. An industrial union is a union which organises all workers in a given type of industry together into one body. This means that all workers regardless of their actual trade would ideally be in the one union. On a

building site, for example, brick-layers, plumbers, carpenters and so on would all be a member of the Building Workers Union. Each trade may have its own sections within the union (so that plumbers can discuss issues relating to their trade for example) but the core decision making focus would be an assembly of all workers employed in a workplace. As they all have the same boss it is logical for them to have the same union.

However, industrial unionism should **not** be confused with a closed shop situation where workers are forced to join a union when they become a wage slave in a workplace. While anarchists do desire to see all workers unite in one organisation, it is vitally important that workers can leave a union and join another. The closed shop only empowers union bureaucrats and gives them even more power to control (and/or ignore) their members. As anarchist unionism has no bureaucrats, there is no need for the closed shop and its voluntary nature is essential in order to ensure that a union be subject to "exit" as well as "voice" for it to be responsive to its members wishes.

As Albert Meltzer argues, the closed shop means that *"the [trade union] leadership becomes all-powerful since once it exerts its right to expel a member, that person is not only out of the union, but out of a job."* Anarcho-syndicalism, therefore, *"rejects the closed shop and relies on voluntary membership, and so avoids any leadership or bureaucracy."* [**Anarchism: Arguments for and against**, p. 56 -- also see Tom Wetzel's excellent article *"The Origins of the Union Shop"*, part 3 of the series *"Why does the union bureaucracy exist?"* in **Ideas & Action** no. 11, Fall 1989 for a fuller discussion of these issues] Without voluntary membership even the most libertarian union may become bureaucratic and unresponsive to the needs of its members and the class struggle (even anarcho-syndicalist unions are subject to hierarchical influences by having to work within the hierarchical capitalist economy although voluntary membership, along with a libertarian structure and tactics, helps combat these tendencies -- see section [J.3.9](#)).

Obviously this means that anarchist opposition to the closed shop has nothing in common with boss, conservative and right-wing libertarian opposition to it. These groups, while denouncing coercing workers into trades unions, support the coercive power of bosses over workers without a second thought (indeed, given their justifications of sexual harassment and other forms of oppressive behaviour by bosses, we can imagine that they would happily support workers having to join **company** unions to keep their jobs -- only when bosses dislike mandatory union membership do these defenders of "freedom" raise their opposition). Anarchist opposition to the closed shop (like their opposition to union bureaucracy) flows from their opposition to hierarchy and authoritarian social relationships. The right-wing's opposition is purely a product of their pro-capitalist and pro-authority position and the desire to see the worker subject only to **one** boss during working hours, not **two** (particularly if this second one has to represent workers interests to some degree). Anarchists, on the other hand, want to get rid of all bosses during working hours.

In industrial unionism, the membership, assembled in their place of work, are the ones to decide when to strike, when to pay strike pay, what tactics to use, what demands to make, what issues to fight over and whether an action is "official" or "unofficial". In this way the rank and file is in control of their unions

and, by confederating with other assemblies, they co-ordinate their forces with their fellow workers. As syndicalist activist Tom Brown makes clear:

*"The basis of the Syndicate is the mass meeting of workers assembled at their place of work. . . The meeting elects its factory committee and delegates. The factory is Syndicate is federated to all other such committees in the locality. . . In the other direction, the factory, let us say engineering factory, is affiliated to the District Federation of Engineers. In turn the District Federation is affiliated to the National Federation of Engineers. . . Then, each industrial federation is affiliated to the National Federation of Labour . . . how the members of such committees are elected is most important. They are, first of all, not representatives like Members of Parliament who air their own views; they are delegates who carry the message of the workers who elect them. They do not tell the workers what the 'official' policy is; the workers tell them.*

*"Delegates are subject to instant recall by the persons who elected them. None may sit for longer than two successive years, and four years must elapse before his [or her] next nomination. Very few will receive wages as delegates, and then only the district rate of wages for the industry. . .*

*"It will be seen that in the Syndicate the members control the organisation - not the bureaucrats controlling the members. In a trade union the higher up the pyramid a man is the more power he wields; in a Syndicate the higher he is the less power he has.*

*"The factory Syndicate has full autonomy over its own affairs. . ."* [**Syndicalism**, pp. 35-36]

As can be seen, industrial unionism reflects anarchist ideas of organisation - it is organised from the bottom up, it is decentralised and based upon federation and it is directly managed by its members in mass assemblies. It is anarchism applied to industry and the needs of the class struggle. By supporting such forms of organisations, anarchists are not only seeing "anarchy in action", they are forming effective tools which can win the class war. By organising in this manner, workers are building the framework of a co-operative society within capitalism. Rudolf Rocker makes this clear:

*"the syndicate. . . has for its purpose the defence of the interests of the producers within existing society and the preparing for and the practical carrying out of the reconstruction of social life . . . It has, therefore, a double purpose: 1. As the fighting organisation of the workers against their employers to enforce the demand of the workers for the safeguarding of their standard of living; 2. As the school for the intellectual training of the workers to make them acquainted with the technical management of production and economic life in general."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 51]

Given the fact that workers wages have been stagnating (or, at best, falling behind productivity

increases) across the world as the trade unions have been weakened and marginalised (partly because of their own tactics, structure and politics) it is clear that there exists a great need for working people to organise to defend themselves. The centralised, top-down trade unions we are accustomed to have proved themselves incapable of effective struggle (and, indeed, the number of times they have sabotaged such struggle are countless - a result not of "bad" leaders but of the way these unions organise and their role within capitalism). Hence anarchists support industrial unionism (co-operation between workers assemblies) as an effective alternative to the malaise of official trade unionism. How anarchists aim to encourage such new forms of workplace organisation and struggle will be discussed in the [next section](#).

We are sure that many radicals will consider that such decentralised, confederal organisations would produce confusion and disunity. However, anarchists maintain that the statist, centralised form of organisation of the trades unions would produce indifference instead of involvement, heartlessness instead of solidarity, uniformity instead of unity, and elites instead of equality, nevermind killing all personal initiative by lifeless discipline and bureaucratic ossification and permitting no independent action. The old form of organisation has been tried and tried again - it has always failed. The sooner workers recognise this the better.

One last point. We must note that many anarchists, particularly communist-anarchists, consider unions, even anarchosyndicalist ones, as having a strong reformist tendency (as discussed in section [J.3.9](#)). However, all anarchists recognise the importance of autonomous class struggle and the need for organisations to help fight that struggle. Thus anarchist-communists, instead of trying to organise industrial unions, apply the ideas of industrial unionism to workplace struggles. In other words, they would agree with the need to organise all workers into a mass assembly and to have elected, recallable administration committees to carry out the strikers wishes. This means that such anarchists they do not call their practical ideas "anarcho-syndicalism" nor the workplace assemblies they desire to create "unions," there are **extremely** similar in nature and so we can discuss both using the term "industrial unionism". The key difference is that many (if not most) anarcho-communists consider that permanent workplace organisations that aim to organise **all** workers would soon become reformist. Because of this they also see the need for anarchist to organise **as anarchists** in order to spread the anarchist message within them and keep their revolutionary aspects at the forefront (and so support industrial networks -- see [next section](#)).

Therefore while there are slight differences in terminology and practice, all anarchists would support the ideas of industrial unionism we have outlined above.

### **J.5.3 What attitude do anarchists take to existing unions?**

As noted in the [last section](#), anarchists desire to create organisations in the workplace radically different from the existing trade unions. The question now arises, what attitude do anarchists generally take to these existing unions?



Before answering that question, we must stress that anarchists, no matter how hostile to trade unions as bureaucratic, reformist institutions, **are** in favour of working class struggle. This means that when trade union members or other workers are on strike anarchists will support them (unless the strike is totally reactionary -- for example, no anarchist would support a strike which is racist in nature). This is because almost all anarchists consider it basic to their politics that you don't scab and you don't crawl (a handful of individualist anarchists are the exception). So, when reading anarchist criticisms of trade unions do not for an instant think we do not support industrial struggles -- we do, we are just very critical of the unions that are sometimes involved.

So, what do anarchists think of the trade unions?

For the most part, one could call the typical anarchist opinion toward them as one of "hostile support." It is hostile insofar as anarchists are well aware of how bureaucratic these unions are and how they continually betray their members. Given that they are usually little more than "business" organisations, trying to sell their members labour-power for the best deal possible, it is unsurprising that they are bureaucratic and that the interests of the bureaucracy are at odds with those of its membership. However, our attitude is "supportive" in that even the worse trade union represents an attempt at working class solidarity and self-help, even if the attempt is now far removed from the initial protests and ideas that set the union up. For a worker to join a trade union means having to recognise, to some degree, that he or she has different interests from their boss. There is no way to explain the survival of the unions other than the fact that there are different class interests, and workers have understood that to promote their own interests they have to organise on class lines.

No amount of conservatism, bureaucracy or backwardness within the unions can obliterate the essential fact of different class interests. The very existence of trade unions testifies to the existence of some level of basic class consciousness -- even though most trade unions claim otherwise and that capital and labour have interests in common. As we have argued, anarchists reject this claim with good reason, and the very existence of trade unions show that this is not true. If workers and capitalists have the same interests, trade unions would not exist. Moreover, claiming that the interests of workers and bosses are the same theoretically disarms both the unions and its members and so weakens their struggles (after all, if bosses and workers have similar interests then any conflict is bad and the decisions of the boss must be in workers' interests!).

Thus anarchist viewpoints reflect the contradictory nature of business/trade unions -- on the one hand they are products of workers' struggle, but on the other they are **very** bureaucratic, unresponsive and centralised and (therefore) their full-time officials have no real interest in fighting against wage labour as it would put them out of a job. Indeed, the very nature of trade unionism ensures that the interests of the union (i.e. the full-time officials) come into conflict with the people they claim to represent.

This can best be seen from the disgraceful activities of the TGWU with respect to the Liverpool dockers in Britain. The union officials (and the TUC itself) refused to support their members after they had been sacked in 1995 for refusing to cross a picket line. The dockers organised their own struggle, contacting

dockers' unions across the world and organising global solidarity actions. Moreover, a network of support groups sprung up across Britain to gather funds for their struggle (and, we are proud to note, anarchists have played their role in supporting the strikers). Many trade unionists could tell similar stories of betrayal by "their" union.

This occurs because trade unions, in order to get recognition from a company, must be able to promise industrial pieces. They need to enforce the contracts they sign with the bosses, even if this goes against the will of its members. Thus trade unions become a third force in industry, somewhere between management and the workers and pursuing its own interests. This need to enforce contracts soon ensures that the union becomes top-down and centralised -- otherwise its members would violate the unions agreements. They have to be able to control their members - which usually means stopping them fighting the boss - if they are to have anything to bargain with at the negotiation table. This may sound odd, but the point is that the union official has to sell the employer labour discipline and freedom from unofficial strikes as part of its side of the bargain. Otherwise the employer will ignore them. The nature of trade unionism is to take power away from out of local members and centralise it into the hands of officials at the top of the organisation.

Thus union officials sell out their members because of the role trade unions play within society, not because they are nasty individuals (although some are). They behave as they do because they have too much power and, being full-time and highly paid, are unaccountable, in any real way, to their members. Power -- and wealth -- corrupts, no matter who you are. (also see Chapter 11 of Alexander Berkman's **What is Communist Anarchism?** for an excellent introduction to anarchist viewpoints on trade unions).

While, in normal times, most workers will not really question the nature of the trade union bureaucracy, this changes when workers face some threat. Then they are brought face to face with the fact that the trade union has interests separate from theirs. Hence we see trade unions agreeing to wage cuts, redundancies and so on -- after all, the full-time trade union official's job is not on the line! But, of course, while such a policy is in the short term interests of the officials, in the longer term it goes against their interests -- after all, who wants to join a union which rolls over and presents no effective resistance to employers? Little wonder Michael Moore has a chapter entitled "*Why are Union Leaders So F#!@ing Stupid?*" in his book **Downsize This!** -- essential reading to realise how moronic trade union bureaucrats can actually be. Sadly trade union bureaucracy seems to afflict all who enter it with short-sightedness, as seen by the countless times the trade unions have sold-out their members -- although the chickens do, finally, come home to roost, as the bureaucrats of the AFL, TUC and other trade unions are finding out in this era of global capital and falling membership. So while the activities of trade union leaders may seem crazy and short-sighted, these activities are forced upon them by their position and role within society -- which explains why they are so commonplace and why even radical leaders end up doing exactly the same thing in time.

Few anarchists would call upon members of a trade union to tear-up their membership cards. While some anarchists, particularly communist anarchists and some anarcho-syndicalists have nothing but contempt (and rightly so) for trade unions (and so do not work within them -- but will support trade

union members in struggle), the majority of anarchists take a more pragmatic viewpoint. If no alternative syndicalist union exists, anarchists will work within the existing unions (perhaps becoming shop-stewards -- few anarchists would agree to be elected to positions above this in any trade union, particularly if the post was full-time), spreading the anarchist message and trying to create a libertarian undercurrent which would hopefully blossom into a more anarchistic labour movement.

So most anarchists "support" the trade unions only until they have created a viable libertarian alternative. Thus we will become trade union members while trying to spread anarchist ideas within and outwith them. This means that anarchists are flexible in terms of their activity in the unions. For example, many IWW members were "two-carders." This meant that as well as being members of the IWW, they were also in the local AFL branch in their place of work and turned to the IWW when the AFL hierarchy refused to back strikes or other forms of direct action. Anarchists encourage rank and file self-activity, **not** endless calls for trade union bureaucrats to act for us (as is unfortunately far too common on the left).

Anarchist activity within trade unions reflects our ideas on hierarchy and its corrupting effects. We reject totally the response of left-wing social democrats, Stalinists and mainstream Trotskyists to the problem of trade union betrayal, which is to try and elect and/or appoint 'better' officials. They see the problem primarily in terms of the individuals who hold the posts. However this ignores the fact that individuals are shaped by the environment they live in and the role they play in society. Thus even the most left-wing and progressive individual will become a bureaucrat if they are placed within a bureaucracy -- and we must note that the problem of corruption does not spring from the high-wages officials are paid (although this is a factor), but from the power they have over their members (which partly expresses itself in high pay).

Any claim that electing "radical" full-time officials who refuse to take the high wages associated with the position will be better is false. The hierarchical nature of the trade union structure has to be changed, not side-effects of it. As the left has no problem with hierarchy as such, this explains why they support this form of "reform." They do not actually want to undercut whatever dependency the members has on leadership, they want to replace the leaders with "better" ones (i.e. themselves or members of their party) and so endlessly call upon the trade union bureaucracy to act **for** its members. In this way, they hope, trade unionists will see the need to support a "better" leadership -- namely themselves. Anarchists, in stark contrast, think that the problem is not that the leadership of the trade unions is weak, right-wing or does not act but that the union's membership follows them. Thus anarchists aim at undercutting reliance on leaders (be they left or right) by encouraging self-activity by the rank and file and awareness that hierarchical leadership as such is bad, not individual leaders.

Instead of "reform" from above (which is doomed to failure), anarchists work at the bottom and attempt to empower the rank and file of the trade unions. It is self-evident that the more power, initiative and control that lies with the rank & file membership on the shop floor, the less it will lie with the bureaucracy. Thus anarchists work within and outwith the trade unions in order to increase the power of workers where it actually lies: at the point of production. This is usually done by creating networks of

activists who spread anarchist ideas to their fellow workers (see next section -- "[What are Industrial Networks?](#)").

*These groups "within the unions should strive to ensure that they [the trade unions] remain open to all workers of whatever opinion or party on the sole condition that there is solidarity in the struggle against the bosses. They should oppose the corporatist spirit and any attempt to monopolise labour or organisation. They should prevent the Unions from becoming the tools of the politicians for electoral or other authoritarian ends; they should preach and practice direct action, decentralisation, autonomy and free initiative. They should strive to help members learn how to participate directly in the life of the organisation and to do without leaders and permanent officials.*

*"They must, in short, remain anarchists, remain always in close touch with anarchists and remember that the workers' organisation is not the end but just one of the means, however important, of preparing the way for the achievement of anarchism."* [Errico Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, pp. 26-27]

As part of this activity anarchists promote the ideas of Industrial Unionism we highlighted in the [last section](#) -- namely direct workers control of struggle via workplace assemblies and recallable committees -- during times of struggle. However, anarchists are aware that economic struggle (and trade unionism as such) *"cannot be an end in itself, since the struggle must also be waged at a political level to distinguish the role of the State."* [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 115] Thus, as well as encouraging worker self-organisation and self-activity, anarchist groups also seek to politicise struggles and those involved in them. Only this process of self-activity and political discussion between equals **within** social struggles can ensure the process of working class self-liberation and the creation of new, more libertarian, forms of workplace organisation.

The result of such activity may be a new form of workplace organisation (either workplace assemblies or an anarcho-syndicalist union) or a reformed, more democratic version of the existing trade union (although few anarchists believe that the current trade unions can be reformed). But either way, the aim is to get as many members of the current labour movement to become anarchists as possible or, at the very least, take a more libertarian and radical approach to their unions and workplace struggle.

## J.5.4 What are industrial networks?

Industrial networks are the means by which revolutionary industrial unions and other forms of libertarian workplace organisation can be created. The idea of Industrial Networks originated with the British section of the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers' Association in the late 1980s. It was developed as a means of promoting anarcho-syndicalist/anarchist ideas within the workplace, so creating the basis on which a workplace movement based upon the ideas of industrial unionism (see section [J.5.2](#)) could grow and expand.

The idea is very simple. An Industrial Network is a federation of militants in a given industry who

support the ideas of anarchism and/or anarcho-syndicalism, namely direct action, solidarity and organisation from the bottom up (the difference between purely anarchist networks and anarcho-syndicalist ones will be highlighted later). In other words, it would *"initially be a political grouping in the economic sphere, aiming to build a less reactive but positive organisation within the industry. The long term aim. . . is, obviously, the creation of an anarcho-syndicalist union."* [**Winning the Class War**, p. 18]

The Industrial Network would be an organisation of groups of anarchists and syndicalists within a workplace united into an industrial basis. They would pull their resources together to fund a regular bulletin and other forms of propaganda which they would distribute within their workplace and industry. These bulletins and leaflets would raise and discuss issues related to work and how to right back and win as well as placing workplace issues in a social and political context. This propaganda would present anarchist ideas of workplace organisation and resistance as well as general anarchist ideas and analysis. In this way anarchist ideas and tactics would be able to get a wider hearing and anarchists can have an input **as anarchists** into workplace struggles.

Traditionally, many syndicalists and anarcho-syndicalists advocated the *One Big Union* strategy, the aim of which was to organise all workers into one organisation representing the whole working class. Today, however, most anarcho-syndicalists and all social anarchists advocate workers assemblies for decision making during struggles (the basic form of which we discussed in section [J.5.2](#)). The role of the anarchist group or anarcho-syndicalist (or revolutionary) union would basically be to call such workplace assemblies, argue for direct workers control of struggle by these mass assemblies, promote direct action and solidarity, put across anarchist ideas and politics and keep things on the boil, so to speak.

This support for industrial networks exists because most anarcho-syndicalists recognise that they face dual unionism (which means there are more than one union within a given workplace or country). This was the case, historically, in all countries with a large anarcho-syndicalist union movement - in Spain and Italy there were the socialist unions along with the syndicalist ones and so on). Therefore most anarcho-syndicalists do not expect to ever get a majority of the working class into a revolutionary union before a revolutionary situation develops. In addition, anarcho-syndicalists recognise that a revolutionary union *"is not just an economic fighting force, but also an organisation with a political context. To build such a union requires a lot of work and experience"* of which the Industrial Networks are but one aspect. [**Ibid.**]

Thus industrial networks are intended to deal with the actual situation that confronts us, and provide a strategy for moving from our present reality toward our ultimate goals. Where one has only a handful of anarchists and syndicalists in a workplace or scattered across several workplaces there is a clear need for developing ways for these fellow workers to effectively act in union, rather than be isolated and relegated to more general agitation. A handful of anarchists cannot meaningfully call a general strike. But we can agitate around specific industrial issues and organise our fellow workers to do something about them. Through such campaigns we demonstrate the advantages of rank-and-file unionism and

direct action, show our fellow workers that our ideas are not mere abstract theory but can be implemented here and now, attract new members and supporters, and further develop our capacity to develop revolutionary unions in our workplaces.

Thus the creation of Industrial Networks and the calling for workplace assemblies is a recognition of where we are now -- with anarchist ideas very much in the minority. Calling for workers assemblies is not an anarchist tactic per se, we must add, but a working class one developed and used plenty of times by workers in struggles (indeed, it was how the current trade unions were created). It also puts the onus on the reformists and reactionary unions by appealing directly to their members as workers and showing their bureaucrat organisations and reformist politics by creating an effective alternative to them.

A few anarchists reject the idea of Industrial Networks and instead support the idea of "**rank and file**" groups which aim to put pressure on the current trade unions to become more militant and democratic (a few anarcho-syndicalists think that such groups can be used to reform the trade-unions into libertarian, revolutionary organisations -- called "*boring from within*" -- but most reject this as utopia, viewing the trade union bureaucracy as unreformable as the state's). Moreover, opponents of "rank and file" groups argue that they direct time and energy **away** from practical and constructive activity and instead waste them "*[b]y constantly arguing for changes to the union structure. . . the need for the leadership to be more accountable, etc., [and so] they not only [offer] false hope but [channel] energy and discontent away from the real problem - the social democratic nature of reformist trade unions.*" [**Winning the Class War**, p. 11]

Supporters of the "rank and file" approach fear that the Industrial Networks will isolate anarchists from the mass of trade union members by creating tiny "pure" syndicalist unions or anarchist groups. But such a claim is rejected by supporters of Industrial Networks. They maintain that they will be working with trade union members where it counts, in the workplace and not in badly attended, unrepresentative branch meetings. So:

*"We have no intention of isolating ourselves from the many workers who make up the rest of the rank and file membership of the unions. We recognise that a large proportion of trade union members are only nominally so as the main activity of social democratic [i.e. reformist] unions is outside the workplace. . . We aim to unite and not divide workers.*

*"It has been argued that social democratic unions will not tolerate this kind of activity, and that we would be all expelled and thus isolated. So be it. We, however, don't think that this will happen until. . . workplace militants had found a voice independent of the trade unions and so they become less useful to us anyway. Our aim is not to support social democracy, but to show it up as irrelevant to the working class." [Op. Cit., p. 19]*

Whatever the merits and disadvantages of both approaches are, it seems likely that the activity of both will overlap in practice with Industrial Networks operating within trade union branches and "rank and file" groups providing alternative structures for struggle.

As noted above, there is a slight difference between anarcho-syndicalist supporters of Industrial Networks and communist-anarchist ones. This is to do with how they see the function and aim of these networks. While both agree that such networks should agitate in their industry and call and support mass assemblies to organise resistance to capitalist exploitation and oppression they disagree on who can join the network groups and what they aims should be. Anarcho-syndicalists aim for the Industrial Networks to be the focal point for the building of permanent syndicalist unions and so aim for the Industrial Networks to be open to all workers who accept the general aims of the organisation. Anarcho-communists, however, view Industrial Networks as a means of increasing anarchist ideas within the working class and are not primarily concerned about building syndicalist unions (while many anarcho-communists would support such a development, some do not).

These anarchists, therefore, see the need for workplace-based branches of an anarchist group along with the need for networks of militant 'rank and file' workers, but reject the idea of something that is one but pretends to be the other. They argue that, far from avoiding the problems of classical anarcho-syndicalism, such networks seem to emphasise one of the worst problems -- namely that of how the organisation remains anarchist but is open to non-anarchists.

But the similarities between the two positions are greater than the differences and so can be summarised together, as we have done here.

## J.5.5 What forms of co-operative credit do anarchists support?

Anarchists tend to support must forms of co-operation, including those associated with credit and money. This co-operative credit/banking takes many forms, such as credit unions, LETS schemes and so on. In this section we discuss two main forms of co-operative credit, *mutualism* and *LETS*.

Mutualism is the name for the ideas associated with Proudhon and his **Bank of the People**. Essentially, it is a confederation of credit unions in which working class people pool their funds and savings. This allows credit to be arranged at cost, so increasing the options available to working people as well as abolishing interest on loans by making increasing amount of cheap credit available to working people. LETS stands for Local Exchange Trading Schemes and is a similar idea in many ways (and apparently discovered independently) -- see **Bringing the Economy Home from the Market** by V.G. Dobson for a detailed discussion on LETS.

Both schemes revolve around creating an alternative form of currency and credit within capitalism in order to allow working class people to work outwith the capitalist money system by creating "*labour notes*" as a new circulating medium. In this way, it is hoped, workers would be able to improve their living and working conditions by having a source of community-based (very low interest) credit and so be less dependent on capitalists and the capitalist banking system. Some supporters of mutualism considered it as the ideal way of reforming capitalism away. By making credit available to the ordinary worker at very cheap rates, the end of wage slavery would soon occur as workers would work for

themselves by either purchasing the necessary tools required for their work or, by their increased bargaining power within the economy, gain industrial democracy from the capitalists by buying them out.

Such ideas have had a long history within the socialist movement, originating in the British socialist movement in the early 19th century. Robert Owen and other Socialists active at the time considered the idea of labour notes and exchanges as a means of improving working class conditions within capitalism and as the means of reforming capitalism into a society of confederated, self-governing communities. Indeed, "*Equitable Labour Exchanges*" were "*founded at London and Birmingham in 1832*" with "*Labour notes and the exchange of small products*" [E.P. Thompson, **The Making of the English Working Class**, p. 870] Apparently independently of these early attempts in England at what would later be called mutualism, P-J Proudhon arrived at the same ideas decades later in France. In his words, "*The People's Bank quite simply embodies the financial and economic aspects of the principle of modern democracy, that is, the sovereignty of the People, and of the republican motto, 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.'*" [**Selected Writings of P-J Proudhon**, p. 75] Similarly, in the USA (partly as a result of Joshua Warren's activities, who got the idea from Robert Owen) there was extensive discussion on labour notes, exchanges and free credit as a means of protecting workers from the evils of capitalism and ensuring their independence and freedom from wage slavery. When Proudhon's works appeared in North America, the basic arguments were well known.

Therefore the idea that mutual banking using labour money as a means to improve working class living conditions, even, perhaps, to achieve industrial democracy, self-management and the end of capitalism has a long history in Socialist thought. Unfortunately this aspect of socialism became less important with the rise of Marxism (which called these early socialists "*utopian*") attempts at such credit unions and alternative exchange schemes were generally replaced with attempts to build working class political parties. With the rise of Marxian social democracy, constructive socialistic experiments and collective working class self-help was replaced by working within the capitalist state. Fortunately, history has had the last laugh on Marxism with working class people yet again creating anew the ideas of Mutualism (as can be seen by the growth of LETS and other schemes of community money).

## J.5.6 What are the key features of mutual credit schemes?

Mutualism, as noted in the [last section](#), is a form of credit co-operation, in which individuals pull their resources together in order to benefit themselves as individuals and as part of a community. LETS is another form of mutualism which developed recently, and apparently developed independently (from its start in Canada, LETS has spread across the world and there are now hundreds of schemes involved hundreds of thousands of people). Mutual banks and LETS have the following key aspects:

- 1) Co-operation: No-one owns the network. It is controlled by its members directly.
- 2) Non-exploitative: No interest is charged on account balances or credit. At most administrative costs are charged, a result of it being commonly owned and managed.
- 3) Consent: Nothing happens without it, there is no compulsion to trade.



4) Money: They use their own type of money (traditionally called "labour-notes") as a means of aiding "honest exchange".

It is hoped, by organising credit, working class people will be able to work for themselves and slowly but surely replace capitalism with a co-operative system based upon self-management. While LETS schemes do not have such grand schemes, historically mutualism aimed at working within and transforming capitalism to socialism. At the very least, LETS schemes reduce the power and influence of banks and finance capital within society as mutualism ensures that working people have a viable alternative to such parasites.

This point is important, as the banking system and money is often considered "neutral" (particularly in capitalist economics). However, as Malatesta correctly argues, it would be *"a mistake to believe . . . that the banks are, or are in the main, a means to facilitate exchange; they are a means to speculate on exchange and currencies, to invest capital and to make it produce interest, and to fulfil other typically capitalist operations."* [**Life and Ideas**, p. 100]

Within capitalism, money is still to a large degree a commodity which is more than a convenient measure of work done in the production of goods and services. As a commodity it can and does go anywhere in the world where it can get the best return for its owners, and so it tends to drain out of those communities that need it most. It is the means by which capitalists can buy the liberty of working people and get them to produce a surplus for them (wealth is, after all, *"a power invested in certain individuals by the institutions of society, to compel others to labour for their benefit."*) [William Godwin, **The Anarchist Writings of William Godwin**, p. 130]. From this consideration alone, working class control of credit and money is an important part of the class struggle as having access to alternative sources of credit can increase working class options and power.

Moreover, credit is also an important form of social control -- people who have to pay their mortgage or visa bill are more pliable, less likely to strike or make other forms of political trouble. And, of course, credit expands the consumption of the masses in the face of stagnant or falling wages while allowing capitalists to profit from it. Indeed, there is a link between the rising debt burden on households in the 1980s and 1990s and the increasing concentration of wealth. This is *"because of the decline in real hourly wages and the stagnation in household incomes, the middle and lower classes have borrowed to stay in place; they've borrowed from the very rich who have gotten richer. The rich need a place to earn interest on their surplus funds, and the rest of the population makes a juicy lending target."* [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, pp. 64-65]

Little wonder that the state (and the capitalists who run it) is so concerned to keep control of money in its own hands or the hands of its agents. With an increase in mutual credit, interest rates would drop, wealth would stay more in working class communities, and the social power of working people would increase (for people would be more likely to struggle for higher wages and better conditions -- as the fear of debt repayments would be less).

Therefore, mutualism is an example of what could be termed "*counter-economics*". By counter-economics we mean the creation of community-based credit unions that do not put their money into "Capital Markets" or into capitalist Banks. We mean finding ways for workers to control their own retirement funds. We mean finding ways of using money as a means of undermining capitalist power and control and supporting social struggle and change.

In this way working people are controlling more and more of the money supply and using it ways that will stop capital from using it to oppress and exploit the working class. An example of why this can be important can be seen from the results of the existing workers' pension fund system. Currently workers pension funds are being used to invest in capitalist firms (particularly transnationals and other forms of Big Business) and these companies use the invested money to fund their activities. The idea is that by so investing, workers will receive an adequate pension in their old age.

However, the only people actually winning are bankers and big companies. Unsurprisingly, the managers of these pension fund companies are investing in those firms with the highest returns, which are usually those who are downsizing or extracting most surplus value from their workforce (which in turn forces other companies to follow the same strategies to get access to the available funds in order to survive).

Basically, if you are lending your money to be used to put your fellow worker out of work or increase the power of capital, then you are not only helping to make things harder for others like you, you are also helping making things worse for yourself. No person is an island, and increasing the clout of capital over the working class is going to affect you directly or indirectly. And, of course, it seems crazy to suggest that workers desire to experience insecurity, fear of downsizing and stagnating wages during their working lives in order to have slightly more money when they retire.

This highlights one of the tricks the capitalists are using against us, namely to get us to buy into the system through our fear of old age. Whether it is going into lifelong debt to buy a home or lending our money to capitalists, we are being encouraged to buy into something which we value more than what is right and wrong. This allows us to be more easily controlled by the government. We need to get away from living in fear and stop allowing ourselves to be deceived into behaving like "stakeholders" in Capitalistic and Plutocratic systems. As can be seen from the use of pension funds to buy out firms, increase the size of transnationals and downsize the workforce, such "stakeholding" amounts to trading in the present and the future while others benefit.

The real enemies are **not** working people who take part in such pension schemes. It is the people in power, those who manage the pension schemes and companies, who are trying to squeeze every last cent out of working people to finance higher profits and stock prices -- which the unemployment and impoverishment of workers on a world-wide scale aids. They control the governments of the world. They are making the "rules" of the current system. Hence the importance of limiting the money they have available, of creating community-based credit unions and mutual risk insurance co-operatives to increase our control over our money and create our own, alternative, means of credit and exchange (as

presented as mutualism) which can be used to empower ourselves, aid our struggles and create our own alternatives. Money, representing as it does the power of capital and the authority of the boss, is not "neutral" and control over it plays a role in the class struggle. We ignore such issues at our own peril.

## J.5.7 Do most anarchists think mutual credit is sufficient to abolish capitalism?

The short answer is no, they do not. While the Individualist Anarchists and Mutualists (followers of Proudhon) do think that mutual banking is the only sure way of abolishing capitalism, most anarchists do not see mutualism as an end in itself. Few think that capitalism can be reformed away in the manner assumed by Proudhon. Increased access to credit does not address the relations of production and market power which exist within the economy and so any move for financial transformation has to be part of a broader attack on all forms of capitalist social power in order to be both useful and effective (see section [B.3.2](#) for more anarchist views on mutual credit and its uses). So, for most anarchists, it is only in combination with other forms of working class self-activity and self-management that mutualist institutions could play an important role in the class struggle.

By creating a network of mutual banks to aid in creating co-operatives, union organising drives, supporting strikes (either directly by gifts/loans or funding food and other co-operatives which could supply food and other essentials free or at a reduction), mutualism can be used as a means of helping build libertarian alternatives within the capitalist system. Such alternatives, while making life better under the current system, also can play a role in overcoming that system by being a means of aiding those in struggle make ends meet and providing alternative sources of income for black-listed or sacked workers. Thus Bakunin's comments:

*"let us co-operate in our common enterprise to make our lives a little bit more supportable and less difficult. Let us, wherever possible, establish producer-consumer co-operatives and mutual credit societies which, though under the present economic conditions they cannot in any real or adequate way free us, are nevertheless important inasmuch they train the workers in the practices of managing the economy and plant the precious seeds for the organisation of the future."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 173]

Therefore, while few anarchists think that mutualism would be enough in itself, it can play a role in the class struggle. As a compliment to direct action and workplace and community struggle and organisation, mutualism has an important role in working class self-liberation. For example, community unions (see section [J.5.1](#)) could create their own mutual banks and money which could be used to fund co-operatives and support strikes and other forms of social struggle. In this way a healthy communalised co-operative sector could develop within capitalism, overcoming the problems of isolation facing workplace co-operatives (see section [J.5.11](#)) as well as providing a firm framework of support for those in struggle.

Moreover, mutual banking can be a way of building upon and strengthening the anarchistic social relations within capitalism. For even under capitalism and statism, there exists extensive mutual aid and, indeed, anarchistic and communistic ways of living. For example, communistic arrangements exist within families, between friends and lovers and within anarchist organisations.

Mutual banking could be a means of creating a bridge between this alternative (gift) "economy" and capitalism. The mutualist alternative economy would help strength communities and bonds of trust between individuals, and this would increase the scope for increasing the scope of the communistic sector as more and more people help each other out without the medium of exchange - in other words, mutualism will help the gift economy that exists within capitalism to grow and develop.

## J.5.8 What would a modern system of mutual banking look like?

The mutual banking ideas of Proudhon could be adapted to the conditions of modern society, as will be described in what follows. (Note: Proudhon is the definitive source on mutualism, but for those who don't read French, there are the works of his American disciples, e.g. William B. Greene's **Mutual Banking**, and Benjamin Tucker's **Instead of a Book by a Man Too Busy to Write One**).

One scenario for an updated system of mutual banking would be for a community barter association to begin issuing an alternative currency accepted as money by all individuals within the system. This "currency" would not at first take the form of coins or bills, but would be circulated entirely through transactions involving the use of barter-cards, personal checks, and "e-money" transfers via modem/Internet. Let's call this currency-issuing type of barter association a "mutual barter clearinghouse," or just "clearinghouse" for short.

The clearinghouse would have a twofold mandate: first, to extend credit at cost to members; second, to manage the circulation of credit-money within the system, charging only a small service fee (probably one percent or less) which is sufficient to cover its costs of operation, including labour costs involved in issuing credit and keeping track of transactions, insuring itself against losses from uncollectable debts, and so forth.

The clearinghouse would be organised and function as follows. Members of the original barter association would be invited to become subscriber-members of the clearinghouse by pledging a certain amount of property as collateral. On the basis of this pledge, an account would be opened for the new member and credited with a sum of mutual dollars equivalent to some fraction of the assessed value of the property pledged. The new member would agree to repay this amount plus the service fee by a certain date. The mutual dollars in the new account could then be transferred through the clearinghouse by using a barter card, by writing a personal check, or by sending e-money via modem to the accounts of other members, who have agreed to receive mutual money in payment for all debts.

The opening of this sort of account is, of course, the same as taking out a "loan" in the sense that a commercial bank "lends" by extending credit to a borrower in return for a signed note pledging a certain

amount of property as security. The crucial difference is that the clearinghouse does not purport to be "lending" a sum of money that it **already has**, as is fraudulently claimed by commercial banks. Instead it honestly admits that it is creating new money in the form of credit. New accounts can also be opened simply by telling the clearinghouse that one wants an account and then arranging with other people who already have balances to transfer mutual money into one's account in exchange for goods or services.

Another form is that associated with LETS systems. In this a number of people get together to form an association. They create a unit of exchange (which is equal in value to a unit of the national currency usually), choose a name for it and offer each other goods and services priced in these units. These offers and wants are listed in a directory which is circulated periodically to members. Members decide who they wish to trade with and how much trading they wish to do. When a transaction is completed, this is acknowledged with a "cheque" made out by the buyer and given to the seller. These are passed on to the system accounts administration which keeps a record of all transactions and periodically sends members a statement of their accounts. The accounts administration is elected by, and accountable to, the membership and information about balances is available to all members.

Unlike the first system described, members do not have to present property as collateral. Members of a LETS scheme can go into "debt" without it, although "debt" is the wrong word as members are not so much going into debt as committing themselves to do some work within the system in the future and by so doing they are creating spending power. The willingness of members to incur such a commitment could be described as a service to the community as others are free to use the units so created to trade themselves. Indeed, the number of units in existence exactly matches the amount of real wealth being exchanged. The system only works if members are willing to spend and runs on trust and builds up trust as the system is used.

It is likely that a fully functioning mutual banking system would incorporate aspects of both these systems. The need for collateral may be used when members require very large loans while the LETS system of negative credit as a commitment to future work would be the normal function of the system. If the mutual bank agrees a maximum limit for negative balances, it may agree to take collateral for transactions that exceed this limit. However, it is obvious that any mutual banking system will find the best means of working in the circumstances it finds itself.

## **J.5.9 How does mutual credit work?**

Let's consider an example of how business would be transacted in the new system. There are two possibilities, depending on whether the mutual credit is based upon whether the creditor can provide collateral or not. we will take the case with collateral first.

Suppose that A, an organic farmer, pledges as collateral a certain plot of land that she owns and on which she wishes to build a house. The land is valued at, say, \$40,000 in the capitalist market. By pledging the land, A is able to open a credit account at the clearinghouse for, say, \$30,000 in mutual money (a ratio of 3/4). She does so knowing that there are many other members of the system who are

carpenters, electricians, plumbers, hardware dealers, and so on who are willing to accept mutual dollars in payment for their products or services.

It's easy to see why other subscriber-members, who have also obtained mutual credit and are therefore in debt to the clearinghouse for mutual dollars, would be willing to accept such dollars in return for their goods and services. For they need to collect mutual dollars to repay their debts. But why would someone who is not in debt for mutual dollars be willing to accept them as money?

To see why, let's suppose that B, an underemployed carpenter, currently has no account at the clearinghouse but that he knows about the clearinghouse and the people who operate it. After examining its list of members and becoming familiar with the policies of the new organisation, he's convinced that it does not extend credit frivolously to untrustworthy recipients who are likely to default. He also knows that if he contracts to do the carpentry on A's new house and agrees to be paid for his work in mutual money, he'll then be able to use it to buy groceries, clothes, car repairs, and other goods and services from various people in the community who already belong to the system.

Thus B will be willing, and perhaps even eager (especially if the economy is in recession and regular money is tight) to work for A and receive payment in mutual dollars. For he knows that if he is paid, say, \$8,000 in mutual money for his labour on A's house, this payment constitutes, in effect, 20 percent of a mortgage on her land, the value of which is represented by her mutual credit. B also understands that A has promised to repay this mortgage by producing new value -- that is, by growing organic fruits and vegetables and selling them for mutual dollars to other members of the system -- and that it is this promise to produce new wealth which gives her mutual credit its value as a medium of exchange.

To put this point slightly differently, A's mutual credit can be thought of as a lien against goods or services which she has guaranteed to create in the future. As security of this guarantee, she agrees that if she is unable for some reason to fulfil her obligation, the land she has pledged will be sold for mutual dollars to other members. In this way, a value sufficient to cancel her debt (and probably then some) will be returned to the system. This provision insures that the clearinghouse is able to balance its books and gives members confidence that mutual money is sound.

It should be noticed that since new wealth is continually being created, the basis for new mutual credit is also being created at the same time. Thus, suppose that after A's new house has been built, her daughter, C, along with a group of friends D, E, F, . . . , decide that they want to start a collectively owned and operated organic restaurant (which will incidentally benefit A, as an outlet for her produce), but that C and her friends do not have enough collateral to obtain a start-up loan. A, however, is willing to co-sign a note for them, pledging her new house (valued at say, \$80,000) as security. On this basis, C and her partners are able to obtain \$60,000 worth of mutual credit, which they then use to buy equipment, supplies, furniture, advertising, etc. and lease the building necessary to start their restaurant.

This example illustrates one way in which people without property are able to obtain credit in the new system. Another way -- for those who cannot find (or perhaps don't wish to ask) someone with property

to co-sign for them -- is to make a down payment and then use the property which is to be purchased on credit as security, as in the current method of obtaining a home or auto loan. With mutual credit, however, this form of financing can be used to purchase anything, including capital goods.

Which brings us to the case of an individual without means for providing collateral - say, for example A, the organic farmer, does not own the land she works. In such a case, A, who still desires work done, would contact other members of the mutual bank with the skills she requires. Those members with the appropriate skills and who agree to work with her commit themselves to do the required tasks. In return, A gives them a check in mutual dollars which is credited to their account and deducted from hers. She does not pay interest on this issue of credit and the sum only represents her willingness to do some work for other members of the bank at some future date.

The mutual bank does not have to worry about the negative balance, as this does not create a loss within the group as the minuses which have been incurred have already created wealth (pluses) within the system and it stays there. It is likely, of course, that the mutual bank would agree an upper limit on negative balances and require some form of collateral for credit greater than this limit, but for most exchanges this would be unlikely to be relevant.

It is important to remember that mutual dollars have no **intrinsic** value, since they can't be redeemed (at the mutual bank) in gold or anything else. All they are promises of future labour. Thus, as Greene points out in his work on mutual banking, mutual dollars are "*a mere medium for the facilitation of barter.*" In this respect they are closely akin to the so-called "barter dollars" now being circulated by barter associations through the use of checks and barter cards. To be precise, then, we should refer to the units of mutual money as "mutual barter dollars." But whereas ordinary barter dollars are created at the same time that a barter transaction occurs and are used to record the values exchanged in that transaction, mutual barter dollars are created **before** any actual barter transaction occurs and are intended to facilitate **future** barter transactions. This fact is important because it can be used as the basis for a legal argument that clearinghouses are essentially barter associations rather than banks, thrifts, or credit unions, and therefore should not be subject to the laws governing the latter institutions.

## J.5.10 Why do anarchists support co-operatives?

Support for co-operatives is a common feature in anarchist writings. Indeed, anarchist support for co-operatives is as old as use of the term anarchist to describe our ideas is. So why do anarchists support co-operatives? Basically it is because a co-operative is seen as an example of the future social organisation anarchists want in the present. As Bakunin argued, "*the co-operative system. . . carries within it the germ of the future economic order.*" [The Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 385]

Anarchists support all kinds of co-operatives - housing, food, credit unions and productive ones. All forms of co-operation are useful as they accustom their members to work together for their common benefit as well as ensuring extensive experience in managing their own affairs. As such, all forms of co-operatives are useful examples of self-management and anarchy in action (to some degree). However,

here we will concentrate on productive co-operatives, i.e. workplace co-operatives. This is because workplace co-operatives, potentially, could **replace** the capitalist mode of production with one based upon associated, not wage, labour. As long as capitalism exists within industry and agriculture, no amount of other kinds of co-operatives will end that system. Capital and wealth accumulates by oppression and exploitation in the workplace, therefore as long as wage slavery exists anarchy will not.

Co-operatives are the "*germ of the future*" because of two facts. Firstly, co-operatives are based on one worker, one vote. In other words those who do the work manage the workplace within which they do it (i.e. they are based on workers' self-management in some form). Thus co-operatives are an example of the "horizontal" directly democratic organisation that anarchists support and so are an example of "anarchy in action" (even if in an imperfect way) within the economy. In addition, they are an example of working class self-help and self-activity. Instead of relying on others to provide work, co-operatives show that production can be carried on without the existence of a class of masters employing a class of order takers.

Workplace co-operatives also present evidence of the viability of an anarchist "economy." It is well established that co-operatives are usually more productive and efficient than their capitalist equivalents. This indicates that hierarchical workplaces are **not** required in order to produce useful goods and indeed can be harmful. Indeed, it also indicates that the capitalist market does not actually allocate resources efficiently (as we will discuss in section [J.5.12](#)). So why should co-operatives be more efficient?

Firstly there are the positive effects of increased liberty associated with co-operatives.

Co-operatives, by abolishing wage slavery, obviously increases the liberty of those who work in them. Members take an active part in the management of their working lives and so authoritarian social relations are replaced by libertarian ones. Unsurprisingly, this liberty also leads to an increase in productivity - just as wage labour is more productive than slavery, so associated labour is more productive than wage slavery. Little wonder Kropotkin argued that "*the only guarantee not to be robbed of the fruits of your labour is to possess the instruments of labour. . . man really produces most when he works in freedom, when he has a certain choice in his occupations, when he has no overseer to impede him, and lastly, when he sees his work bringing profit to him and to others who work like him, but bringing in little to idlers.*" [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 145]

There are also the positive advantages associated with participation (i.e. self-management, liberty in other words). Within a self-managed, co-operative workplace, workers are directly involved in decision making and so these decisions are enriched by the skills, experiences and ideas of all members of the workplace. In the words of Colin Ward:

*"You can be **in** authority, or you can be **an** authority, or you can **have** authority. The first derives from your rank in some chain of command, the second derives special knowledge, and the third from special wisdom. But knowledge and wisdom are not distributed in order of rank, and they are no one person's monopoly in any undertaking. The fantastic*



*inefficiency of any hierarchical organisation -- any factory, office, university, warehouse or hospital -- is the outcome of two almost invariable characteristics. One is that the knowledge and wisdom of the people at the bottom of the pyramid finds no place in the decision-making leadership hierarchy of the institution. Frequently it is devoted to making the institution work in spite of the formal leadership structure, or alternatively to sabotaging the ostensible function of the institution, because it is none of their choosing. The other is that they would rather not be there anyway: they are there through economic necessity rather than through identification with a common task which throws up its own shifting and functional leadership.*

*"Perhaps the greatest crime of the industrial system is the way it systematically thwarts the investing genius of the majority of its workers." [Anarchy in Action, p. 41]*

Also, as workers also own their place of work, they have an interest in developing the skills and abilities of their members and, obviously, this also means that there are few conflicts within the workplace. Unlike capitalist firms, there is no need for conflict between bosses and wage slaves over work loads, conditions or the division of value created between them. All these factors will increase the quality, quantity and efficiency of work and so increases efficient utilisation of available resources and facilities the introduction of new techniques and technologies.

Secondly, the increased efficiency of co-operatives results from the benefits associated with co-operation itself. Not only does co-operation increase the pool of knowledge and abilities available within the workplace and enriches that source by communication and interaction, it also ensures that the workforce are working together instead of competing and so wasting time and energy. As Alfie Kohn notes (in relation to investigations of in-firm co-operation):

*"Dean Tjosvold of Simon Frazer. . .conducted [studies] at utility companies, manufacturing plants, engineering firms, and many other kinds of organisations. Over and over again, Tjosvold has found that 'co-operation makes a work force motivated' whereas 'serious competition undermines co-ordination.' . . . Meanwhile, the management guru. . . T. Edwards Demming, has declared that the practice of having employees compete against each other is 'unfair [and] destructive. We cannot afford this nonsense any longer. . . [We need to] work together on company problems [but] annual rating of performance, incentive pay, [or] bonuses cannot live with team work. . . What takes the joy out of learning. . .[or out of] anything? Trying to be number one.'" [No Contest, p. 240]*

(The question of co-operation and participation within capitalist firms will be discussed in section [J.5.12](#)).

Thirdly, there are the benefits associated with increased equality. Studies prove that business performance deteriorates when pay differentials become excessive. In a study of over 100 businesses

(producing everything from kitchen appliances to truck axles), researchers found that the greater the wage gap between managers and workers, the lower their product's quality. [Douglas Cowherd and David Levine, "*Product Quality and Pay Equity*," **Administrative Science Quarterly** no. 37 (June 1992), pp. 302-30] Businesses with the greatest inequality were plagued with a high employee turnover rate. Study author David Levine said: "*These organisations weren't able to sustain a workplace of people with shared goals.*" [quoted by John Byrne in "*How high can CEO pay go?*" **Business Week**, April 22, 1996]

(In fact, the negative effects of income inequality can be seen on a national level as well. Economists Torsten Persson and Guido Tabellini conducted a thorough statistical analysis of historical inequality and growth, and found that nations with more equal incomes generally experience faster productive growth. [*"Is Inequality Harmful for Growth?"*, **American Economic Review** no. 84, June 1994, pp. 600-21] Numerous other studies have also confirmed their findings. Real life yet again disproves the assumptions of capitalism - inequality harms us all, even the capitalist economy which produces it).

This is to be expected. Workers, seeing an increasing amount of the value they create being monopolised by top managers and a wealthy elite and not re-invested into the company to secure their employment prospects, will hardly be inclined to put in that extra effort or care about the quality of their work. Managers who use the threat of unemployment to extract more effort from their workforce are creating a false economy. While they will postpone decreasing profits in the short term due to this adaptive strategy (and enrich themselves in the process) the pressures placed upon the system will bring a harsh long term effects - both in terms of economic crisis (as income becomes so skewed as to create realisation problems and the limits of adaptation are reached in the face of international competition) and social breakdown.

As would be imagined, co-operative workplaces tend to be more egalitarian than capitalist ones. This is because in capitalist firms, the incomes of top management must be justified (in practice) to a small number of individuals (namely, those shareholders with sizeable stock in the firm), who are usually quite wealthy and so not only have little to lose in granting huge salaries but are also predisposed to see top managers as being very much like themselves and so are entitled to comparable incomes. In contrast, the incomes of top management in worker controlled firms have to be justified to a workforce whose members experience the relationship between management incomes and their own directly and who, no doubt, are predisposed to see their top managers as being workers like themselves and accountable to them. Such an egalitarian atmosphere will have a positive impact on production and efficiency as workers will see that the value they create is not being accumulated by others but distributed according to work actually done (and not control over power). In the Mondragon co-operatives, for example, the maximum pay differential is 14 to 1 (increased from 3 to 1 in a response to outside pressures after much debate, with the actual maximum differential at 9 to 1) while (in the USA) the average CEO is paid over 140 times the average factory worker (up from 41 times in 1960).

Therefore, we see that co-operatives prove (to a greater or lesser extent) the advantages of (and interrelationship between) key anarchist principles such as liberty, equality, solidarity and self-management. Their application, whether all together or in part, has a positive impact on efficiency and

work -- and, as we will discuss in section [J.5.12](#), the capitalist market actively **blocks** the spread of more efficient productive techniques instead of encouraging them. Even by its own standards, capitalism stands condemned - it does not encourage the efficient use of resources and actively places barriers in the development of human "resources."

From all this it's clear to see why co-operatives are supported by anarchists. We are "*convinced that the co-operative could, potentially, replace capitalism and carries within it the seeds of economic emancipation. . . The workers learn from this precious experience how to organise and themselves conduct the economy without guardian angels, the state or their former employers.*" [Michael Bakunin, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 399] Co-operatives give us a useful insight into the possibilities of a free, socialist, economy. Even within the hierarchical capitalist economy, co-operatives show us that a better future is possible and that production can be organised in a co-operative fashion and that by so doing we can reap the individual and social benefits of working together as equals.

However, this does not mean that all aspects of the co-operative movement find favour with anarchists. As Bakunin pointed out, "*there are two kinds of co-operative: bourgeois co-operation, which tends to create a privileged class, a sort of new collective bourgeoisie organised into a stockholding society: and truly Socialist co-operation, the co-operation of the future which for this very reason is virtually impossible of realisation at present.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 385] In other words, while co-operatives are the germ of the future, in the present they are often limited by the capitalist environment they find themselves in and narrow their vision to just surviving within the current system.

For most anarchists, the experience of co-operatives has proven without doubt that, however excellent in principle and useful in practice, if they are kept within the narrow circle of "bourgeois" existence they cannot become dominant and free the masses. This point is argued in Section [J.5.11](#) and so will be ignored here. In order to fully develop, co-operatives must be part of a wider social movement which includes community and industrial unionism and the creation of an anarchistic social framework which can encourage "*truly Socialist co-operation*" and discourage "*bourgeois co-operation.*" As Murray Bookchin correctly argues, "*[r]emoved from a libertarian municipalist [or other anarchist] context and movement focused on achieving revolutionary municipalist [or communalist] goals as a **dual power** against corporations and the state, food [and other forms of] co-ops are little more than benign enterprises that capitalism and the state can easily tolerate with no fear of challenge.*" [**Democracy and Nature** no. 9, p. 175]

Therefore, while co-operatives are an important aspect of anarchist ideas and practice, they are not to be all or end all of our activity. Without a wider social movement which creates all (or at least most) of the future society in the shell of the old, co-operatives will never arrest the growth of capitalism or transcend the narrow horizons of the capitalist economy.

## J.5.11 If workers really want self-management, why aren't there more producer co-operatives?

Supporters of capitalism suggest that producer co-operatives would spring up spontaneously if workers really wanted them. Their argument is that co-operatives could be financed at first by "*wealthy radicals*" or by affluent workers pooling their resources to buy out existing capitalist firms; then, if such co-operatives were really economically viable and desired by workers, they would spread until eventually they undermined capitalism. They conclude that since this is not happening, it must be because workers' self-management is either economically unfeasible or is not really attractive to workers or both (see, for example, Robert Nozick, **Anarchy, State, and Utopia**, pp. 250-52).

David Schweickart has decisively answered this argument by showing that the reason there are not more producer co-operatives is structural:

*"A worker-managed firm lacks an expansionary dynamic. When a capitalist enterprise is successful, the owner can increase her profits by reproducing her organisation on a larger scale. She lacks neither the means nor the motivation to expand. Not so with a worker-managed firm. Even if the workers have the means, they lack the incentive, because enterprise growth would bring in new workers with whom the increased proceeds would have to be shared. Co-operatives, even when prosperous, do not spontaneously grow. But if this is so, then each new co-operative venture (in a capitalist society) requires a new wealthy radical or a new group of affluent radical workers willing to experiment. Because such people doubtless are in short supply, it follows that the absence of a large and growing co-operative movement proves nothing about the viability of worker self-management, nor about the preferences of workers."* [**Against Capitalism**, p. 239]

There are other structural problems as well. For one thing, since their pay levels are set by members' democratic vote, co-operatives tend to be more egalitarian in their income structure. But this means that in a capitalist environment, co-operatives are in constant danger of having their most skilled members hired away. Moreover, there is a difficulty in raising capital:

*"Quite apart from ideological hostility (which may be significant), external investors will be reluctant to put their money into concerns over which they will have little or no control -- which tends to be the case with a co-operative. Because co-operatives in a capitalist environment face special difficulties, and because they lack the inherent expansionary dynamic of a capitalist firm, it is hardly surprising that they are far from dominant."* [**Ibid.**, p 240]

In addition, co-operatives face the negative externalities generated by a capitalist economy. The presence of wage labour and investment capital in the economy will tempt successful co-operatives to increase their flexibility to adjust to changes in market changes by hiring workers or issuing shares to attract new investment. In so doing, however, they may end up losing their identities as co-operatives by diluting ownership or by making the co-operative someone's boss:

*"To meet increased production, the producer co-operatives hired outside wage workers.*

*This created a new class of workers who exploit and profit from the labour of their employees. And all this fosters a bourgeois mentality.*" [Michael Bakunin, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 399]

Hence the pressures of working in a capitalist market may result in co-operatives pursuing activities which may result in short term gain or survival, but are sure to result in harm in the long run. Far from co-operatives slowly expanding within and changing a capitalist environment it is more likely that capitalist logic will expand into and change the co-operatives that work in it (this can be seen from the Mondragon co-operatives, where there has been a slight rise in the size of wage labour being used and the fact that the credit union, since 1992, has invested in non-co-operative firms). These externalities imposed upon isolated co-operatives within capitalism (which would not arise within a fully co-operative context) block local moves towards anarchism. The idea that co-operation will simply win out in competition within well developed capitalist economic systems is just wishful thinking. Just because a system is more liberatory and just does not mean it will survive in an authoritarian economic and social environment.

There are also cultural problems as well. As Jon Elster points out, it is a *"truism, but an important one, that workers' preferences are to a large extent shaped by their economic environment. Specifically, there is a tendency to adaptive preference formation, by which the actual mode of economic organisation comes to be perceived as superior to all others."* ["From Here to There", in **Socialism**, p. 110] In other words, people view "what is" as given and feel no urge to change to "what could be." In the context of creating alternatives within capitalism, this can have serious effects on the spread of alternatives and indicates the importance of anarchists encouraging the spirit of revolt to break down this mental apathy.

This acceptance of "what is" can be seen, to some degree, by some companies which meet the formal conditions for co-operatives, for example ESOP owned firms in the USA, but lack effective workers' control. ESOP (Employee Stock Ownership Plans) firms enable a firms workforce to gain the majority of a companies shares but the unequal distribution of shares amongst employees prevents the great majority of workers from having any effective control or influence on decisions. Unlike real co-operatives (based on "one worker, one vote") these firms are based on "one share, one vote" and so have more in common with capitalist firms than co-operatives.

Moreover, we have ignored such problems as natural barriers to entry into, and movement within, a market (which is faced by all firms) and the difficulties co-operatives can face in finding access to long term credit facilities required by them from capitalist banks (which would effect co-operatives more as short term pressures can result in their co-operative nature being diluted). As Tom Cahill notes, the *"old co-ops [of the nineteenth century] also had the specific problem of . . . giving credit . . . [as well as] problems . . . of competition with price cutting capitalist firms, highlighting the inadequate reservoirs of the under-financed co-ops."* ["Co-operatives and Anarchism: A contemporary Perspective", in **For Anarchism**, edited by Paul Goodway, p. 239]

In addition, the *"return on capital is limited"* in co-operatives [Tom Cahill, **Op. Cit.**, p. 247] which

means that investors are less-likely to invest in co-operatives, and so co-operatives will tend to suffer from a lack of investment. Which also suggests that Nozick's argument that "*don't say that its against the class interest of investors to support the growth of some enterprise that if successful would end or diminish the investment system. Investors are not so altruistic. They act in personal and not their class interests*" is false [Op. Cit., pp. 252-3]. Nozick is correct, to a degree -- but given a choice between high returns from investments in capitalist firms and lower ones from co-operatives, the investor will select the former. This does not reflect the productivity or efficiency of the investment -- quite the reverse! -- it reflects the social function of wage labour in maximising profits and returns on capital (see [next section](#) for more on this). In other words, the personal interests of investors will generally support their class interests (unsurprisingly, as class interests are not independent of personal interests and will tend to reflect them!).

Tom Cahill outlines the investment problem when he writes that the "*financial problem*" is a major reason why co-operatives failed in the past, for "*basically the unusual structure and aims of co-operatives have always caused problems for the dominant sources of capital. In general, the finance environment has been hostile to the emergence of the co-operative spirit. . .*" And he also notes that they were "*unable to devise structuring to **maintain a boundary** between those who work and those who own or control. . . It is understood that when outside investors were allowed to have power within the co-op structure, co-ops lost their distinctive qualities.*" [Op. Cit., pp. 238-239] Meaning that even **if** co-operative do attract investors, the cost of so doing may be to transform the co-operatives into capitalist firms.

Thus, in spite of "*empirical studies suggest[ing] that co-operatives are at least as productive as their capitalist counterparts,*" with many having "*an excellent record, superior to conventionally organised firms over a long period*" [Jon Elster, Op. Cit., p. 96], co-operatives are more likely to adapt to capitalism than replace it and adopt capitalist principles of rationality in order to survive. All things being equal, co-operatives are more efficient than their capitalist counterparts - but when co-operatives compete in a capitalist economy, all things are **not** equal.

In spite of these structural and cultural problems, however, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of producer co-operatives in most Western countries in recent years. For example, Saul Estrin and Derek Jones report that co-operatives in the UK grew from 20 in 1975 to 1,600 by 1986; in France they increased from 500 to 1,500; and in Italy, some 7,000 new co-operatives came into existence between 1970 and 1982 ["*Can Employee-owned Firms Survive?*", Working Paper Series, Department of Economics, Hamilton College (April, May, 1989)]. Italian co-operatives now number well over 20,000, many of them large and having many support structures as well (which aids their development by reducing their isolation and providing long term financial support lacking within the capitalist market).

We have already noted the success of the Mondragon co-operatives in Spain, which created a cluster of inter-locking co-operatives with its own credit union to provide long term financial support and commitment. Thus, in Europe at least, it appears that there **is** a rather "*large and growing co-operative movement,*" which gives the lie to Nozick's and other supporters of capitalism arguments about co-

operatives' lack of economic viability and/or attractiveness to workers.

However, because co-operatives can survive in a capitalist economy it does not automatically mean that they shall **replace** that economy. Isolated co-operatives, as we argued above, will more likely adapt to capitalist realities than remain completely true to their co-operative promise. For most anarchists, therefore, co-operatives can reach their full potential only as part of a social movement aiming to change society. As part of a wider movement of community and workplace unionism, with mutualist banks to provide long terms financial support and commitment, co-operatives could be communalised into a network of solidarity and support that will reduce the problems of isolation and adaptation. Hence Bakunin:

*"We hardly oppose the creation of co-operative associations; we find them necessary in many respects. . . they accustom the workers to organise, pursue, and manage their interests themselves, without interference either by bourgeois capital or by bourgeois control. . . [they must] above all [be] founded on the principle of solidarity and collectivity rather than on bourgeois exclusivity, then society will pass from its present situation to one of equality and justice without too many great upheavals."* [Op. Cit., p. 153]

Co-operation *"will prosper, developing itself fully and freely, embracing all human industry, only when it is based on equality, when all capital . . . [and] the soil, belong to the people by right of collective property."* [Ibid.]

Until then, co-operatives will exist within capitalism but not replace it by market forces - only a **social** movement and collective action can fully secure their full development. As David Schweickart argues:

*"Even if worker-managed firms are preferred by the vast majority, and even if they are more productive, a market initially dominated by capitalist firms may not select for them. The common-sense neo-classical dictum that only those things that best accord with people's desires will survive the struggle of free competition has never been the whole truth with respect to anything; with respect to workplace organisation it is barely a half-truth."* [Op. Cit., p. 240]

This means that while anarchists support, create and encourage co-operatives within capitalism, they understand *"the impossibility of putting into practice the co-operative system under the existing conditions of the predominance of bourgeois capital in the process of production and distribution of wealth."* Because of this, most anarchists stress the need for more combative organisations such as industrial and community unions and other bodies *"formed,"* to use Bakunin's words, *"for the organisation of toilers against the privileged world"* in order to help bring about a free society. [Michael Bakunin, Op. Cit., p. 185]

## J.5.12 If self-management is more efficient, surely capitalist

## firms will be forced to introduce it by the market?

While it may be admitted that co-operatives cannot reform capitalism away (see [last section](#)), many supporters of "free market" capitalism will claim that a laissez-faire system would see workers self-management spread within capitalism. This is because, as self-management is more efficient than wage slavery, those capitalist firms that introduce it will gain a competitive advantage, and so their competitors will be forced to introduce it or go bust. While not being true anarchistic production, it would (it is argued) be a very close approximation of it and so capitalism could reform itself naturally to get rid of (to a large degree) its authoritarian nature.

While such a notion seems plausible in theory, in practice it does not work. Free market capitalism places innumerable barriers to the spread of worker empowering structures within production, in spite (perhaps, as we will see, **because**) of their more efficient nature. This can be seen from the fact that while the increased efficiency associated with workers' participation and self-management has attracted the attention of many capitalist firms, the few experiments conducted have failed to spread. This is due, essentially, to the nature of capitalist production and the social relationships it produces.

As we noted in [section D.10](#), capitalist firms (particularly in the west) made a point of introducing technologies and management structures that aimed to deskill and disempower their workers. In this way, it was hoped to make the worker increasingly subject to "market discipline" (i.e. easier to train, so increasing the pool of workers available to replace any specific worker and so reducing workers power by increasing management's power to fire them). Of course, what actually happens is that after a short period of time while management gained the upper hand, the workforce found newer and more effective ways to fight back and assert their productive power again. While for a short time the technological change worked, over the longer period the balance of forces changed, so forcing management to continually try to empower themselves at the expense of the workforce.

It is unsurprising that such attempts to reduce workers to order-takers fail. Workers' experiences and help are required to ensure production actually happens at all. When workers carry out their orders strictly and faithfully (i.e. when they "work to rule") production threatens to stop. So most capitalists are aware of the need to get workers to "co-operate" within the workplace to some degree. A few capitalist companies have gone further. Seeing the advantages of fully exploiting (and we do mean exploiting) the experience, skills, abilities and thoughts of their employees which the traditional authoritarian capitalist workplace denies them, some have introduced various schemes to "enrich" and "enlarge" work, increase "co-operation" between workers and their bosses. In other words, some capitalist firms have tried to encourage workers to "participate" in their own exploitation by introducing (in the words of Sam Dolgoff) *"a modicum of influence, a strictly limited area of decision-making power, a voice - at best secondary - in the control of conditions of the workplace."* [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 81] The management and owners still have the power and still reap the majority of benefits from the productive activity of the workforce.

David Noble provides a good summary of the problems associated with experiments in workers' self-



management within capitalist firms:

*"Participant in such programs can indeed be a liberating and exhilarating experience, awakening people to their own untapped potential and also to the real possibilities of collective worker control of production. As one manager described the former pilots [workers in a General Electric program]: 'These people will never be the same again. They have seen that things can be different.' But the excitement and enthusiasm engendered by such programs, as well as the heightened sense of commitment to a common purpose, can easily be used against the interests of the work force. First, that purpose is not really 'common' but is still determined by management alone, which continues to decide what will be produced, when, and where. Participation in production does not include participation in decisions on investment, which remains the prerogative of ownership. Thus participation is, in reality, just a variation of business as usual -- taking orders -- but one which encourages obedience in the name of co-operation.*

*"Second, participation programs can contribute to the creation of an elite, and reduced, work force, with special privileges and more 'co-operative' attitudes toward management -- thus at once undermining the adversary stance of unions and reducing membership . . .*

*"Thirds, such programs enable management to learn from workers -- who are now encouraged by their co-operative spirit to share what they know -- and, then, in Taylorist tradition, to use this knowledge against the workers. As one former pilot reflected, 'They learned from the guys on the floor, got their knowledge about how to optimise the technology and then, once they had it, they eliminated the Pilot Program, put that knowledge into the machines, and got people without any knowledge to run them -- on the Company's terms and without adequate compensation. They kept all the gains for themselves.'" . . .*

*"Fourth, such programs could provide management with a way to circumvent union rules and grievance procedures or eliminate unions altogether. . . ." [Forces of Production, pp. 318-9]*

Therefore, capitalist-introduced and supported "workers' control" is very like the situation when a worker receives stock in the company they work for. If it goes some way toward redressing the gap between the value of that person's labour, and the wage they receive for it, that in itself cannot be a totally bad thing (although, of course, this does not address the issue of workplace hierarchy and the social relations within the workplace itself). The real downside of this is the "carrot on a stick" enticement to work harder -- if you work extra hard for the company, your stock will be worth more. Obviously, though, the bosses get rich off you, so the more you work, the richer they get, the more you are getting ripped off. It is a choice that anarchists feel many workers cannot afford to make -- they need or at least want the money - but we believe that the stock does not work for many workers, who end up working harder, for less. After all, stocks do not represent all profits (large amounts of which end up in

the hands of top management) nor are they divided just among those who labour. Moreover, workers may be less inclined to take direct action, for fear that they will damage the value of "their" company's stock, and so they may find themselves putting up with longer, more intense work in worse conditions.

However, be that as it may, the results of such capitalist experiments in "workers' control" are interesting and show **why** self-management will not spread by market forces (and they also bear direct relevance to the question of why **real** co-operatives are not widespread within capitalism -- see [last section](#)).

According to one expert "*[t]here is scarcely a study in the entire literature which fails to demonstrate that satisfaction in work is enhanced or. . .productivity increases occur from a genuine increase in worker's decision-making power. Findings of such consistency, I submit, are rare in social research.*" [Paul B. Lumberg, cited by Hebert Gintis, "*The nature of Labour Exchange and the Theory of Capitalist Production*", **Radical Political Economy** vol. 1, p. 252]

In spite of these findings, a "*shift toward participatory relationships is scarcely apparent in capitalist production. . . [this is] not compatible with the neo-classical assertion as to the efficiency of the internal organisation of capitalist production.*" [Herbert Gintz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 252] Why is this the case?

Economist William Lazonick indicates the reason when he writes that "*[m]any attempts at job enrichment and job enlargement in the first half of the 1970s resulted in the supply of more and better effort by workers. Yet many 'successful' experiments were cut short when the workers whose work had been enriched and enlarged began questioning traditional management prerogatives inherent in the existing hierarchical structure of the enterprise.*" [**Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, p. 282]

This is an important result, as it indicates that the ruling sections within capitalist firms have a vested interest in **not** introducing such schemes, even though they are more efficient methods of production. As can easily be imagined, managers have a clear incentive to resist participatory schemes (and David Schweickart notes, such resistance, "*often bordering on sabotage, is well known and widely documented*" [**Against Capitalism**, p. 229]). As an example of this, David Noble discusses a scheme (called the Pilot Program) ran by General Electric at Lynn, Massachusetts, USA in the late 1960s:

*"After considerable conflict, GE introduced a quality of work life program . . . which gave workers much more control over the machines and the production process and eliminated foremen. Before long, by all indicators, the program was succeeding -- machine use, output and product quality went up; scrap rate, machine downtime, worker absenteeism and turnover when down, and conflict on the floor dropped off considerably. Yet, little more than a year into the program -- following a union demand that it be extended throughout the shop and into other GE locations -- top management abolished the program out of fear of losing control over the workforce. Clearly, the company was willing to sacrifice gains in technical and economic efficiency in order to regain and insure management control."* [**Progress Without People**, p. 65f]

However, it could be claimed that owners, being concerned by the bottom-line of profits, could **force** management to introduce participation. By this method, competitive market forces would ultimately prevail as individual owners, pursuing profits, reorganise production and participation spreads across the economy. Indeed, there are a few firms that **have** introduced such schemes, but there has been no tendency for them to spread. This contradicts "free market" capitalist economic theory which states that those firms which introduce more efficient techniques will prosper and competitive market forces will ensure that other firms will introduce the technique.

This is for three reasons.

Firstly, the fact is that within "free market" capitalism **keeping** (indeed strengthening) skills and power in the hands of the workers makes it harder for a capitalist firm to maximise profits (i.e. unpaid labour). It strengthens the power of workers, who can use that power to gain increased wages (i.e. reduce the amount of surplus value they produce for their bosses).

Workers' control basically leads to a usurpation of capitalist prerogatives -- including their share of revenues and their ability to extract more unpaid labour during the working day. While in the short run workers' control may lead to higher productivity (and so may be toyed with), in the long run, it leads to difficulties for capitalists to maximise their profits. So, *"given that profits depend on the integrity of the labour exchange, a strongly centralised structure of control not only serves the interests of the employer, but dictates a minute division of labour irrespective of considerations of productivity. For this reason, the evidence for the superior productivity of 'workers control' represents the most dramatic of anomalies to the neo-classical theory of the firm: worker control increases the effective amount of work elicited from each worker and improves the co-ordination of work activities, while increasing the solidarity and delegitimising the hierarchical structure of ultimate authority at its root; hence it threatens to increase the power of workers in the struggle over the share of total value."* [Hebert Gintz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 264]

So, a workplace which had extensive workers participation would hardly see the workers agreeing to reduce their skill levels, take a pay cut or increase their pace of work simply to enhance the profits of capitalists. Simply put, profit maximisation is not equivalent to technological efficiency. By getting workers to work longer, more intensely or in more unpleasant conditions can increase profits but does not yield more output for the **same** inputs. Workers' control would curtail capitalist means of enhancing profits by changing the quality and quantity of work. It is **this** requirement which also aids in understanding why capitalists will not support workers' control -- even though it is more efficient, it reduces the ability of capitalists to maximise profits by minimising labour costs. Moreover, demands to change the nature of workers' inputs into the production process in order to maximise profits for capitalists would provoke a struggle over the time and intensity of work and over the share of value added going to workers, management and owners and so destroy the benefits of participation.

Thus power within the workplace plays a key role in explaining why workers' control does not spread -- it reduces the ability of bosses to extract more unpaid labour from workers.

The second reason is related to the first. It too is based on the power structure within the company but the power is related to control over the surplus produced by the workers rather than the ability to control how much surplus is produced in the first place (i.e. power over workers).

Hierarchical management is the way to ensure that profits are channelled into the hands of a few. By centralising power, the surplus value produced by workers can be distributed in a way which benefits those at the top (i.e. management and capitalists). Profit maximisation under capitalism means the maximum profits available for capitalists -- **not** the maximum difference between selling price and cost as such. This difference explains the strange paradox of workers' control experiments being successful but being cancelled by management. The paradox is easily explained once the hierarchical nature of capitalist production (i.e. of wage labour) is acknowledged. Workers' control, by placing (some) power in the hands of workers, undermines the authority of management and, ultimately, their power to control the surplus produced by workers and allocate it as they see fit. Thus, while workers' control does reduce costs, increase efficiency and productivity (i.e. maximise the difference between prices and costs) it (potentially) reduces profit maximisation by undermining the power (and so privileges) of management to allocate that surplus as they see fit.

Increased workers' control reduces the capitalists potential to maximise **their** profits and so will be opposed by both management **and** owners. Indeed, it can be argued that hierarchical control of production exists solely to provide for the accumulation of capital in a few hands, **not** for efficiency or productivity (see Stephan A. Margin, "*What do Bosses do? The Origins and Functions of Hierarchy in Capitalist Production*", **Op. Cit.**, pp. 178-248). This is why profit maximisation does not entail efficiency and can actively work against it.

As David Noble argues, power is the key to understanding capitalism, **not** the drive for profits as such:

*"In opting for control [over the increased efficiency of workers' control] . . . management . . . knowingly and, it must be assumed, willingly, sacrificed profitable production. Hence [experiences such as] the Pilot Program [at GE] . . . illustrates not only the ultimate management priority of power over both production and profit within the firm, but also the larger contradiction between the preservation of private power and prerogatives, on the one hand, and the social goals of efficient, quality, and useful production, on the other . . .*

*"It is a common confusion, especially on the part of those trained in or unduly influenced by formal economics (liberal and Marxist alike), that capitalism is a system of profit-motivated, efficient production. This is not true, nor has it ever been. If the drive to maximise profits, through private ownership and control over the process of production, it has never been the end of that development. The goal has always been domination (and the power and privileges that go with it) and the preservation of domination. There is little historical evidence to support the view that, in the final analysis, capitalists play by the rules of the economic game imagined by theorists. There is ample evidence to suggest, on*

*the other hand, that when the goals of profit-making and efficient production fail to coincide with the requirements of continued dominance, capital will resort to more ancient means: legal, political, and, of need be, military. Always, behind all the careful accounting, lies the threat of force. This system of domination has been legitimated in the past by the ideological invention that private ownership of the means of production and the pursuit of profit via production are always ultimately beneficial to society. Capitalism delivers the goods, it is argued, better, more cheaply, and in larger quantity, and in so doing, fosters economic growth . . . The story of the Pilot Program -- and it is but one among thousands like it in U.S. industry -- raises troublesome questions about the adequacy of this mythology as a description of reality." [Forces of Production, pp. 321-2]*

Hierarchical organisation (i.e. domination) is essential to ensure that profits are controlled by a few and can, therefore, be allocated by them in such a way to ensure their power and privileges. By undermining management authority, workers' control undermines that power to maximise profits in a certain direction even though it increases "profits" (the difference between prices and costs) in the abstract. As workers' control starts to extend (or management sees its potential to spread) into wider areas such as investment decisions, how to allocate the surplus (i.e. profits) between wages, investment, dividends, management pay and so on, then they will seek to end the project in order to ensure their power over both the workers and the surplus they, the workers, produce. In this they will be supported by those who actually own the company who obviously would not support a regime which will not ensure the maximum return on their investment. This maximum return would be endangered by workers' control, even though it is technically more efficient, as control over the surplus rests with the workers and not a management elite with similar interests and aims as the owners -- an egalitarian workplace would produce an egalitarian distribution of surplus, in other words (as proven by the experience of workers' co-operatives). In the words of one participant of the GE workers' control project -- *"If we're all one, for manufacturing reasons, we must share in the fruits equitably, just like a co-op business."* [quoted by Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 295] Such a possibility is one no owner would agree to.

Thirdly, to survive within the "free" market means to concentrate on the short term. Long term benefits, although greater, are irrelevant. A free market requires profits **now** and so a firm is under considerable pressure to maximise short-term profits by market forces (a similar situation occurs when firms invest in "green" technology, see [section E.5](#)).

Participation requires trust, investment in people and technology and a willingness to share the increased value added that result from workers' participation with the workers who made it possible. All these factors would eat into short term profits in order to return richer rewards in the future. Encouraging participation thus tends to increase long term gains at the expense of short-term ones (for it ensures that workers do not consider participation as a con, they must experience **real** benefits in terms of power, conditions and wage rises). For firms within a free market environment, they are under pressure from share-holders and their financiers for high returns as soon as possible. If a company does not produce high dividends then it will see its stock fall as shareholders move to those companies that do. Thus the market **forces** companies (and banks, who in turn loan over the short term to companies) to act in such

ways as to maximise short term profits.

If faced with a competitor which is not making such investments (and which is investing directly into deskilling technology or intensifying work loads which lowers their costs) and so wins them market share, or a downturn in the business cycle which shrinks their profit margins and makes it difficult for the firm to meet its commitments to its financiers and workers, a company that intends to invest in people and trust will usually be rendered unable to do so. Faced with the option of empowering people in work or deskilling them and/or using the fear of unemployment to get workers to work harder and follow orders, capitalist firms have consistently chosen (and probably preferred) the latter option (as occurred in the 1970s).

Thus, workers' control is unlikely to spread through capitalism because it entails a level of working class consciousness and power that is incompatible with capitalist control. In other words, "*[i]f the hierarchical division of labour is necessary for the extraction of surplus value, then worker preferences for jobs threatening capitalist control will not be implemented.*" [Hebert Gintis, **Op. Cit.**, p. 253] The reason why it is more efficient, ironically, ensures that a capitalist economy will not select it. The "free market" will discourage empowerment and democratic workplaces, at best reducing "co-operation" and "participation" to marginal issues (and management will still have the power of veto).

In addition, moves towards democratic workplaces within capitalism is an example of the system in conflict with itself -- pursuing its objectives by methods which constantly defeat those same objectives. As Paul Carden argues, the "*capitalist system can only maintain itself by trying to reduce workers into mere order-takers. . . At the same time the system can only function as long as this reduction is never achieved. . . [for] the system would soon grind to a halt. . . [However] capitalism constantly has to **limit** this **participation** (if it didn't the workers would soon start deciding themselves and would show in practice now superfluous the ruling class really is).*" [**Revolution and Modern Capitalism**, pp. 45-46]

The experience of the 1970s supports this thesis well. Thus "workers' control" within a capitalist firm is a contradictory thing - too little power and it is meaningless, too much and workplace authority structures and short-term profits (i.e. capitalist share of value added) can be harmed. Attempts to make oppressed, exploited and alienated workers work if they were neither oppressed, exploited nor alienated will always fail.

For a firm to establish committed and participatory relations internally, it must have external supports - particularly with providers of finance (which is why co-operatives benefit from credit unions and co-operating together). The price mechanism proves self-defeating to create such supports and that is why we see "participation" more fully developed within Japanese and German firms (although it is still along way from fully democratic workplaces), who have strong, long term relationships with local banks and the state which provides them with the support required for such activities. As William Lazonick notes, Japanese industry had benefited from the state ensuring "*access to inexpensive long-term finance, the sine qua non of innovating investment strategies*" along with a host of other supports, such as protecting Japanese industry within their home markets so they could "*develop and utilise their productive*

*resources to the point where they could attain competitive advantage in international competition.*" [Op. Cit., p. 305] The German state provides its industry with much of the same support.

Therefore, "participation" within capitalist firms will have little or no tendency to spread due to the "automatic" actions of market forces. In spite of such schemes being more efficient, capitalism will not select them because they empower workers and make it hard for capitalists to maximise their short term profits. Hence capitalism, by itself, will have no tendency to produce more libertarian organisational forms within industry. Those firms that do introduce such schemes will be the exception rather than the rule (and the schemes themselves will be marginal in most respects and subject to veto from above). For such schemes to spread, collective action is required (such as state intervention to create the right environment and support network or -- from an anarchist point of view -- union and community direct action).

However such schemes, as noted above, are just forms of self-exploitation, getting workers to help their robbers and so **not** a development anarchists seek to encourage. We have discussed this here just to be clear that, firstly, such forms of structural reforms are **not** self-management, as managers and owners still have the real power, and, secondly, even if such forms are somewhat liberatory, market forces will not select them (i.e. collective action would be required).

For anarchists *"self-management is not a new form of mediation between workers and their bosses . . . [it] refers to the very process by which the workers themselves overthrow their managers and take on their own management and the management of production in their own workplace."* [Sam Dolgoff, Op. Cit., p. 81] Hence our support for co-operatives, unions and other self-managed structures created and organised from below by and for working class people.

## J.5.13 What are Modern Schools?

Modern schools are alternative schools, self-managed by students, teachers and parents which reject the authoritarian schooling methods of the modern "education" system. Such schools have a feature of the anarchist movement since the turn of the 20th century while interest in libertarian forms of education has been a feature of anarchist theory from the beginning. All the major anarchist thinkers, from Godwin through Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin to modern activists like Colin Ward, have stressed the importance of libertarian (or "rational") education, education that develops all aspects of the student (mental and physical -- and so termed "integral" education) as well as encouraging critical thought and mental freedom. The aim of such education is, to use Proudhon's words, ensure that the *"industrial worker, the man [sic!] of action and the intellectual would all be rolled into one"* [cited by Steward Edward in **The Paris Commune**, p. 274]

Anyone involved in radical politics, constantly and consistently challenges the role of the state's institutions and their representatives within our lives. The role of bosses, the police, social workers, the secret service, middle managers, doctors and priests are all seen as part of a hierarchy which exists to keep us, the working class, subdued. It is relatively rare though for the left-wing to call into question the

role of teachers. Most left wing activists and a large number of libertarians believe that education is good, all education is good, and education is always good. As Henry Barnard, the first US commissioner of education, appointed in 1867, exhorted, "*education always leads to freedom*".

Those involved in libertarian education believe the contrary. They believe that national education systems exist only to produce citizens who'll be blindly obedient to the dictates of the state, citizens who will uphold the authority of government even when it runs counter to personal interest and reason, wage slaves who will obey the orders of their boss most of the time and consider being able to change bosses as freedom. They agree with William Godwin (one of the earliest critics of national education systems) when he wrote in **An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice** that "*the project of a national education ought to be discouraged on account of its obvious alliance with national government . . . Government will not fail to employ it to strengthen its hand and perpetuate its institutions. . . Their views as instigator of a system will not fail to be analogous to their views in their political capacity.*" [cited by Colin Ward, **Anarchy in Action**, p. 81]

With the growth of industrialism in the 19th century schools triumphed, not through a desire to reform but as an economic necessity. Industry did not want free thinking individuals, it wanted workers, instruments of labour, and it wanted them punctual, obedient, passive and willing to accept their disadvantaged position. According to Nigel Thrift, many employers and social reformers became convinced that the earliest generations of workers were almost impossible to discipline (i.e. to get accustomed to wage labour and workplace authority). They looked to children, hoping that "*the elementary school could be used to break the labouring classes into those habits of work discipline now necessary for factory production. . . Putting little children to work at school for very long hours at very dull subjects was seen as a positive virtue, for it made them habituated, not to say naturalised, to labour and fatigue.*" [quoted by Juliet B. Schor in **The Overworked American**, p. 61]

Thus supporters of Modern Schools recognise that the role of education is an important one in maintaining hierarchical society -- for government and other forms of hierarchy (such as wage labour) must always depend on the opinion of the governed. Francisco Ferrer (the most famous supporter of Modern Schooling due to his execution by the Spanish state in 1909) argued that:

*"Rulers have always taken care to control the education of the people. They know their power is based almost entirely on the school and they insist on retaining their monopoly. The school is an instrument of domination in the hands of the ruling class."* [cited by Clifford Harper, **Anarchy: A Graphic Guide**, p. 100]

Little wonder, then, that Emma Goldman argued that the "*modern method of education*" has "*little regard for personal liberty and originality of thought. Uniformity and imitation is [its] motto*" and that the school "*is for the child what the prison is for the convict and the barracks for the soldier - a place where everything is being used to break the will of the child, and then to pound, knead, and shape it into a being utterly foreign to itself.*" [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 118, p. 116]



Hence the importance of Modern Schools. It is a means of spreading libertarian education within a hierarchical society and undercut one of the key supports for that society -- the education system. Instead of hierarchical education, Modern schools exist to *"develop the individual through knowledge and the free play of characteristic traits, so that [the child] may become a social being, because he had learned to know himself [or herself], to know his [or her] relation to his fellow[s]. . . "* [Emma Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 121] It would, in Stirner's words, be *"an education for freedom, not for subservience."*

The Modern School Movement (also known as the Free School Movement) over the past century has been an attempt to represent part of this concern about the dangers of state and church schools and the need for libertarian education. The idea of libertarian education is that knowledge and learning should be linked to real life processes and personal usefulness and should not be the preserve of a special institution. Thus Modern Schools are an attempt to establish an environment for self development in an overly structured and rationalised world. An oasis from authoritarian control and as a means of passing on the knowledge to be free.

*"The underlying principle of the Modern School is this: education is a process of drawing out, not driving in; it aims at the possibility that the child should be left free to develop spontaneously, directing his [or her] own efforts and choosing the branches of knowledge which he desires to study. . . the teacher . . . should be a sensitive instrument responding to the needs of the child . . . a channel through which the child may attain so much of the ordered knowledge of the world as he shows himself [or herself] ready to receive and assimilate".* [Emma Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 126]

The Modern School bases itself on libertarian education techniques. Libertarian education, very broadly, seeks to produce children who will demand greater personal control and choice, who think for themselves and question all forms of authority:

*"We don't hesitate to say we want people who will continue to develop. People constantly capable of destroying and renewing their surroundings and themselves: whose intellectual independence is their supreme power, which they will yield to none; always disposed for better things, eager for the triumph of new ideas, anxious to crowd many lives into the life they have. It must be the aim of the school to show the children that there will be tyranny as long as one person depends on another."* [Ferrer, quoted by Clifford Harper, **Op. Cit.**, p. 100]

Thus the Modern School insists that the child is the centre of gravity in the education process -- and that education is just that, **not** indoctrination:

*"I want to form a school of emancipation, concerned with banning from the mind whatever divides people, the false concepts of property, country and family so as to attain the liberty and well-being which all desire. I will teach only simple truth. I will not ram dogma into their heads. I will not conceal one iota of fact. I will teach not what to think*

*but how to think.*" [Ferrer, cited by Harper, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 99-100]

The Modern School has no rewards or punishments, exams or mark -- the everyday "*tortures*" of conventional schooling. And because practical knowledge is more useful than theory, lessons were often held in factories, museums or the countryside. The school was also used by the parents, and Ferrer planned a Popular University.

*"Higher education, for the privileged few, should be for the general public, as every human has a right to know; and science, which is produced by observers and workers of all countries and ages, ought not be restricted to class."* [Ferrer, cited by Harper, **Op. Cit.**, p. 100]

Thus Modern Schools are based on encouraging self-education in a co-operative, egalitarian and libertarian atmosphere in which the pupil (regardless of age) can develop themselves and their interests to the fullest of their abilities. In this way Modern Schools seek to create anarchists by a process of education which respects the individual and gets them to develop their own abilities in a conducive setting.

Modern Schools have been a constant aspect of the anarchist movement since the later 1890s. The movement was started in France by Louise Michel and Sebastien Faure, where Francisco Ferrer became acquainted with them. He founded his Modern School in Barcelona in 1901, and by 1905 there were 50 similar schools in Spain (many of them funded by anarchist groups and trade unions and, from 1919 onward, by the C.N.T. -- in all cases the autonomy of the schools was respected). In 1909, Ferrer was falsely accused by the Spanish government of leading an insurrection and executed in spite of world-wide protest and overwhelming proof of his innocence. His execution, however, gained him and his educational ideas international recognition and inspired a Modern School progressive education movement in Britain, France, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, China, Japan and, on the greatest scale, in the USA.

However, for most anarchists, Modern Schools are not enough in themselves to produce a libertarian society. They agree with Bakunin's argument that "*[f]or individuals to be moralised and become fully human . . . three things are necessary: a hygienic birth, all-round education, accompanied by an upbringing based on respect for labour, reason, equality, and freedom and a social environment wherein each human individual will enjoy full freedom and really by, **de jure** and **de facto**, the equal of every other.*

*"Does this environment exist? No. Then it must be established. . . [otherwise] in the existing social environment . . . on leaving [libertarian] schools they [the student] would enter a society governed by totally opposite principles, and, because society is always stronger than individuals, it would prevail over them . . . [and] demoralise them."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p, 174]

Because of this, Modern Schools must be part of a mass working class revolutionary movement which

aims to build as many aspects of the new world as possible in the old one before, ultimately, replacing it. Otherwise they are just useful as social experiments and their impact on society marginal. Little wonder, then, that Bakunin supported the International Workers Association's resolution that urged "*the various sections [of the International] to establish public courses . . . [based on] all-round instruction, in order to remedy as much as possible the insufficient education that workers currently receive.*" [quoted by Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 175]

Thus, for anarchists, this process of education is **part of** the class struggle, not in place of it and so "*the workers [must] do everything possible to obtain all the education they can in the material circumstances in which they currently find themselves . . . [while] concentrat[ing] their efforts on the great question of their economic emancipation, the mother of all other emancipations.*" [Michael Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 175]

Before finishing, we must stress that hierarchical education (like the media), cannot remove the effects of actual life and activity in shaping/changing people and their ideas, opinions and attitudes. While education is an essential part of maintaining the status quo and accustoming people to accept hierarchy, the state and wage slavery, it cannot stop individuals from learning from their experiences, ignoring their sense of right and wrong, recognising the injustices of the current system and the ideas that it is based upon. This means that even the best state (or private) education system will still produce rebels -- for the **experience** of wage slavery and state oppression (and, most importantly, **struggle**) is shattering to the **ideology** spoon-fed children during their "education" and reinforced by the media.

For more information on Modern Schools see Paul Avrich's **The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and education in the United States**, Emma Goldman's essay "*Francisco Ferrer and the Modern School*" in **Anarchism and Other Essays** and A.S Neil's **Summerhill**. For a good introduction to anarchist viewpoints on education see "*Kropotkin and technical education: an anarchist voice*" by Michael Smith in **For Anarchism** and Michael Bakunin's "*All-Round Education*" in **The Basic Bakunin**. For an excellent summary of the advantages and benefits of co-operative learning, see Alfie Kohn's **No Contest**.

## J.5.14 What is Libertarian Municipalism?

In his article "*Theses on Libertarian Municipalism*" [in **The Anarchist Papers**, Black Rose Press, 1986], Murray Bookchin has proposed a non-parliamentary electoral strategy for anarchists. He has repeated this proposal in many of his later works, such as **From Urbanisation to Cities** and has made it -- at least in the USA -- one of the many alternatives anarchists are involved in. The main points of his argument are summarised below, followed by a brief commentary.

According to Bookchin, "*the proletariat, as do all oppressed sectors of society, comes to life when it sheds its industrial habits in the free and spontaneous activity of **communising**, or taking part in the political life of the community.*" In other words, Bookchin thinks that democratisation of local communities may be as strategically important, or perhaps more important, to anarchists than workplace

struggles.

Since local politics is humanly scaled, Bookchin argues that it can be participatory rather than parliamentary. Or, as he puts it, "*[t]he anarchic ideal of decentralised, stateless, collectively managed, and directly democratic communities -- of confederated municipalities or 'communes' -- speaks almost intuitively, and in the best works of Proudhon and Kropotkin, consciously, to the transforming role of libertarian municipalism as the framework of a liberatory society. . .*" He also points out that, historically, the city has been the principle countervailing force to imperial and national states, haunting them as a potential challenge to centralised power and continuing to do so today, as can be seen in the conflicts between national government and municipalities in many countries.

But, despite the libertarian potential of urban politics, "urbanisation" -- the growth of the modern megalopolis as a vast wasteland of suburbs, shopping malls, industrial parks, and slums that foster political apathy and isolation in realms of alienated production and private consumption -- is antithetical to the continued existence of those aspects of the city that might serve as the framework for a libertarian municipalism. "*When urbanisation will have effaced city life so completely that the city no longer has its own identity, culture, and spaces for consociation, the bases for democracy -- in whatever way the word is defined -- will have disappeared and the question of revolutionary forms will be a shadow game of abstractions.*"

Despite this danger, however, Bookchin thinks that a libertarian politics of local government is still possible, provided anarchists get their act together. "*The Commune still lies buried in the city council; the sections still lie buried in the neighbourhood; the town meeting still lies buried in the township; confederal forms of municipal association still lie buried in regional networks of towns and cities.*"

What would anarchists do electorally at the local level? Bookchin proposes that they change city and town charters to make political institutions participatory. "*An organic politics based on such radical participatory forms of civic association does not exclude the right of anarchists to alter city and town charters such that they validate the existence of directly democratic institutions. And if this kind of activity brings anarchists into city councils, there is no reason why such a politics should be construed as parliamentary, particularly if it is confined to the civic level and is consciously posed against the state.*"

In a latter essay, Bookchin argues that Libertarian Municipalism "*depends upon libertarian leftists running candidates at the local level, calling for the division of municipalities into wards, where popular assemblies can be created that bring people into full and direct participation in political life . . . municipalities would [then] confederate into a dual power to oppose the nation-state and ultimately dispense with it and with the economic forces that underpin statism as such.*" [**Democracy and Nature** no. 9, p. 158] This would be part of a social wide transformation, whose "*[m]inimal steps . . . include initiating Left Green municipalist movements that propose neighbourhood and town assemblies - even if they have only moral functions at first - and electing town and city councillors that advance the cause of these assemblies and other popular institutions. These minimal steps can lead step-by-step to the*

*formation of confederal bodies. . . Civic banks to fund municipal enterprises and land purchases; the fostering of new ecologically-orientated enterprises that are owned by the community. . .* [From **Urbanisation to Cities**, p. 266]

Thus Bookchin sees Libertarian Municipalism as a process by which the state can be undermined by using elections as the means of creating popular assemblies. Part of this process, he argues, would be the "*municipalisation of property*" which would "*bring the economy as a whole into the orbit of the public sphere, where economic policy could be formulated by the entire community.*" [Op. Cit. p. 235]

Bookchin considers Libertarian Municipalism as the key means of creating an anarchist society, and argues that those anarchists who disagree with it are failing to take their politics seriously. "*It is curious,*" he notes, "*that many anarchists who celebrate the existence of a 'collectivised' industrial enterprise, here and there, with considerable enthusiasm despite its emergence within a thoroughly bourgeois economic framework, can view a municipal politics that entails 'elections' of any kind with repugnance, even if such a politics is structured around neighbourhood assemblies, recallable deputies, radically democratic forms of accountability, and deeply rooted localist networks.*" ["*Theses on Libertarian Municipalism*"]

In evaluating Bookchin's proposal, several points come to mind.

Firstly, it is clear that Libertarian Municipalism's arguments in favour of community assemblies is important and cannot be ignored. Bookchin is right to note that, in the past, many anarchists placed far too much stress on workplace struggles and workers' councils as the framework of a free society. Many of the really important issues that affect us cannot be reduced to workplace organisations, which by their very nature disenfranchise those who do not work in industry (such as housewives, the old, and so on). And, of course, there is far more to life than work and so any future society organised purely around workplace organisations is reproducing capitalism's insane glorification of economic activity, at least to some degree. So, in this sense, Libertarian Municipalism has a very valid point -- a free society will be created and maintained within the community as well as in the workplace.

Secondly, Bookchin and other Libertarian Municipalists are totally correct to argue that anarchists should work in their local communities. As noted in section [J.5.1](#), many anarchists are doing just that and are being very successful as well. However, most anarchists reject the idea that using elections are a viable means of "*struggle toward creating new civic institutions out of old ones (or replacing the old ones altogether).*" [From **Urbanisation to Cities**, p. 267]

The most serious problem has to do with whether politics in most cities has already become too centralised, bureaucratic, inhumanly scaled, and dominated by capitalist interests to have any possibility of being taken over by anarchists running on platforms of participatory democratisation. Merely to pose the question seems enough to answer it. There is no such possibility in the vast majority of cities, and hence it would be a waste of time and energy for anarchists to support libertarian municipalist candidates in local elections -- time and energy that could be more profitably spent in direct action. If the

central governments are too bureaucratic and unresponsive to be used by Libertarian Municipalists, the same can be said of local ones too.

The counter-argument to this is that even if there is no chance of such candidates being elected, their standing for elections would serve a valuable educational function. The answer to this is: perhaps, but would it be more valuable than direct action? And would its educational value, if any, outweigh the disadvantages of electioneering mentioned in sections [J.2.2](#) and [J.2.4](#), such as the fact that voting ratifies the current system? Given the ability of major media to marginalise alternative candidates, we doubt that such campaigns would have enough educational value to outweigh these disadvantages. Moreover, being an anarchist does not make one immune to the corrupting effects of electioneering (as highlighted in section [J.2.6](#)). History is littered with radical, politically aware movements using elections and ending up becoming part of the system they aimed to transform. Most anarchists doubt that Libertarian Municipalism will be any different -- after all, it is the circumstances the parties find themselves in which are decisive, not the theory they hold (the social relations they face will transform the theory, not vice versa, in other words).

Lastly, most anarchists question the whole process on which Libertarian Municipalism bases itself on. The idea of communes is a key one of anarchism and so strategies to create them in the here and now are important. However, to think that using alienated, representative institutions to abolish these institutions is mad. As the Italian activists (who organised a neighbourhood assembly by non-electoral means) argue, *"[t]o accept power and to say that the others were acting in bad faith and that we would be better, would force non-anarchists towards direct democracy. We reject this logic and believe that organisations must come from the grassroots."* [*Community Organising in Southern Italy*", pp. 16-19, **Black Flag** no. 210, p. 18]

Thus Libertarian Municipalism reverses the process by which community assemblies will be created. Instead of anarchists using elections to build such bodies, they must work in their communities directly to create them (see section J.5.1 - ["What is Community Unionism?"](#) for more details). Using the catalyst of specific issues of local interest, anarchists could propose the creation of a community assembly to discuss the issues in question and organise action to solve them. Instead of a *"confederal municipalist movement run[ning] candidates for municipal councils with demands for the institution of public assemblies"* [Murray Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 229] anarchists should encourage people to create these institutions themselves and empower themselves by collective self-activity. As Kropotkin argued, *"Laws can only follow the accomplished facts; and even if they do honestly follow them - which is usually not the case - a law remains a dead letter so long as there are not on the spot the living forces required for making the tendencies expressed in the law an accomplished fact."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 171] Most anarchists, therefore, think it is far more important to create the *"living forces"* within our communities directly than waste energy in electioneering and the passing of laws creating or "legalising" community assemblies. In other words, community assemblies can only be created from the bottom up, by non-electoral means, a process which Libertarian Municipalism confuses with electioneering.

So, while Libertarian Municipalism **does** raise many important issues and correctly stresses the importance of community activity and self-management, its emphasis on electoral activity undercuts its liberatory promise. For most anarchists, community assemblies can only be created from below, by direct action, and (because of its electoral strategy) a Libertarian Municipalist movement will end up being transformed into a copy of the system it aims to abolish.

## J.5.15 What attitude do anarchists take to the welfare state?

Currently we are seeing a concerted attempt to rollback the state within society. This has been begun by the right-wing in the name of "freedom," "individual dignity and responsibility" and "efficiency." The position of anarchists to this process is mixed. On the one hand, we are all in favour of reducing the size of the state and increasing individual responsibility and freedom, but, on the other, we are well aware that this process is part of an attack on the working class and tends to increase the power of the capitalists over us as the state's (direct) influence is reduced. Thus anarchists appear to be on the horns of a dilemma -- or, at least, apparently.

So what attitude **do** anarchists take to the welfare state and the current attacks on it? (see [next section](#) for a short discussion of business based welfare)

First we must note that this attack of "welfare" is somewhat selective. While using the rhetoric of "self-reliance" and "individualism," the practitioners of these "tough love" programmes have made sure that the major corporations continue to get state hand-outs and aid while attacking social welfare. In other words, the current attack on the welfare state is an attempt to impose market discipline on the working class while increasing state protection for the ruling class. Therefore, most anarchists have no problem in social welfare programmes as these can be considered as only fair considering the aid the capitalist class has always received from the state (both direct subsidies and protection and indirect support via laws that protect property and so on). And, for all their talk of increasing individual choice, the right-wing remain silent about the lack of choice and individual freedom during working hours within capitalism.

Secondly, most of the right-wing inspired attacks on the welfare state are inaccurate. For example, Noam Chomsky notes that the *"correlation between welfare payments and family life is real, though it is the reverse of what is claimed [by the right]. As support for the poor has declined, unwed birth-rates, which had risen steadily from the 1940s through the mid-1970s, markedly increased. 'Over the last three decades, the rate of poverty among children almost perfectly correlates with the birth-rates among teenage mothers a decade later,' Mike Males points out: 'That is, child poverty seems to lead to teenage childbearing, not the other way around.'"* ["Rollback III", **Z Magazine**, April, 1995] The same can be said for many of the claims about the evil effects of welfare which the rich and large corporations wish to save others (but not themselves) from. Such altruism is truly heart warming.

Thirdly, we must note that while most anarchists **are** in favour of collective self-help and welfare, we are opposed to the welfare state. Part of the alternatives anarchists try and create are self-managed and communal community welfare projects (see [next section](#)). Moreover, in the past, anarchists and

syndicalists were at the forefront in opposing state welfare schemes (introduced, we may note, **not** by socialists but by liberals and other supporters of capitalism to undercut support for radical alternatives and aid long term economic development by creating the educated and healthy population required to use advanced technology and fight wars). Thus we find that:

*"Liberal social welfare legislation. . . were seen by many [British syndicalists] not as genuine welfare reforms, but as mechanisms of social control. Syndicalists took a leading part in resisting such legislation on the grounds that it would increase capitalist discipline over labour, thereby undermining working class independence and self-reliance."* [Bob Holton, **British Syndicalism: 1900-1914**, p. 137]

Anarchists view the welfare state much as some feminists do. While they note the *"patriarchal structure of the welfare state"* they are also aware that it has *"also brought challenges to patriarchal power and helped provide a basis for women's autonomous citizenship."* [Carole Pateman, *"The Patriarchal Welfare State"*, in **The Disorder of Women**, p. 195] She does on to note that *"for women to look at the welfare state is merely to exchange dependence on individual men for dependence on the state. The power and capriciousness of husbands is replaced by the arbitrariness, bureaucracy and power of the state, the very state that has upheld patriarchal power. . . [this] will not in itself do anything to challenge patriarchal power relations."* [**Ibid.**, p. 200]

Thus while the welfare state does give working people more options than having to take **any** job or put up with **any** conditions, this relative independence from the market and individual capitalists has come at the price of dependence on the state -- the very institution that protects and supports capitalism in the first place. And as we have become painfully aware in recent years, it is the ruling class who has most influence in the state -- and so, when it comes to deciding what state budgets to cut, social welfare ones are first in line. Given that state welfare programmes are controlled by the state, **not** working class people, such an outcome is hardly surprising. Not only this, we also find that state control reproduces the same hierarchical structures that the capitalist firm creates.

Unsurprisingly, anarchists have no great love of such state welfare schemes and desire their replacement by self-managed alternatives. For example, taking municipal housing, Colin Ward writes:

*"The municipal tenant is trapped in a syndrome of dependence and resentment, which is an accurate reflection of his housing situation. People care about what is theirs, what they can modify, alter, adapt to changing needs and improve themselves. They must have a direct responsibility for it.*

*". . . The tenant take-over of the municipal estate is one of those obviously sensible ideas which is dormant because our approach to municipal affairs is still stuck in the groves of nineteenth-century paternalism."* [**Anarchy in Action**, p.73]

Looking at state supported education, Ward argues that the *"universal education system turns out to be*



*yet another way in which the poor subsidise the rich."* Which is the least of its problems, for *"it is in the nature of public authorities to run coercive and hierarchical institutions whose ultimate function is to perpetuate social inequality and to brainwash the young into the acceptance of their particular slot in the organised system."* [Op. Cit., p. 83, p. 81]

The role of state education as a means of systematically indoctrinating the working class is reflected in William Lazonick's essay *"The Subjection of Labour to Capital: The rise of the Capitalist System"*:

*"The Education Act of 1870. . . [gave the] state. . . the facilities. . . to make education compulsory for all children from the age of five to the age of ten. It had also erected a powerful system of ideological control over the next generation of workers. . . [It] was to function as a prime ideological mechanism in the attempt by the capitalist class through the medium of the state, to continually **reproduce** a labour force which would passively accept [the] subjection [of labour to the domination of capital]. At the same time it had set up a public institution which could potentially be used by the working class for just the contrary purpose."* [Radical Political Economy Vol. 2, p. 363]

Lazonick, as did Pateman, indicates the contradictory nature of welfare provisions within capitalism. On the one hand, they are introduced to help control the working class (and to improve long term economic development). On the other hand, these provisions can be used by working class people as weapons against capitalism and give themselves more options than "work or starve" (the fact that the recent attack on welfare in the UK -- called, ironically enough, **welfare to work** -- involves losing benefits if you refuse a job is not a surprising development). Thus we find that welfare acts as a kind of floor under wages. In the US, the two have followed a common trajectory (rising together and falling together). And it is **this**, the potential benefits welfare can have for working people, that is the **real** cause for the current capitalist attacks upon it.

Because of this contradictory nature of welfare, we find anarchists like Noam Chomsky arguing that (using an expression popularised by South American rural workers unions) *"we should 'expand the floor of the cage.' We know we're in a cage. We know we're trapped. We're going to expand the floor, meaning we will extend to the limits what the cage will allow. And we intend to destroy the cage. But not by attacking the cage when we're vulnerable, so they'll murder us. . . You have to protect the cage when it's under attack from even worse predators from outside, like private power. And you have to expand the floor of the cage, recognising that it's a cage. These are all preliminaries to dismantling it. Unless people are willing to tolerate that level of complexity, they're going to be of no use to people who are suffering and who need help, or, for that matter, to themselves."* [Expanding the Floor of the Cage]

Thus, even though we know the welfare state is a cage and an instrument of class power, we have to defend it from a worse possibility -- namely, the state as "pure" defender of capitalism with working people with few or no rights. At least the welfare state does have a contradictory nature, the tensions of which can be used to increase our options. And one of these options is its abolition **from below!**

For example, with regards to municipal housing, anarchists will be the first to agree that it is paternalistic, bureaucratic and hardly a wonderful living experience. However, in stark contrast with the "libertarian" right who desire to privatise such estates, anarchists think that *"tenants control"* is the best solution as it gives us the benefits of individual ownership **along with** community (and so without the negative points of property, such as social atomisation). And anarchists agree with Colin Ward when he thinks that the demand for *"tenant control"* must come from below, by the *"collective resistance"* of the tenants themselves, perhaps as a growth from struggles against rent increases. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 73]

And it is here that we find the ultimate irony of the right-wing, "free market" attempts to abolish the welfare state -- neo-liberalism wants to end welfare **from above**, by means of the state (which is the instigator of this "individualistic" "reform"). It does not seek the end of dependency by self-liberation, but the shifting of dependency from state to charity and the market. In contrast, anarchists desire to abolish welfare from below, by the direct action of those who receive it by a *"multiplicity of mutual aid organisations among claimants, patients, victims"* for this *"represents the most potent lever for change in transforming the welfare state into a genuine welfare society, in turning community care into a caring community."* [Colin Ward, **Op. Cit.**, p. 125]

Ultimately, unlike the state socialist/liberal left, anarchists reject the idea that the case of socialism, of a free society, can be helped by using the state. Like the right, the left see political action in terms of the state. All its favourite policies have been statist - state intervention in the economy, nationalisation, state welfare, state education and so on. Whatever the problem, the left see the solution as lying in the extension of the power of the state. And, as such, they continually push people in relying on **others** to solve their problems for them (moreover, such state-based "aid" does not get to the core of the problem. All it does is fight the symptoms of capitalism and statism without attacking their root causes -- the system itself).

Invariably, this support for the state is a move away from working class people, of trusting and empowering them to sort out their own problems. Indeed, the left seem to forget that the state exists to defend the collective interests of capitalists and other sections of the ruling class and so could hardly be considered a neutral body. And, worst of all, they have presented the right with the opportunity of stating that freedom from the state means the same thing as the freedom of the market (and as we have explained in detail in sections [B](#), [C](#) and [D](#), capitalism is based upon domination -- wage labour -- and needs many repressive measures in order to exist and survive). Anarchists are of the opinion that changing the boss for the state (or vice versa) is only a step sideways, **not** forward! After all, it is **not** working people who control how the welfare state is run, it is politicians, "experts" and managers who do so. Little wonder we have seen elements of the welfare state used as a weapon in the class war **against** those in struggle (for example, in Britain during the 1980s the Conservative Government made it illegal to claim benefits while on strike, so reducing the funds available to workers in struggle and helping bosses force strikers back to work faster).

Therefore, anarchists consider it far better to encourage those who suffer injustice to organise themselves and in that way they can change what **they** think is actually wrong, as opposed to what

politicians and "experts" claim is wrong. If sometimes part of this struggle involves protecting aspects of the welfare state (*"expanding the floor of the cage"*) so be it -- but we will never stop there and will use such struggles as a step in abolishing the welfare state from below by creating self-managed, working class, alternatives. As part of this process anarchists also seek to **transform** those aspects of the welfare state they may be trying to "protect". They do not defend an institution which **is** paternalistic, bureaucratic and unresponsive. For example, if we are involved in trying to stop a local state-run hospital or school from closing, anarchists would try to raise the issue of self-management and local community control into the struggle in the hope of going beyond the status quo.

Not only does this mean that we can get accustomed to managing our own affairs collectively, it also means that we can ensure that whatever "safety-nets" we create for ourselves do what we want and not what capital wants. In the end, what we create and run by our own activity will be more responsive to our needs, and the needs of the class struggle, than reformist aspects of the capitalist state. This much, we think, is obvious. And it is ironic to see elements of the "radical" and "revolutionary" left argue against this working class self-help (and so ignore the **long** tradition of such activity in working class movements) and instead select for the agent of their protection a state run by and for capitalists!

There are two traditions of welfare within society, one of *"fraternal and autonomous associations springing from below, the other that of authoritarian institutions directed from above."* [Colin Ward, **Op. Cit.**, p. 123] While sometimes anarchists are forced to defend the latter against the greater evil of "free market" corporate capitalism, we never forget the importance of creating and strengthening the former. A point we will discuss more in section [J.5.16](#) when we highlight the historical examples of self-managed communal welfare and self-help organisations.

## **J.5.16 Are there any historical examples of collective self-help?**

Yes, in all societies we see working people joining together to practice mutual aid and solidarity. These take many forms, such as trade and industrial unions, credit unions and friendly societies, co-operatives and so on, but the natural response of working class people to the injustices of capitalism was to practice collective "self-help" in order to improve their lives and protect their friends, communities and fellow workers.

Unfortunately, this *"great tradition of working class self-help and mutual aid was written off, not just as irrelevant, but as an actual impediment, by the political and professional architects of the welfare state. . . The contribution that the recipients had to make to all this theoretical bounty was ignored as a mere embarrassment - apart, of course, for paying for it. . . The socialist ideal was rewritten as a world in which everyone was entitled to everything, but where nobody except the providers had any actual say about anything. We have been learning for years, in the anti-welfare backlash, what a vulnerable utopia that was."* [Colin Ward, **Social Policy: an anarchist response**, p. 3]

Ward terms this self-help (and self-managed) working class activity the *"welfare road we failed to take."*

Indeed, anarchists would argue that self-help is the natural side effect of freedom. There is no possibility of radical social change unless people are free to decide for themselves what their problems are, where their interests lie and are free to organise for themselves what they want to do about them. Self-help is a natural expression of people taking control of their own lives and acting for themselves. Anyone who urges state action on behalf of people is no socialist and any one arguing against self-help as "bourgeois" is no anti-capitalist. It is somewhat ironic that it is the right who have monopolised the rhetoric of "self-help" and turned it into yet another ideological weapon against working class direct action and self-liberation (although, saying that, the right generally likes individualised self-help -- given a strike or squatting or any other form of **collective** self-help movement they will be the first to denounce it):

*"The political Left has, over the years, committed an enormous psychological error in allowing this kind of language ["self-help", "mutual aid", "standing on your own two feet" and so on] to be appropriated by the political Right. If you look at the exhibitions of trade union banners from the last century, you will see slogans like Self Help embroidered all over them. It was those clever Fabians and academic Marxists who ridiculed out of existence the values by which ordinary citizens govern their own lives in favour of bureaucratic paternalising, leaving those values around to be picked up by their political opponents."* [Colin Ward, **Talking Houses**, p. 58]

We cannot be expected to provide an extensive list of working class collective self-help and social welfare activity here, all we can do is present an overview. For a discussion of working class self-help and co-operation through the centuries we can suggest no better source than Kropotkin's **Mutual Aid**. Here we will (using other sources than **Mutual Aid**) indicate a few examples of collective welfare in action.

In the case of Britain, we find that the *"newly created working class built up from nothing a vast network of social and economic initiatives based on self-help and mutual aid. The list is endless: friendly societies, building societies, sick clubs, coffin clubs, clothing clubs, up to enormous federated enterprises like the trade union movement and the Co-operative movement."* [Colin Ward, **Social Policy: an anarchist response**, p. 2]

The historian E.P. Thompson confirms this picture of a wide network of working class self-help organisations:

*"Small tradesmen, artisans, labourers - all sought to insure themselves against sickness, unemployment, or funeral expenses through membership of . . . friendly societies." These were "authentic evidence of independent working-class culture and institutions . . . out of which . . . trade unions grew, and in which trade union officers were trained." Friendly societies "did not 'proceed from' an idea: both the ideas and institutions arose from a certain common experience . . . In the simple cellular structure of the friendly society, with its workaday ethos of mutual aid, we see many features which were reproduced in more sophisticated and complex form in trade unions, co-operatives, Hampden clubs, Political Unions, and Chartist lodges. . . Every kind of witness in the first half of the nineteenth century - clergymen, factory*

*inspectors, Radical publicists - remarked upon the extent of mutual aid in the poorest districts. In times of emergency, unemployment, strikes, sickness, childbirth, then it was the poor who 'helped every one his neighbour.'*" [**The Making of the English Working Class**, p. 458, pp. 460-1, p. 462]

Taking the United States, Sam Dolgoff presents an excellent summary of similar self-help activities by the American working class:

*"Long before the labour movement got corrupted and the state stepped in, the workers organised a network of co-operative institutions of all kinds: schools, summer camps for children and adults, homes for the aged, health and cultural centres, credit associations, fire, life, and health insurance, technical education, housing, etc."* [**The American Labour Movement: A New Beginning**, p. 74]

Dolgoff, like all anarchists, urges workers to *"finance the establishment of independent co-operative societies of all types, which will respond adequately to their needs"* and that such a movement *"could constitute a realistic alternative to the horrendous abuses of the 'establishment' at a fraction of the cost."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 74, pp. 74-75]

In this way a network of self-managed, communal, welfare associations and co-operatives could be built -- paid for, run by and run for working class people. Such a network could be initially build upon, and be an aspect of, the struggles of claimants, patients, tenants, and other users of the current welfare state (see [last section](#)).

The creation of such a co-operative, community-based, welfare system will not occur over night. Nor will it be easy. But it **is** possible, as history shows. And, of course, it will have its problems, but as Colin Ward notes, that *"the standard argument against a localist and decentralised point of view, is that of universalism: an equal service to all citizens, which it is thought that central control achieves. The short answer to this is that it doesn't!"* [Colin Ward, **Op. Cit.**, p. 6] He notes that richer areas generally get a better service from the welfare state than poorer ones, thus violating the claims of equal service. And a centralised system (be it state or private) will most likely allocate resources which reflect the interests and (lack of) knowledge of bureaucrats and experts, **not** on where they are best used or the needs of the users.

Anarchists are sure that a **confederal** network of mutual aid organisations and co-operatives, based upon local input and control, can overcome problems of localism far better than a centralised one -- which, due to its lack of local input and participation will more likely **encourage** parochialism and indifference than a wider vision and solidarity. If you have no real say in what affects you, why should you be concerned with what affects others? Centralisation leads to disempowerment, which in turn leads to indifference, **not** solidarity. Rudolf Rocker reminds us of the evil effects of centralism when he writes:

*"For the state centralisation is the appropriate form of organisation, since it aims at the*

*greatest possible uniformity in social life for the maintenance of political and social equilibrium. But for a movement whose very existence depends on prompt action at any favourable moment and on the independent thought and action of its supporters, centralism could but be a curse by weakening its power of decision and systematically repressing all immediate action. If, for example, as was the case in Germany, every local strike had first to be approved by the Central, which was often hundreds of miles away and was not usually in a position to pass a correct judgement on the local conditions, one cannot wonder that the inertia of the apparatus of organisation renders a quick attack quite impossible, and there thus arises a state of affairs where the energetic and intellectually alert groups no longer serve as patterns for the less active, but are condemned by these to inactivity, inevitably bringing the whole movement to stagnation. Organisation is, after all, only a means to an end. When it becomes an end in itself, it kills the spirit and the vital initiative of its members and sets up that domination by mediocrity which is the characteristic of all bureaucracies."* [Anarcho-Syndicalism, p. 54]

And, as an example, he notes that while the highly centralised German labour movement "*did not raise a finger to avert the catastrophe*" of Hitler's seizing power and "*which in a few months beat their organisation completely to pieces*" the exact opposite happened in Spain ("*where Anarcho-Syndicalism had maintained its hold upon organised labour from the days of the First International*"). There the anarcho-syndicalist C.N.T. "*frustrated the criminal plans of Franco*" and "*by their heroic example spurred the Spanish workers and peasants to the battle.*" Without the heroic resistance of the Anarcho-Syndicalist labour unions the Fascist reaction would have dominated the whole country in a matter of weeks. [Op. Cit., p. 53]

This is unsurprising, for what else is global action other than the product of thousands of local actions? Solidarity within our class is the flower that grows from the soil of our local self-activity, direct action and self-organisation. Unless we act and organise locally, any wider organisation and action will be hollow. Thus **local** organisation and empowerment is essential to create and maintain wider organisations and mutual aid.

To take another example of the benefits of a self-managed welfare system, we find that it "*was a continual complaint of the authorities [in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century] that friendly societies allowed members to withdraw funds when on strike.*" [E.P. Thompson, Op. Cit., p. 461f] The same complaints were voiced in Britain about the welfare state allowing strikers to claim benefit while on strike. The Conservative Government of the 1980s changed that by passing a law barring those in industrial dispute to claim benefits -- and so removing a potential support for those in struggle. Such a restriction would have been far harder (if not impossible) to impose on a network of self-managed mutual aid co-operatives. And such institutions would have not become the plaything of central government financial policy as the welfare state and the taxes working class people have to pay have become.

All this means that anarchists reject totally the phoney choice between private and state capitalism we are usually offered. We reject both privatisation **and** nationalisation, both right and left wings (of

capitalism). Neither state nor private health care are user-controlled -- one is subject to the requirements of politics and the other places profits before people. As we have discussed the welfare state in the [last section](#), it is worthwhile to quickly discuss privatised welfare and why most anarchists reject this option even more than state welfare.

Firstly, all forms of private healthcare/welfare has to pay dividends to capitalists, fund advertising, reduce costs to maximise profits by standardising the "caring" process - i.e. McDonaldisation - and so on, all of which inflates prices and produces substandard service across the industry as a whole. According to Alfie Kohn, the *"[m]ore hospitals and clinics are being run by for-profit corporations; many institutions, forced to battle for 'customers,' seem to value a skilled director of marketing more highly than a skilled caregiver. As in any other economic sector, the race for profits translates into pressure to reduce costs, and the easiest way to do it here is to cut back on services to unprofitable patients, that is, those who are more sick than rich . . ."* *"The result: hospital costs are actually **higher** in areas where there is more competition for patients."* [Alfie Kohn, **No Contest**, p. 240] In the UK, attempts to introduce "market forces" into the National Health Service also lead to increased costs as well as inflating the services bureaucracy.

Looking at Chile, hyped by those who desire to privatise Social Security, we find similar disappointing results (well, disappointing for the working class at least, as we will see). Seemingly, Chile's private system has achieved impressive average returns on investment. However, once commissions are factored in, the real return for individual workers is considerably lower. For example, although the average rate of return on funds from 1982 through 1986 was 15.9 percent, the real return after commissions was a mere 0.3 percent! Between 1991 and 1995, the pre-commission return was 12.9 percent, but with commissions it fell to 2.1 percent. According to Doug Henwood, the *"competing mutual funds have vast sales forces, and the portfolio managers all have their vast fees. All in all, administrative costs . . . are almost 30% of revenues, compared to well under 1% for the U.S. Social Security system."* [**Wall Street**, p. 305] Although market competition was supposed to lower commissions in Chile, the private pension fund market is dominated by a handful of companies. These, according to economists Peter Diamond and Salvador Valdes-Prieto, form a *"monopolistic competitive market"* rather than a truly competitive one. A similar process seems to be taking place in Argentina, where commissions have remained around 3.5 percent of taxable salary. As argued in section [C.4](#), such oligopolistic tendencies are inherent in capitalism and so this development is not unexpected.

Even if commission costs were lowered (perhaps by regulation), the impressive returns on capital seen between 1982 and 1995 (when the real annual return on investment averaged 12.7 percent) are likely not to be sustained. These average returns coincided with boom years in Chile, complemented by government's high borrowing costs. Because of the debt crisis of the 1980s, Latin governments were paying double-digit real interest rates on their bonds -- the main investment vehicle of social security funds. In effect, government was subsidising the "private" system by paying astronomical rates on government bonds.

Another failing of the system is that only a little over half of Chilean workers make regular social

security contributions. While many believe that a private system would reduce evasion because workers have a greater incentive to contribute to their own personal retirement accounts, 43.4 percent of those affiliated with the new system in June of 1995 did not contribute regularly (see Stephen J. Kay, "*The Chile Con: Privatizing Social Security in South America*," **The American Prospect** no. 33, July-August 1997, pp. 48-52 for details).

All in all, privatisation seems to be beneficial only to middle-men and capitalists, if Chile is anything to go by. As Henwood argues, while the "*infusion of money*" resulting from privatising social security "*has done wonders for the Chilean stock market*" "*projections are that as many as half of future retirees will draw a poverty-level pension.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 304-5]

So, anarchists reject private welfare as a con (and an even bigger one than state welfare). Instead we try to create **real** alternatives to hierarchy, be it state or capitalist, in the here and now which reflect our ideas of a free and just society. For, when it boils down to it, freedom cannot be given, only taken and this process of **self**-liberation is reflected in the alternatives we build to help win the class war.

The struggle **against** capitalism and statism requires that we build **for** the future ("*the urge to destroy is a creative urge*" - Bakunin) and, moreover, we should remember that "*he who has no confidence in the creative capacity of the masses and in their capability to revolt doesn't belong in the revolutionary movement. He should go to a monastery and get on his knees and start praying. Because he is no revolutionist. He is a son of a bitch.*" [Sam Dolgoff, quoted by Ulrike Heider, **Anarchism: left, right, and green**, p. 12]



# J.1 Are anarchists involved in social struggles?

Yes. Anarchism, above all else, is a movement which aims to not only analyse the world but also to change it. Therefore anarchists aim to participate in and encourage social struggle. Social struggle includes strikes, marches, protests, demonstrations, boycotts, occupations and so on. Such activities show that the "*spirit of revolt*" is alive and well, that people are thinking and acting for themselves and against what authorities want them to do. This, in the eyes of anarchists, plays a key role in helping create the seeds of anarchy within capitalism.

Anarchists consider socialistic tendencies to develop within society, as people see the benefits of co-operation and particularly when mutual aid develops within the struggle against authority, oppression and exploitation. Anarchism, as Kropotkin argues, "*originated in everyday struggles.*" [**Environment and Revolution**, p.58] Therefore, anarchists do not place anarchy abstractly against capitalism, but see it as a tendency within (and against) the system -- a tendency created by struggle and which can be developed to such a degree that it can **replace** the dominant structures and social relationships with new, more liberatory and humane ones. This perspective indicates why anarchists are involved in social struggles -- they are an expression of this tendency within but against capitalism which can ultimately replace it.

However, there is another reason why anarchists are involved in social struggle -- namely the fact that we are part of the oppressed and, like other oppressed people, fight for our freedom and to make our life better in the here and now. It is not in some tomorrow that we want to see the end of oppression, exploitation and hierarchy. It is today, in our own life, that the anarchist wants to win our freedom, or at the very least, to improve our situation, reduce oppression, domination and exploitation as well as increasing individual liberty. We are aware that we often fail to do so, but the very process of struggle can help create a more libertarian aspect to society:

*"Whatever may be the practical results of the struggle for immediate gains, the greatest value lies in the struggle itself. For thereby workers [and other oppressed sections of society] learn that the bosses interests are opposed to theirs and that they cannot improve their conditions, and much less emancipate themselves, except by uniting and becoming stronger than the bosses. If they succeed in getting what they demand, they will be better off: they will earn more, work fewer hours and will have more time and energy to reflect on the things that matter to them, and will immediately make greater demands and have greater needs. If they do not succeed they will be led to study the reasons of their failure and recognise the need for closer unity and greater activity and they will in the end understand that to make victory secure and definite, it is necessary to destroy capitalism. The revolutionary cause, the cause of moral elevation and emancipation of the workers [and other oppressed sections of society] must benefit by the fact that workers [and other oppressed people] unite and struggle for their interests."* [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 191]

Therefore, *"we as anarchists and workers, must incite and encourage them [the workers and other oppressed people] to struggle, and join them in their struggle."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 190] This is for three reasons. Firstly, struggle helps generate libertarian ideas and movements which could help make existing society more anarchistic and less oppressive. Secondly, struggle creates people, movements and organisations which are libertarian in nature and which, potentially, can replace capitalism with a more humane society. Thirdly, because anarchists are part of the oppressed and so have an interest in taking part in and showing solidarity with struggles and movements that can improve our life in the here and now (*"an injury to one is an injury to all"*).

As we will see later (in [section J.2](#)) anarchists encourage direct action within social struggles as well as arguing anarchist ideas and theories. However, what is important to note here is that social struggle is a sign that people are thinking and acting for themselves and working together to change things. Anarchists agree with Howard Zinn when he points out that:

*"civil disobedience. . . is **not** our problem. Our problem is civil **obedience**. Our problem is that numbers of people all over the world have obeyed the dictates of the leaders of their government and have gone to war, and millions have been killed because of this obedience. . . Our problem is that people are obedient all over the world in the face of poverty and starvation and stupidity, and war, and cruelty. Our problem is that people are obedient while the jails are full of petty thieves, and all the while the grand thieves are running the country. That's our problem."* [**Failure to Quit**, p. 45]

Therefore, social struggle is an important thing for anarchists and we take part in it as much as we can. Moreover, anarchists do more than just take part. We are fighting to get rid of the system that causes the problems which people fight against. We explain anarchism to those who are involved in struggle with us and seek to show the relevance of anarchism to people's everyday lives through our work in such struggles and the popular organisations which they create (in addition to trade unions, campaigning groups and other bodies). By so doing we try to popularise the ideas and methods of anarchism, namely solidarity, self-management and direct action.

Anarchists do not engage in abstract propaganda (become an anarchist, wait for the revolution -- if we did that, in Malatesta's words, *"that day would never come."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 195]). We know that our ideas will only win a hearing and respect when we can show both their relevance to people's lives in the here and now, and show that an anarchist world is both possible and desirable. In other words, social struggle is the "school" of anarchism, the means by which people become anarchists and anarchist ideas are applied in action. Hence the importance of social struggle and anarchist participation within it.

Before discussing issues related to social struggle, it is important to point out here that anarchists are interested in struggles against all forms of oppression and do not limit ourselves to purely economic issues. The hierarchical and exploitative nature of the capitalist system is only part of the story -- other forms of oppression are needed in order to keep it going (such as those associated with the state) and

have resulted from its workings (in addition to those inherited from previous hierarchical and class systems). Like the bug in work, domination, exploitation, hierarchy and oppression soon spreads and infests our homes, our friendships and our communities. They need to be fought everywhere, not just in work.

Therefore, anarchists are convinced that human life (and the struggle against oppression) cannot be reduced to mere money and, indeed, the *"proclivity for economic reductionism is now actually obscurantist. It not only shares in the bourgeois tendency to render material egotism and class interest the centrepieces of history it also denigrates all attempts to transcend this image of humanity as a mere economic being. . . by depicting them as mere 'marginalia' at best, as 'well-intentioned middle-class ideology' at worse, or sneeringly, as 'diversionary,' 'utopian,' and 'unrealistic.' . . . Capitalism, to be sure, did not create the 'economy' or 'class interest,' but it subverted all human traits - be they speculative thought, love, community, friendship, art, or self-governance - with the authority of economic calculation and the rule of quantity. Its 'bottom line' is the balance sheet's sum and its basic vocabulary consists of simple numbers."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Modern Crisis**, pp. 125-126]

In other words, issues such as freedom, justice, individual dignity, quality of life and so on cannot be reduced to the categories of capitalist economics. Anarchists think that any radical movement which does so fails to understand the nature of the system they are fighting against. Indeed, economic reductionism plays into the hands of capitalist ideology. So, when anarchists take part in and encourage social struggle they do not aim to restrict or reduce them to economic issues (however important these are). The anarchist knows that the individual has more interests than just money and we consider it essential to take into account the needs of the emotions, mind and spirit just as much as those of the belly. Hence Bookchin:

*"The class struggle does not centre around material exploitation alone but also around spiritual exploitation. In addition, entirely new issues emerge: coercive attitudes, the quality of work, ecology (or stated in more general terms, psychological and environmental oppression). . . Terms like 'classes' and 'class struggle,' conceived of almost entirely as economic categories and relations, are too one-sided to express the **universalisation** of the struggle. . . the target is still a ruling class and a class society . . . but this terminology, with its traditional connotations, does not reflect the sweep and the multi-dimensional nature of the struggle . . . [and] fail to encompass the cultural and spiritual revolt that is taking place along with the economic struggle."*

[. . . ]

*"Exploitation, class rule and happiness, are the **particular** within the more **generalised** concepts of domination, hierarchy and pleasure."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp.229-30 and p. 243]

As the anarchist character created by the science-fiction writer Ursula Le Guin (who is an anarchist)

points out, capitalists *"think if people have enough things they will be content to live in prison."* [**The Dispossessed**, p. 120] Anarchists disagree, and the experience of social revolt in the "affluent" 1960s proves their case.

This is unsurprising for, ultimately, the *"antagonism [between classes] is spiritual rather than material. There will never be a sincere understanding between bosses and workers. . . because the bosses above all want to remain bosses and secure always more power at the expense of the workers, as well as by competition with other bosses, whereas the workers have had their fill of bosses and don't want any more."* [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 79]

## J.1.1 Why are social struggles important?

Social struggle is an expression of the class struggle, namely the struggle of working class people **against** their exploitation, oppression and alienation and **for** their liberty from capitalist and state authority. It is what happens when one group of people have hierarchical power over another. Where there is oppression, there is resistance and where there is resistance to authority you will see anarchy in action. For this reason anarchists are in favour of, and are involved within, social struggles. Ultimately they are a sign of individuals asserting their autonomy and disgust at an unfair system.

When it boils down to it, our actual freedom is not determined by the law or by courts, but by the power the cop has over us in the street; the judge behind him; by the authority of our boss if we are working; by the power of teachers and heads of schools and universities if we are students; by the welfare bureaucracy if we are unemployed or poor; by landlords if we are tenants; by prison guards if we are in jail; by medical professionals if we are in a hospital. These realities of wealth and power will remain unshaken unless counter-forces appear on the very ground our liberty is restricted - on the street, in workplaces, at home, at school, in hospitals and so on.

Therefore social struggles for improvements are important indications of the spirit of revolt and of people supporting each other in the continual assertion of their (and our) freedom. They show people standing up for what they consider right and just, building alternative organisations, creating their own solutions to their problems - and are a slap in the face of all the paternal authorities which dare govern us. Hence their importance to anarchists and all people interested in extending freedom.

In addition, social struggle helps break people from their hierarchical conditioning. Anarchists view people not as fixed objects to be classified and labelled, but as human beings engaged in making their own lives. They live, love, think, feel, hope, dream, and can change themselves, their environment and social relationships. Social struggle is the way this is done collectively.

Struggle promotes attributes within people which are crushed by hierarchy (attributes such as imagination, organisational skills, self-assertion, self-management, critical thought, self-confidence and so on) as people come up against practical problems in their struggles and have to solve them themselves. This builds self-confidence and an awareness of individual and collective power. By seeing

that their boss, the state and so on are against them they begin to realise that they live in a class ridden, hierarchical society that depends upon their submission to work. As such, social struggle is a politicising experience.

Struggle allows those involved to develop their abilities for self-rule through practice and so begins the process by which individuals assert their ability to control their own lives and to participate in social life directly. These are all key elements of anarchism and are required for an anarchist society to work ("*Self-management of the struggle comes first, then comes self-management of work and society,*" in the words of Alfredo Bonnano [*"Self-Management"*, **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed**, no. 48, Fall-Winter 1999-2000, p. 35-37, p. 35]). So self-activity is a key factor in self-liberation, self-education and the creating of anarchists. In a nutshell, people learn in struggle.

A confident working class is an essential factor in making successful and libertarian improvements within the current system and, ultimately, in making a revolution. Without that self-confidence people tend to just follow "leaders" and we end up changing rulers rather than changing society.

Part of our job as anarchists is to encourage people to fight for whatever small reforms are possible at present, to improve our/their conditions, to give people confidence in their ability to start taking control of their lives, and to point out that there is a limit to whatever (sometimes temporary) gains capitalism will or can concede. Hence the need for a revolutionary change.

Until anarchist ideas are the dominant/most popular ones, other ideas will be the majority ones. If we think a movement is, all things considered, a positive or progressive one then we should not abstain but should seek to popularise anarchist ideas and strategies within it. In this way we create "*schools of anarchy*" within the current system and lay the foundations of something better. Revolutionary tendencies and movements, in other words, must create the organisations that contain, in embryo, the society of the future. These organisations, in turn, further the progress of radical change by providing social spaces for the transformation of individuals (via the use of direct action, practising self-management and solidarity, and so on). Therefore, social struggle aids the creation of a free society by accustoming the marginalised to govern themselves within self-managed organisations and empowering the (officially) disempowered via the use of direct action and mutual aid.

Hence the importance of social (or class) struggle for anarchists (which, we may add, goes on all the time and is a two-sided affair). Social struggle is the means of breaking the normality of capitalist and statist life, a means of developing the awareness for social change and the means of making life better under the current system. The moment that people refuse to bow to authority, its days are numbered. Social struggle indicates that some of the oppressed see that by using their power of disobedience they can challenge, perhaps eventually end, hierarchical power.

Ultimately, anarchy is not just something you believe in, it is not a cool label you affix to yourself, it is something you do. You participate. If you stop doing it, anarchy crumbles. Social struggle is the means by which we ensure that anarchy becomes stronger and grows.

## J.1.2 Are anarchists against reforms?

No, we are not. While most anarchists are against reformism (namely the notion that we can somehow reform capitalism and the state away) they are most definitely in favour of reforms (i.e. improvements in the here and now).

The claim that anarchists are against reforms and improvements in the here and now are often put forth by opponents of anarchism in an effort to paint us as extremists. Anarchists are radicals; as such, they seek the root causes of societal problems. Reformists seek to ameliorate the symptoms of societal problems, while anarchists focus on the causes.

In the words of the revolutionary syndicalist Emile Pouget (who is referring to revolutionary/libertarian unions but whose words can be generalised to all social movements):

*"Trade union endeavour has a double aim: with tireless persistence, it must pursue betterment of the working class's current conditions. But, without letting themselves become obsessed with this passing concern, the workers should take care to make possible and imminent the essential act of comprehensive emancipation: the expropriation of capital.*

*"At present, trade union action is designed to won partial and gradual improvements which, far from constituting a goal, can only be considered as a means of stepping up demands and wresting further improvements from capitalism. . .*

*"This question of partial improvements served as the pretext for attempts to sow discord in the trades associations. Politicians . . . have tried to . . . stir up ill-feeling and to split the unions into two camps, by categorising workers as reformists and as revolutionaries. The better to discredit the latter, they have dubbed them 'the advocates of all or nothing' and the have falsely represented them as supposed adversaries of improvements achievable right now.*

*"The most that can be said about this nonsense is that it is witless. There is not a worker . . . who, on grounds of principle or for reasons of tactics, would insist upon working ten hours for an employer instead of eight hours, while earning six francs instead of seven. . .*

*"What appears to afford some credence to such chicanery is the fact that the unions, cured by the cruel lessons of experience from all hope in government intervention, are justifiably mistrustful of it. They know that the State, whose function is to act as capital's gendarme, is, by its very nature, inclined to tip the scales in favour of the employer side. So, whenever a reform is brought about by legal avenues, they do not fall upon it with the*

*relish of a frog devouring the red rag that conceals the hook, they greet it with all due caution, especially as this reform is made effective only if the workers are organised to insist forcefully upon its implementation.*

*"The trade unions are even more wary of gifts from the government because they have often found these to be poison gifts. . .*

*"But, given that the trade unions look askance at the government's benevolence towards them, it follows that they are loath to go after partial improvements. Wanting real improvements . . . instead of waiting until the government is generous enough to bestow them, they wrest them in open battle, through direct action.*

*"If, as sometimes is the case, the improvement they seek is subject to the law, the trade unions strive to obtain it through outside pressure brought to bear upon the authorities and not by trying to return specially mandated deputies to Parliament, a puerile pursuit that might drag on for centuries before there was a majority in favour of the yearned-for reform.*

*"When the desired improvement is to be wrestled directly from the capitalist, the trades associations resort to vigorous pressure to convey their wishes. Their methods may well vary, although the direct action principle underlies them all. . .*

*"But, whatever the improvement won, it must always represent a reduction in capitalist privileges and be a partial expropriation. So . . . the fine distinction between 'reformist' and 'revolutionary' evaporates and one is led to the conclusion that the only really reformist workers are the revolutionary syndicalists." [No Gods, No Masters, pp. 71-3]*

By seeking improvements from below by direct action, solidarity and the organisation of those who directly suffer the injustice, anarchists can make reforms more substantial, effective and long lasting than "reforms" made from above by reformists. By recognising that the effectiveness of a reform is dependent on the power of the oppressed to resist those who would dominate them, anarchists seek change from the bottom-up and so make reforms real rather than just words gathering dust in the law books.

For example, a reformist sees poverty and looks at ways to lessen the destructive and debilitating effects of it: this produced things like the minimum wage, affirmative action, and the projects in the USA and similar reforms in other countries. An anarchist looks at poverty and says, "what causes this?" and attacks that source of poverty, rather than the symptoms. While reformists may succeed in the short run with their institutional panaceas, the festering problems remain untreated, dooming reform to eventual costly, inevitable failure -- measured in human lives, no less. Like a quack that treats the symptoms of a disease without getting rid of what causes it, all the reformist can promise is short-term improvements for a condition that never goes away and may ultimately kill the sufferer. The anarchist, like a real

doctor, investigates the causes of the illness and treats them while fighting the symptoms.

Therefore, anarchists are of the opinion that *"[w]hile preaching against every kind of government, and demanding complete freedom, we must support all struggles for partial freedom, because we are convinced that one learns through struggle, and that once one begins to enjoy a little freedom one ends by wanting it all. We must always be with the people . . . [and] get them to understand . . . [what] they may demand should be obtained by their own efforts and that they should despise and detest whoever is part of, or aspires to, government."* [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas** p. 195]

Anarchists keep the spotlight on the actual problems, which of course alienates them from their "distinguished" reformists foes. Reformists are uniformly "reasonable" and always make use of "experts" who will make everything okay - and they are always wrong in how they deal with a problem.

The recent "health care crisis" in the United States is a prime example of reformism at work.

The reformist says, *"how can we make health care more affordable to people? How can we keep those insurance rates down to levels people can pay?"*

The anarchist says, *"should health care be considered a privilege or a right? Is medical care just another marketable commodity, or do living beings have an inalienable right to it?"*

Notice the difference? The reformist has no problem with people paying for medical care -- business is business, right? The anarchist, on the other hand, has a big problem with that attitude -- we are talking about human lives, here! For now, the reformists have won with their "managed care" reformism, which ensures that the insurance companies and medical industry continue to rake in record profits -- at the expense of people's lives. And, in the end, the proposed reforms were defeated by the power of big business -- without a social movement with radical aims such a result was a forgone conclusion.

Reformists get acutely uncomfortable when you talk about genuinely bringing change to any system -- they don't see anything wrong with the system itself, only with a few pesky side effects. In this sense, they are stewards of the Establishment, and are agents of reaction, despite their altruistic overtures. By failing to attack the sources of problems, and by hindering those who do, they ensure that the problems at hand will only grow over time, and not diminish.

So, anarchists are not opposed to struggles for reforms and improvements in the here and now. Indeed, few anarchists think that an anarchist society will occur without a long period of anarchist activity encouraging and working within social struggle against injustice. Thus Malatesta's words:

*"the subject is not whether we accomplish Anarchism today, tomorrow or within ten centuries, but that we walk towards Anarchism today, tomorrow and always."* ["Towards Anarchism," **Man!**, M. Graham (Ed.), p. 75]



So, when fighting for improvements anarchists do so in an anarchist way, one that encourages self-management, direct action and the creation of libertarian solutions and alternatives to both capitalism and the state.

### J.1.3 Why are anarchists against reformism?

Firstly, it must be pointed out that the struggle for reforms within capitalism is **not** the same as reformism. Reformism is the idea that reforms within capitalism are enough in themselves and attempts to change the system are impossible (and not desirable). As such all anarchists are against this form of reformism -- we think that the system can be (and should be) changed and until that happens any reforms will not get to the root of social problems.

In addition, particularly in the old social democratic labour movement, reformism also meant the belief that social reforms could be used to **transform** capitalism into socialism. In this sense, only the Individualist anarchists and Mutualists can be considered reformist as they think their system of mutual banking can reform capitalism into a co-operative system. However, in contrast to Social Democracy, such anarchists think that such reforms cannot come about via government action, but only by people creating their own alternatives and solutions by their own actions.

So, anarchists oppose reformism because it takes the steam out of revolutionary movements by providing easy, decidedly short-term "solutions" to deep social problems. In this way, reformists can present the public with they've done and say "look, all is better now. The system worked." Trouble is that over time, the problems will only continue to grow, because the reforms did not tackle them in the first place. To use Alexander Berkman's excellent analogy:

*"If you should carry out [the reformers] ideas in your personal life, you would not have a rotten tooth that aches pulled out all at once. You would have it pulled out a little to-day, some more next week, for several months or years, and by then you would be ready to pull it out altogether, so it should not hurt so much. That is the logic of the reformer. Don't be 'too hasty,' don't pull a bad tooth out all at once."* [What is Communist Anarchism?, p. 53]

Rather than seek to change the root cause of the problems (namely in a hierarchical, oppressive and exploitative system), reformists try to make the symptoms better. In the words of Berkman again:

*"Suppose a pipe burst in your house. You can put a bucket under the break to catch the escaping water. You can keep on putting buckets there, but as long as you do not mean the broken pipe, the leakage will continue, no matter how much you may swear about it . . . the leakage will continue until you repair the broken social pipe."* [Op. Cit., p. 56]

What reformism fails to do is fix the underlying causes of the real problems society faces. Therefore, reformists try to pass laws which reduce the level of pollution rather than work to end a system in which

it makes economic sense to pollute. Or they pass laws to improve working conditions and safety while failing to get rid of the wage slavery which creates the bosses whose interests are served by them ignoring those laws and regulations. The list is endless. Ultimately, reformism fails because reformists *"believe in good faith that it is possible to eliminate the existing social evils by recognising and respecting, in practice if not in theory, the basic political and economic institutions which are the cause of, as well as the prop that supports these evils."* [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 82]

Reformists, in other words, are like people who think that treating the symptoms of, say, cholera is enough in and of itself. In practice, of course, the causes that create the disease as well as the disease itself must be combated before the symptoms will disappear. While most people would recognise the truth of this in the case of medicine, fewer apply it to social problems.

Revolutionaries, in contrast to reformists, fight both symptoms **and** the root causes. They recognise that as long as the cause of the evil remains, any attempts to fight the symptoms, however necessary, will never get to the root of the problem. There is no doubt that we have to fight the symptoms, however revolutionaries recognise that this struggle is not an end in itself and should be considered purely as a means of increasing working class strength and social power within society until such time as capitalism and the state (i.e. the root causes of most problems) can be abolished.

Reformists also tend to objectify the people whom they are "helping;" they envision them as helpless, formless masses who need the wisdom and guidance of the "best and the brightest" to lead them to the Promised Land. Reformists mean well, but this is altruism borne of ignorance, which is destructive over the long run. Freedom cannot be given and so any attempt to impose reforms from above cannot help but ensure that people are treated as children, incapable of making their own decisions and, ultimately, dependent on bureaucrats to govern them. This can be seen from public housing. As Colin Ward argues, the *"whole tragedy of publicly provided non-profit housing for rent and the evolution of this form of tenure in Britain is that the local authorities have simply taken over, though less flexibly, the role of the landlord, together with all the dependency and resentment that it engenders."* [**Housing: An Anarchist Approach**, p. 184] This feature of reformism was skilfully used by the right-wing to undermine publicly supported housing and other aspects of the welfare state. The reformist social-democrats reaped what they had sown.

Reformism often amounts to little more than an altruistic contempt for the masses, who are considered as little more than victims who need to be provided for by state. The idea that we may have our own visions of what we want is ignored and replaced by the vision of the reformists who enact legislation **for** us and make "reforms" from the top-down. Little wonder such reforms can be counter-productive -- they cannot grasp the complexity of life and the needs of those subject to them.

Reformists may mean well, but they do not grasp the larger picture -- by focusing exclusively on narrow aspects of a problem, they choose to believe that is the whole problem. In this wilfully narrow examination of pressing social ills, reformists are, more often than not, counter-productive. The disaster of the urban rebuilding projects in the United States (and similar projects in Britain which moved inter-

city working class communities into edge of town developments during the 1950s and 1960s) are an example of reformism at work: upset at the growing slums, reformists supported projects that destroyed the ghettos and built brand-new housing for working class people to live in. They looked nice (initially), but they did nothing to address the problem of poverty and indeed created more problems by breaking up communities and neighbourhoods.

Logically, it makes no sense. Why dance around a problem when you can attack it directly? Reformists dilute social movements, softening and weakening them over time. The AFL-CIO labour unions in the USA, like the ones in Western Europe, killed the labour movement by narrowing and channelling labour activity and taking the power from the workers themselves, where it belongs, and placing it the hands of a bureaucracy. The British Labour Party, after over 100 years of reformist practice, has done little more than manage capitalism, seen most of its reforms eliminated by right-wing governments (and by the following Labour government!) and the creation of a leadership of the party (in the shape of Tony Blair) which is in most ways as right-wing as the Conservative Party (if not more so). Bakunin would not have been surprised.

Reformists say, "*don't do anything, we'll do it for you.*" You can see why anarchists would loathe this sentiment; anarchists are the consummate do-it-yourselfers, and there's nothing reformists hate more than people who can take care of themselves, who will not let them "help" them.

Also, it is funny to hear left-wing "revolutionaries" and "radicals" put forward the reformist line that the capitalist state can help working people (indeed be used to abolish itself!). Despite the fact that leftists blame the state and capitalism for most of the problems we face, they usually turn to the state (run primarily by rich - i.e. capitalist - people) to remedy the situation, not by leaving people alone, but by becoming more involved in people's lives. They support government housing, government jobs, welfare, government-funded and regulated child care, government-funded drug "treatment," and other government-centred programmes and activities. If a capitalist (and racist/sexist/authoritarian) government is the problem, how can it be depended upon to change things to the benefit of working class people or other oppressed sections of the population like blacks and women? Surely any reforms passed by the state will not solve the problem? As Malatesta pointed out, "*[g]overnments and the privileged classes are naturally always guided by instincts of self-preservation, of consolidation and the development of their powers and privileges; and when they consent to reforms it is either because they consider that they will serve their ends or because they do not feel strong enough to resist, and give in, fearing what might otherwise be a worse alternative*" (i.e. revolution) [**Op. Cit.**, p. 81] Therefore, reforms gained by direct action are of a different quality and nature than reforms passed by reformist politicians -- these latter will only serve the interests of the ruling class as they do not threaten their privileges while the former have the potential of real change.

Instead of encouraging working class people to organise themselves and create their own alternatives and solutions to their problem (which can supplement, and ultimately replace, whatever welfare state activity which is actually useful), reformists and other radicals urge people to get the state to act for them. However, the state is not the community and so whatever the state does for people you can be sure it will be in **its** interests, not theirs. As Kropotkin put it:

*"We maintain that the State organisation, having been the force to which the minorities resorted for establishing and organising their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy these privileges . . . the economic and political liberation of man will have to create new forms for its expression in life, instead of those established by the State.*

*"Consequently, the chief aim of Anarchism is to awaken those constructive powers of the labouring masses of the people which at all great moments of history came forward to accomplish the necessary changes . . .*

*"This is also why the Anarchists refuse to accept the functions of legislators or servants of the State. We know that the social revolution will not be accomplished by means of **laws**. Laws only **follow** the accomplished facts . . . [and] remains a dead letter so long as there are not on the spot the living forces required for making of the **tendencies** expressed in the law an accomplished **fact**.*

*"On the other hand . . . the Anarchists have always advised taking an active part in those workers' organisations which carry on the **direct** struggle of Labour against Capital and its protector, -- the State.*

*"Such a struggle . . . better than any other indirect means, permits the worker to obtain some temporary improvements in the present conditions of work [and life in general], while it opens his [or her] eyes to the evil that is done by Capitalism and the State that supports it, and wakes up his thoughts concerning the possibility of organising consumption, production, and exchange without the intervention of the capitalist and the State." [Environment and Evolution, pp.82-3]*

Therefore, while seeking reforms, anarchists are against reformism and reformists. Reforms are not an end in themselves but rather a means of changing society from the bottom-up and a step in that direction:

*"Each step towards economic freedom, each victory won over capitalism will be at the same time a step towards political liberty -- towards liberation from the yoke of the state. . . And each step towards taking from the State any one of its powers and attributes will be helping the masses to win a victory over capitalism." [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 95]*

However, no matter what, anarchists *"will never recognise the institutions; we will take or win all possible reforms with the same spirit that one tears occupied territory from the enemy's grasp in order to keep advancing, and we will always remain enemies of every government."* Therefore, *"[i]t is not true to say . . . [that anarchists] are systematically opposed to improvements, to reforms. They oppose the reformists on the one hand because their methods are less effective for securing reforms from*

*government and employers, who only give in through fear, and because very often the reforms they prefer are those which not only bring doubtful immediate benefits, but also serve to consolidate the existing regime and to give the workers a vested interest in its continued existence."* [**Life and Ideas**, p. 81 and p. 83]

Only by working class people, by their own actions and organisation, getting the state and capital out of the way can produce an improvement in their lives, indeed it is the only thing that will lead to **real** fundamental changes for the better. Encouraging people to rely on themselves instead of the state or capital can lead to self-sufficient, independent, and, hopefully, more rebellious people -- people who will rebel against the real evils in society (capitalist and statist exploitation and oppression, racism, sexism, ecological destruction, and so on) and not their neighbours.

Working class people, despite having fewer options in a number of areas in their lives, due both to hierarchy and restrictive laws, still are capable of making choices about their actions, organising their own lives and are responsible for the consequences of their decisions, just as other people are. To think otherwise is to infantilise them, to consider them less fully human than other people and reproduce the classic capitalist vision of working class people as means of production, to be used, abused, and discarded as required. Such thinking lays the basis for paternalistic interventions in their lives by the state, ensuring their continued dependence and poverty and the continued existence of capitalism and the state.

Ultimately, there are two options:

*"The oppressed either ask for and welcome improvements as a benefit graciously conceded, recognise the legitimacy of the power which is over them, and so do more harm than good by helping to slow down, or divert . . . the processes of emancipation. Or instead they demand and impose improvements by their action, and welcome them as partial victories over the class enemy, using them as a spur to greater achievements, and thus a valid help and a preparation to the total overthrow of privilege, that is, for the revolution."* [Errico Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 81]

Reformism encourages the first attitude within people and so ensures the impoverishment of the human spirit. Anarchism encourages the second attitude and so ensures the enrichment of humanity and the possibility of meaningful change. Why think that ordinary people cannot arrange their lives for themselves as well as Government people can arrange it not for themselves but for others?

## **J.1.4 What attitude do anarchists take to "single-issue" campaigns?**

Firstly, we must note that anarchists do take part in "single-issue" campaigns, but do not nourish false hopes in them. This section explains what anarchists think of such campaigns.

A "single-issue" campaign are usually run by a pressure group which concentrates on tackling issues one at a time. For example, C.N.D. (The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) is a classic example of "single-issue" campaigning with the aim of getting rid of nuclear weapons as the be all and end all of its activity. For anarchists, however, single-issue campaigning can be seen as a source of false hopes. The possibilities of changing one aspect of a totally inter-related system and the belief that pressure groups can compete fairly with transnational corporations, the military and so forth, in their influence over decision making bodies can both be seen to be optimistic at best.

In addition, many "single-issue" campaigns desire to be "apolitical", concentrating purely on the one issue which unites the campaign and so refuse to analyse or discuss the system they are trying to change. This means that they end up accepting the system which causes the problems they are fighting against. At best, any changes achieved by the campaign must be acceptable to the establishment or be so watered down in content that no practical long-term good is done.

This can be seen from the green movement, where groups like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth accept the status quo as a given and limit themselves to working within it. This often leads to them tailoring their "solutions" to be "practical" within a fundamentally anti-ecological political and economic system, so slowing down (at best) ecological disruption.

For anarchists these problems all stem from the fact that social problems cannot be solved as single issues. As Larry Law argues:

*"single issue politics . . . deals with the issue or problem in isolation. When one problem is separated from all other problems, a solution really is impossible. The more campaigning on an issue there is, the narrower its perspectives become . . . As the perspective of each issue narrows, the contradictions turn into absurdities . . . What single issue politics does is attend to 'symptoms' but does not attack the 'disease' itself. It presents such issues as nuclear war, racial and sexual discrimination, poverty, starvation, pornography, etc., as if they were aberrations or faults in the system. In reality such problems are the inevitable consequence of a social order based on exploitation and hierarchical power . . . single issue campaigns lay their appeal for relief at the feet of the very system which oppresses them. By petitioning they acknowledge the right of those in power to exercise that power as they choose."* [**Bigger Cages, Longer Chains**, pp. 17-20].

Single issue politics often prolong the struggle for a free society by fostering illusions that it is just parts of the capitalist system which are wrong, not the whole of it, and that those at the top of the system can, and will, act in our interests. While such campaigns can do some good, practical, work and increase knowledge and education about social problems, they are limited by their very nature and can not lead to extensive improvements in the here and now, never mind a free society.

Therefore, anarchists often support and work within single-issue campaigns, trying to get them to use effective methods of activity (such as direct action), work in an anarchistic manner (i.e. from the bottom

up) and to try to "politicise" them into questioning the whole of the system. However, anarchists do not let themselves be limited to such activity as a social revolution or movement is not a group of single-issue campaigns but a mass movement which understands the inter-related nature of social problems and so the need to change every aspect of life.

## J.1.5 Why do anarchists try to generalise social struggles?

Basically, we do it in order to encourage and promote solidarity. This is **the** key to winning struggles in the here and now as well as creating the class consciousness necessary to create an anarchist society. At its most simple, generalising different struggles means increasing the chances of winning them. Take, for example, a strike in which one trade or one workplace goes on strike while the others continue to work:

*"Consider yourself how foolish and inefficient is the present form of labour organisation in which one trade or craft may be on strike while the other branches of the same industry continue to work. Is it not ridiculous that when the street car workers of New York, for instance, quit work, the employees of the subway, the cab and omnibus drivers remain on the job? . . . It is clear, then, that you compel compliance [from your bosses] only when you are determined, when your union is strong, when you are well organised, when you are united in such a manner that the boss cannot run his factory against your will. But the employer is usually some big . . . company that has mills or mines in various places. . . If it cannot operate . . . in Pennsylvania because of a strike, it will try to make good its losses by continuing . . . and increasing production [elsewhere]. . . In that way the company . . . breaks the strike."* [Alexander Berkman, **The ABC of Anarchism**, pp. 53-54]

By organising all workers in one union (after all they all have the same boss) it increases the power of each trade considerably. It may be easy for a boss to replace a few workers, but a whole workplace would be far more difficult. By organising all workers in the same industry, the power of each workplace is correspondingly increased. Extending this example to outside the workplace, its clear that by mutual support between different groups increases the chances of each group winning its fight.

As the I.W.W. put it, "**An injury to one is an injury to all.**" By generalising struggles, by practising mutual support and aid we can ensure that when we are fighting for our rights and against injustice we will not be isolated and alone. If we don't support each other, groups will be picked off one by one and if we are go into conflict with the system there will be on-one there to support us and we may lose.

Therefore, from an anarchist point of view, the best thing about generalising different struggles together is that it leads to an increased spirit of solidarity and responsibility as well as increased class consciousness. This is because by working together and showing solidarity those involved get to understand their common interests and that the struggle is not against **this** injustice or **that** boss but against **all** injustice and **all** bosses.

This sense of increased social awareness and solidarity can be seen from the experience of the C.N.T in Spain during the 1930s. The C.N.T. organised all workers in a given area into one big union. Each workplace was a union branch and were joined together in a local area confederation. The result was that:

*"The territorial basis of organisation linkage [of the C.N.T. unions] brought all the workers from one area together and fomented working class solidarity over and before corporative [i.e. industrial] solidarity."* [J. Romero Maura, "The Spanish Case", in **Anarchism Today**, D. Apter and J. Joll (eds.), p. 75]

This can also be seen from the experiences of the syndicalist unions in Italy and France as well. The structure of such local federations also situates the workplace in the community where it really belongs (particularly if the commune concept supported by social anarchists is to be realistic).

Also, by uniting struggles together, we can see that there are really no "single issues" - that all various different problems are inter-linked. For example, ecological problems are not just that, but have a political and economic basis and that economic and social domination and exploitation spills into the environment. Inter-linking struggles means that they can be seen to be related to other struggles against capitalist exploitation and oppression and so encourage solidarity and mutual aid. What goes on in the environment, for instance, is directly related to questions of domination and inequality within human society, that pollution is often directly related to companies cutting corners to survive in the market or increase profits. Similarly, struggles against sexism or racism can be seen as part of a wider struggle against hierarchy, exploitation and oppression in all their forms. As such, uniting struggles has an important educational effect above and beyond the benefits in terms of winning struggles.

Murray Bookchin presents a concrete example of this process of linking issues and widening the struggle:

*"Assume there is a struggle by welfare mothers to increase their allotments . . . Without losing sight of the concrete issues that initially motivated the struggle, revolutionaries would try to catalyse an order of relationships between the mothers entirely different from [existing ones] . . . They would try to foster a deep sense of community, a rounded human relationship that would transform the very subjectivity of the people involved . . . Personal relationships would be intimate, not merely issue-orientated. People would get to **know** each other, to **confront** each other; they would **explore** each other with a view of achieving the most complete, unalienated relationships. Women would discuss sexism, as well as their welfare allotments, child-rearing as well as harassment by landlords, their dreams and hopes as human beings as well as the cost of living.*

*"From this intimacy there would grow, hopefully, a supportive system of kinship, mutual aid, sympathy and solidarity in daily life. The women might collaborate to establish a*



*rotating system of baby sitters and child-care attendants, the co-operative buying of good food at greatly reduced prices, the common cooking and partaking of meals, the mutual learning of survival skills and the new social ideas, the fostering of creative talents, and many other shared experiences. Every aspect of life that could be explored and changed would be one part of the kind of relationships . . .*

*"The struggle for increased allotments would expand beyond the welfare system to the schools, the hospitals, the police, the physical, cultural, aesthetic and recreational resources of the neighbourhood, the stores, the houses, the doctors and lawyers in the area, and so on - into the very ecology of the district.*

*"What I have said on this issue could be applied to every issue -- unemployment, bad housing, racism, work conditions -- in which an insidious assimilation of bourgeois modes of functioning is masked as 'realism' and 'actuality.' The new order of relationships that could be developed from a welfare struggle . . . [can ensure that the] future penetrates the present; it recasts the way people 'organise' and the goals for which they strive." [Op. Cit., pp. 231-3]*

As the anarchist slogan puts it, "**Resistance is Fertile.**" Planting the seed of autonomy, direct action and self-liberation can result, potentially, in the blossoming of a free individual due to the nature of struggle itself (see also [section A.2.7](#)) Therefore, the generalisation of social struggle is not only a key way of winning a specific fight, it can (and should) also spread into different aspects of life and society and play a key part in developing free individuals who reject hierarchy in all aspects of their life.

Social problems are not isolated from each other and so struggles against them cannot be. The nature of struggle is such that once people start questioning one aspect of society, the questioning of the rest soon follow. So, anarchists seek to generalise struggles for these three reasons -- firstly, to ensure the solidarity required to win; secondly, to combat the many social problems we face as **people** and to show how they are inter-related; and, thirdly, to encourage the transformation of those involved into unique individuals in touch with their humanity, a humanity eroded by hierarchical society and domination.

## J.2 What is direct action?

Direct action, to use Rudolf Rocker's words, is *"every method of immediate warfare by the workers [or other sections of society] against their economic and political oppressors. Among these the outstanding are: the strike, in all its gradations from the simple wage struggle to the general strike; the boycott; sabotage in all its countless forms; [occupations and sit-down strikes;] anti-militarist propaganda, and in particularly critical cases,... armed resistance of the people for the protection of life and liberty."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 66]

Not that anarchists think that direct action is only applicable within the workplace. Far from it. Direct action must occur everywhere! So, in non-workplace situations, direct action includes rent strikes, consumer boycotts, occupations (which, of course, can include sit-in strikes by workers), eco-tage, individual and collective non-payment of taxes, blocking roads and holding up construction work of an anti-social nature and so forth. Also direct action, in a workplace setting, includes strikes and protests on social issues, not directly related to working conditions and pay. Such activity aims to ensure the *"protection of the community against the most pernicious outgrowths of the present system. The social strike seeks to force upon the employers a responsibility to the public. Primarily it has in view the protection of the customers, of whom the workers themselves [and their families] constitute the great majority"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 72]

Basically, direct action means that instead of getting someone else to act for you (e.g. a politician) you act for yourself. Its essential feature is an organised protest by ordinary people to make a change by their own efforts. Thus Voltairine De Cleyre's excellent statement on this topic:

*"Every person who ever thought he had a right to assert, and went boldly and asserted it, himself, or jointly with others that shared his convictions, was a direct actionist. Some thirty years ago I recall that the Salvation Army was vigorously practicing direct action in the maintenance of the freedom of its members to speak, assemble, and pray. Over and over they were arrested, fined, and imprisoned; but they kept right on singing, praying, and marching, till they finally compelled their persecutors to let them alone. The Industrial Workers [of the World] are now conducting the same fight, and have, in a number of cases, compelled the officials to let them alone by the same direct tactics.*

*"Every person who ever had a plan to do anything, and went and did it, or who laid his plan before others, and won their co-operation to do it with him, without going to external authorities to please do the thing for them, was a direct actionist. All co-operative experiments are essentially direct action.*

*"Every person who ever in his life had a difference with anyone to settle, and went straight to the other persons involved to settle it, either by a peaceable plan or otherwise,*

*was a direct actionist. Examples of such action are strikes and boycotts; many persons will recall the action of the housewives of New York who boycotted the butchers, and lowered the price of meat; at the present moment a butter boycott seems looming up, as a direct reply to the price-makers for butter.*

*"These actions are generally not due to any one's reasoning overmuch on the respective merits of directness or indirectness, but are the spontaneous retorts of those who feel oppressed by a situation. In other words, all people are, most of the time, believers in the principle of direct action, and practicers of it. . ."* [Direct Action]

So direct action means acting for yourself against injustice and oppression. It can, sometimes, involve putting pressure on politicians or companies, for example, to ensure a change in an oppressive law or destructive practices. However, such appeals are direct action simply because they do not assume that the parties in question we will act for us - indeed the assumption is that change only occurs when we act to create it. Regardless of what the action is, *"if such actions are to have the desired empowerment effect, they must be largely self-generated, rather than being devised and directed from above."* [Martha Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, p. 33]

So, in a nutshell, direct action is any form of activity which people themselves decide upon and organise themselves which is based on their own collective strength and does not involve getting intermediates to act for them. As such direct action is a natural expression of liberty, of self-government for *"[d]irect action against the authority in the shop, direct action against the authority of the law, direct action against the invasive, meddlesome authority of our moral code, is the logical, consistent method of Anarchism."* [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 62-63] It is clear that by acting for yourself you are expressing the ability to govern yourself. Thus its a means by which people can take control of their own lives. It is a means of self-empowerment and self-liberation:

*"Direct action meant that the goal of any and all these activities was to provide ways for people to get in touch with their own powers and capacities, to take back the power of naming themselves and their lives."* [Martha Ackelsberg, **Op. Cit.**, p. 32]

In other words, anarchists reject the view that society is static and that people's consciousness, values, ideas and ideals cannot be changed. Far from it and anarchists support direct action **because** it actively encourages the transformation of those who use it. Direct action is the means of creating a new consciousness, a means of self-liberation from the chains placed around our minds, emotions and spirits by hierarchy and oppression.

Because direct action is the expression of liberty, the powers that be are vitally concerned only when the oppressed use direct action to win its demands, for it is a method which is not easy or cheap to combat. Any hierarchical system is placed into danger when those at the bottom start to act for themselves and, historically, people have invariably gained more by acting directly than could have been won by playing ring around the rosy with indirect means.

Direct action tore the chains of open slavery from humanity. Over the centuries it has established individual rights and modified the life and death power of the master class. Direct action won political liberties such as the vote and free speech. Used fully, used wisely and well, direct action can forever end injustice and the mastery of humans by other humans.

In the sections that follow, we will indicate why anarchists are in favour of direct action and why they are against electioneering as a means of change.

## J.2.1 Why do anarchists favour using direct action to change things?

Simply because it is effective and it has a radicalising impact on those who practice it. As it is based on people acting for themselves, it shatters the dependency and marginalisation created by hierarchy. As Murray Bookchin argues, "*[w]hat is even more important about direct action is that it forms a decisive step toward recovering the personal power over social life that the centralised, over-bearing bureaucracies have usurped from the people . . . we not only gain a sense that we can control the course of social events again; we recover a new sense of selfhood and personality without which a truly free society, based in self-activity and self-management, is utterly impossible.*" [**Toward an Ecological Society**, p. 47]

By acting for themselves, people gain a sense of their own power and abilities. This is essential if people are to run their own lives. As such, direct action is **the** means by which individuals empower themselves, to assert their individuality, to make themselves count as individuals. It is the opposite of hierarchy, within which individuals are told again and again that they are nothing, are insignificant and must dissolve themselves into a higher power (the state, the company, the party, the people, etc.) and feel proud in participating in the strength and glory of this higher power. Direct action, in contrast, is the means of asserting ones individual opinion, interests and happiness, of fighting against self-negation:

*"man has as much liberty as he is willing to take. Anarchism therefore stands for direct action, the open defiance of, and resistance to, all laws and restrictions, economic, social and moral. But defiance and resistance are illegal. Therein lies the salvation of man. Everything illegal necessitates integrity, self-reliance, and courage. In short, it calls for free independent spirits, for men who are men, and who have a bone in their back which you cannot pass your hand through."* [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 61-62]

In addition, because direct action is based around individuals solving their own problems, by their own action, it awakens those aspects of individuals crushed by hierarchy and oppression - such as initiative, solidarity, imagination, self-confidence and a sense of individual and collective power, that you do matter and count as an individual and that you, and others like you, **can** change the world. Direct Action is the means by which people can liberate themselves and educate themselves in the ways of and skills required for self-management and liberty. Hence:

*"anarchists insisted that we learn to think and act for ourselves by joining together in organisations in which our experience, our perception and our activity can guide and make the change. Knowledge does not precede experience, it flows from it. . . People learn to be free only by exercising freedom. [As one Spanish Anarchist put it] 'We are not going to find ourselves. . . with people ready-made for the future. . . Without continued exercise of their faculties, there will be no free people. . . The external revolution and the internal revolution presuppose one another, and they must be simultaneous in order to be successful.'" [Martha Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, pp. 32-33]*

So direct action, to use Murray Bookchin's words, is *"the means whereby each individual awakens to the hidden powers within herself and himself, to a new sense of self-confidence and self-competence; it is the means whereby individuals take control of society directly."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 48]

In addition, direct action creates the need for new forms of social organisation. These new forms of organisation will be informed and shaped by the process of self-liberation, so be more anarchistic and based upon self-management. Direct action, as well as liberating individuals, can also create the free, self-managed organisations which can replace the current hierarchical ones. In other words, direct action helps create the new world in the shell of the old:

*"direct action not only empowered those who participated in it, it also had effects on others. . . [including] exemplary action that attracted adherents by the power of the positive example it set. Contemporary examples. . . include food or day-care co-ops, collectively run businesses, sweat equity housing programmes, women's self-help health collectives, urban squats or women's peace camps [as well as traditional examples as industrial unions, social centres, etc.]. While such activities empower those who engage in them, they also demonstrate to others that non-hierarchical forms of organisation can and do exist - and that they can function effectively."* [Martha Ackelsberg, **Op. Cit.**, p. 33]

Also, direct action such as strikes encourage and promote class consciousness and class solidarity. According to Kropotkin, *"the strike develops the sentiment of solidarity"* while for Bakunin it *"is the beginnings of the social war of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. . . Strikes are a valuable instrument from two points of view. Firstly, they electrify the masses, invigorate their moral energy and awaken in them the feeling of the deep antagonism which exists between their interests and those of the bourgeoisie. . . secondly they help immensely to provoke and establish between the workers of all trades, localities and countries the consciousness and very fact of solidarity: a twofold action, both negative and positive, which tends to constitute directly the new world of the proletariat, opposing it almost in an absolute way to the bourgeois world."* [cited in Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872-1886**, p. 256, pp. 216-217]

Direct action and the movements that used it (such as unionism) would be the means to develop the *"revolutionary intelligence of the workers"* and so ensure *"emancipation through practice"* (to use Bakunin's words).

Direct action, therefore, helps to create anarchists and anarchist alternatives within capitalism and statism. As such, it plays an essential role in anarchist theory and activity. For anarchists, direct action *"is not a 'tactic'. . . it is a moral principle, an ideal, a sensibility. It should imbue every aspect of our lives and behaviour and outlook."* [Murray Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 48]

## J.2.2 Why do anarchists reject voting as a means for change?

Simply because electioneering does not work. History is littered with examples of radicals being voted into office only to become as, or even more, conservative than the politicians they replaced.

As we have discussed previously (see [section B.2](#) and related sections) any government is under pressure from two sources of power, the state bureaucracy and big business. This ensures that any attempts at social change would be undermined and made hollow by vested interests, assuming they even reached that level of discussion to begin with (the de-radicalising effects of electioneering is discussed below in [section J.2.6](#)). Here we will highlight the power of vested interests within democratic government.

In [section B.2](#) we only discussed the general nature of the state and what its role within society is (i.e. *"the preservation of the economic 'status quo,' the protection of the economic privileges of the ruling class,"* in the words of Luigi Galleani). However, as the effectiveness of the vote to secure change is now the topic we will have to discuss how and why the state and capital restricts and controls political action.

Taking capital to begin with, if we assume that a relatively reformist government was elected it would soon find itself facing various economic pressures. Either capital would disinvest, so forcing the government to back down in the face of economic collapse, or the government in question would control capital leaving the country and so would soon be isolated from new investment and its currency would become worthless. Either way, the economy would be severely damaged and the promised "reforms" would be dead letters. In addition, this economic failure would soon result in popular revolt which in turn would lead to a more authoritarian state as "democracy" was protected from the people.

Far fetched? No, not really. In January, 1974, the FT Index for the London Stock Exchange stood at 500 points. In February, the miner's went on strike, forcing Heath to hold (and lose) a general election. The new Labour government (which included many left-wingers in its cabinet) talked about nationalising the banks and much heavy industry. In August, 74, Tony Benn announced Plans to nationalise the ship building industry. By December of that year, the FT index had fallen to 150 points. By 1976 the British Treasury was spending \$100 million a day buying back of its own money to support the pound [**The London Times**, 10/6/76]. The economic pressure of capitalism was at work:

*"The further decline in the value of the pound has occurred despite the high level of*

*interest rates. . . dealers said that selling pressure against the pound was not heavy or persistent, but there was an almost total lack of interest amongst buyers. The drop in the pound is extremely surprising in view of the unanimous opinion of bankers, politicians and officials that the currency is undervalued" [The London Times, 27/5/76]*

The Labour government faced with the power of international capital ended up having to receive a temporary "bailing out" by the I.M.F. who imposed a package of cuts and controls which translated to Labour saying "*We'll do anything you say*", in the words of one economist [Peter Donaldson, **A Question of Economics**, p. 89]. The social costs of these policies was massive, with the Labour government being forced to crack down on strikes and the weakest sectors of society (but that's not to forget that they "*cut expenditure by twice the amount the I.M.F. were promised.*" [**Ibid.**]). In the backlash to this, Labour lost the next election to a right-wing, pro-free market government which continued where Labour had left off.

Or, to use a more recent example, "*[t]he fund managers [who control the flow of money between financial centres and countries] command such vast resources that their clashes with governments in the global marketplace usually ends up in humiliating defeat for politicians. . . In 1992, US financier George Soros single-handedly destroyed the British government's attempts to keep the pound in the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM). Soros effectively bet, and won, that he could force the British government to devalue. Using his huge resources, he engineered a run on the pound, overwhelming the Bank of England's attempts to use its reserves to keep sterling within its ERM band. The British government capitulated by suspending sterling's membership of the ERM (an effective devaluation) and Soros came away from his victory some \$1bn richer. Fund managers then picked off other currencies one by one, derailing the drive for European monetary union, which would, incidentally, have cut their profits by making them unable to buy and sell between the different European currencies.*" [Duncan Green, **The Silent Revolution**, p. 124]

The fact is that capital will not invest in a country which does not meet its approval and this is an effective weapon to control democratically elected governments. And with the increase in globalisation of capital over the last 30 years this weapon is even more powerful (a weapon we may add which was improved, via company and state funded investment and research in communication technology, precisely to facilitate the attack on working class reforms and power in the developed world, in other words capital ran away to teach us a lesson - see sections [C.8.1](#), [C.8.2](#), [C.8.3](#) and [D.5.3](#)).

As far as political pressures go, we must remember that there is a difference between the state and government. The state is the permanent collection of institutions that have entrenched power structures and interests. The government is made up of various politicians. It's the institutions that have power in the state due to their permanence, not the representatives who come and go. In other words, the state bureaucracy has vested interests and elected politicians cannot effectively control them. This network of behind the scenes agencies can be usefully grouped into two parts:

*"By 'the secret state' we mean. . . the security services, MI5 [the FBI in the USA], Special Branch. . .*

*MI6 [the CIA]. By 'the permanent government' . . . we mean the secret state plus the Cabinet Office and upper echelons of Home and Foreign and Commonwealth Offices, the Armed Forces and Ministry of Defence, the nuclear power industry and its satellite ministries; and the so-called 'Permanent Secretaries Club,' the network of very senior civil servants - the 'Mandarins.' In addition. . . its satellites" including M.P.s (particularly right-wing ones), 'agents of influence' in the media, former security services personnel, think tanks and opinion forming bodies, front companies of the security services, and so on. [Stephen Dorril and Robin Ramsay, **Smear! Wilson and the Secret State**, p. X, XI]*

These bodies, while theoretically under the control of the elected government, can effectively (via disinformation, black operations, bureaucratic slowdowns, media attacks, etc.) ensure that any government trying to introduce policies which the powers that be disagree with will be stopped. In other words the state is **not** a neutral body, somehow rising above vested interests and politics. It is, and always will be, a institution which aims to protect specific sections of society as well as its own.

An example of this "secret state" at work can be found in **Smear!**, where Dorril and Ramsay document the campaign against the Labour Prime Minister of Britain, Harold Wilson, which resulted in his resignation. They also indicate the pressures which Labour M.P. Tony Benn was subjected to by "his" Whitehall advisers:

*"In early 1985, the campaign against Benn by the media was joined by the secret state. The timing is interesting. In January, his Permanent Secretary had 'declared war' and the following month began the most extraordinary campaign of harassment any major British politician has experienced. While this is not provable by any means, it does look as though there is a clear causal connection between withdrawal of Prime Ministerial support, the open hostility from the Whitehall mandarins and the onset of covert operations." [Stephen Dorril and Robin Ramsay, **Op. Cit.**, p. 279]*

Not to mention the role of the secret state in undermining reformist and radical organisations and movements. Thus involvement goes from pure information gathering on "subversives", to disruption and repression. Taking the example of the US secret state, Howard Zinn notes that in 1975

*"congressional committees. . . began investigations of the FBI and CIA.*

*"The CIA inquiry disclosed that the CIA had gone beyond its original mission of gathering intelligence and was conducting secret operations of all kinds . . . [for example] the CIA - with the collusion of a secret Committee of Forty headed by Henry Kissinger - had worked to 'destabilize' the [democratically elected, left-wing] Chilean government. . .*

*"The investigation of the FBI disclosed many years of illegal actions to disrupt and destroy radical groups and left-wing groups of all kinds. The FBI had sent forged letters, engaged in burglaries. . . opened mail illegally, and in the case of Black Panther leader Fred Hampton, seems to have conspired in murder. . .*



*"The investigations themselves revealed the limits of government willingness to probe into such activities. . . [and they] submitted its findings on the CIA to the CIA to see if there was material the Agency wanted omitted."* [**A People's History of the United States**, pp. 542-3]

Also, the CIA secretly employs several hundred American academics to write books and other materials to be used for propaganda purposes, an important weapon in the battle for hearts and minds. In other words, the CIA, FBI [and their equivalents in other countries] and other state bodies can hardly be considered neutral bodies, who just follow orders. They are a network of vested interests, with specific ideological viewpoints and aims which usually place the wishes of the voting population below maintaining the state-capital power structure in place.

This can be seen most dramatically in the military coup in Chile against the democratically re-elected (left-wing) Allende government by the military, aided by the CIA, US based corporations and the US government cutting economic aid to the country (specifically to make it harder for the Allende regime). The coup resulted in tens of thousands murdered and years of terror and dictatorship, but the danger of a pro-labour government was stopped and the business environment was made healthy for profits. An extreme example, we know, but important ones for any believer in freedom or the idea that the state machine is somehow neutral and can be captured and used by left-wing parties.

Therefore we cannot expect a different group of politicians to react in different ways to the same economic and institutional influences and interests. Its no coincidence that left-wing, reformist parties have introduced right-wing, pro-capitalist ("Thatcherite/Reaganite") policies at the same time as right-wing, explicitly pro-capitalist parties introduced them in the UK and the USA. As Clive Ponting (an ex-British Civil Servant) points out, this is to be expected:

*"the function of the political system in any country in the world is to regulate, but not alter radically, the existing economic structure and its linked power relationships. The great illusion of politics is that politicians have the power to make whatever changes they like. . . On a larger canvas what real control do the politicians in any country have over the operation of the international monetary system, the pattern of world trade with its built in subordination of the third world or the operation of multi-national companies? These institutions and the dominating mechanism that underlies them - the profit motive as a sole measure of success - are essentially out of control and operating on autopilot."* [quoted in **Alternatives**, # 5, p. 10]

Of course there have been examples of quite extensive reforms which did benefit working class people in major countries. The New Deal in the USA and the 1945-51 Labour Governments spring to mind. Surely these indicate that our claims above are false? Simply put, no, they do not. Reforms can be won from the state when the dangers of not giving in outweigh the problems associated with the reforms. Reforms can therefore be used to save the capitalist system and the state and even improve their operation (with, of course, the possibility of getting rid of the reforms when they are no longer required).

For example, both the reformist governments of 1930s USA and 1940s UK were under pressure from below, by waves of militant working class struggle which could have developed beyond mere reformism. The waves of sit-down strikes in the 1930s ensured the passing of pro-union laws which while allowing workers to organise without fear of being fired. This measure also involved the unions in running the capitalist-state machine (and so making them responsible for controlling "unofficial" workplace action and so ensuring profits). The nationalisation of roughly 20% of the UK economy during the Labour administration of 1945 (the most unprofitable sections of it as well) was also the direct result of ruling class fear. As Quintin Hogg, a Tory M.P. at the time, said, *"If you don't give the people social reforms they are going to give you social revolution"*. Memories of the near revolutions across Europe after the first war were obviously in many minds, on both sides. Not that nationalisation was particularly feared as "socialism." Indeed it was argued that it was the best means of improving the performance of the British economy. As anarchists at the time noted *"the real opinions of capitalists can be seen from Stock Exchange conditions and statements of industrialists than the Tory Front bench . . . [and from these we] see that the owning class is not at all displeased with the record and tendency of the Labour Party"* [**Neither Nationalisation nor Privatisation: Selections from Freedom 1945-1950**, Vernon Richards (Ed), p. 9]

So, if extensive reforms have occurred, just remember what they were in response to militant pressure from below and that we could have got so much more.

Therefore, in general, things have little changed over the one hundred years since this anarchist argument against electioneering was put forward:

*"in the electoral process, the working class will always be cheated and deceived. . . if they did manage to send, one, or ten, or fifty of them[selves to Parliament], they would become spoiled and powerless. Furthermore, even if the majority of Parliament were composed of workers, they could do nothing. Not only is there the senate . . . the chiefs of the armed forces, the heads of the judiciary and of the police, who would be against the parliamentary bills advanced by such a chamber and would refuse to enforce laws favouring the workers (it has happened [for example the 8 hour working day was legally created in many US states by the 1870s, but workers had to strike for it in 1886 as it was not enforced]; but furthermore laws are not miraculous; no law can prevent the capitalists from exploiting the workers; no law can force them to keep their factories open and employ workers at such and such conditions, nor force shopkeepers to sell at a certain price, and so on."* [S. Merlino, quoted by L. Galleani, **The End of Anarchism?**, p. 13]

Moreover, anarchists reject voting for other reasons. The fact is that electoral procedures are the opposite of direct action - they are **based** on getting someone else to act on your behalf. Therefore, far from empowering people and giving them a sense of confidence and ability, electioneering **dis**-empowers them by creating a "leader" figure from which changes are expected to flow. As Martin observes:

*"all the historical evidence suggests that parties are more a drag than an impetus to radical change. One obvious problem is that parties can be voted out. All the policy changes they brought in can simply be reversed later.*

*"More important, though, is the pacifying influence of the radical party itself. On a number of occasions, radical parties have been elected to power as a result of popular upsurges. Time after time, the 'radical' parties have become chains to hold back the process of radical change" ["Democracy without Elections," **Reinventing Anarchy, Again**, Howard J. Ehrlich (ed.), p. 124]*

This can easily be seen from the history of the various left-wing parties. Ralph Miliband points out that labour or socialist parties, elected in periods of social turbulence, have often acted to reassure the ruling elite by dampening popular action that could have threatened capitalist interests [**The State in Capitalist Society**, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969]. For example, the first project undertaken by the Popular Front, elected in France in 1936, was to put an end to strikes and occupations and generally to cool popular militancy, which was the Front's strongest ally in coming to power. The Labour government elected in Britain in 1945 got by with as few reforms as it could, refusing to consider changing basic social structures. In addition, within the first week of taking office it sent troops in to break the dockers' strike. Labour has used troops to break strikes far more often than the Conservatives have.

These points indicate why existing power structures cannot effectively be challenged through elections. For one thing, elected representatives are not **mandated**, which is to say they are not tied in any binding way to particular policies, no matter what promises they have made or what voters may prefer. Around election time, the public's influence on politicians is strongest, but after the election, representatives can do practically whatever they want, because there is no procedure for **instant recall**. In practice it is impossible to recall politicians before the next election, and between elections they are continually exposed to pressure from powerful special-interest groups -- especially business lobbyists, state bureaucracies and political party power brokers.

Under such pressure, the tendency of politicians to break campaign promises has become legendary. Generally, such promise breaking is blamed on bad character, leading to periodic "throw-the-bastards-out" fervour -- after which a new set of representatives is elected, who also mysteriously turn out to be bastards! In reality it is the system itself that produces "bastards," the sell-outs and shady dealing we have come to expect from politicians. As Alex Comfort argues, political office attracts power-hungry, authoritarian, and ruthless personalities, or at least tends to bring out such qualities in those who are elected (see his classic work **Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State: A Criminological Approach to the Problem of Power**).

In light of modern "democracy", it is amazing that anyone takes the system seriously enough to vote at all. And in fact, voter turnout in the US and other nations where "democracy" is practiced in this fashion

is typically low. Nevertheless, some voters continue to participate, pinning their hopes on new parties or trying to reform a major party. For anarchists, this activity is pointless as it does not get at the root of the problem. It is not politicians or parties which are the problem, its a system which shapes them into its own image and marginalises and alienates people due to its hierarchical and centralised nature. No amount of party politics can change that.

However, we should make it clear that most anarchists recognise there is a difference between voting for a government and voting in referendum. Here we are discussing the former, electioneering, as a means of social change. Referenda are closer to anarchist ideas of direct democracy and are, while flawed, far better than electing a politician to office once every four years or so.

In addition, Anarchists are not necessarily against all involvement in electoral politics. Bakunin thought it could sometimes be useful to participate in local elections in relatively small communities where regular contact with representatives can maintain accountability. This argument has been taken up by such Social Ecologists such as Murray Bookchin who argues that anarchists, by taking part in local elections, can use this technique to create self-governing community assemblies. However, few anarchists support such means to create community assemblies (see [section J.5.14](#) for a discussion on this).

However, in large cities and in regional or national elections, certain processes have developed which render the term "democracy" inappropriate. These processes include mass advertising, bribery of voters through government projects in local areas, party "machines," the limitation of news coverage to two (or at most three) major parties, and government manipulation of the news. Party machines choose candidates, dictate platforms, and contact voters by phone campaigns. Mass advertising "packages" candidates like commodities, selling them to voters by emphasising personality rather than policies, while media news coverage emphasise the "horse race" aspects of campaigns rather than policy issues. Government spending in certain areas (or more cynically, the announcement of new projects in such areas just before elections) has become a standard technique for buying votes. And we have already examined the mechanisms through which the media is made dependent of government sources of information (see [section D.3](#)), a development that obviously helps incumbents.

Therefore, for these related reasons anarchists reject the voting as a means of change. Instead we wholeheartedly support direct action as the means of getting improvements in the here and now as well as the means of creating an alternative to the current system.

### **J.2.3 What are the political implications of voting?**

At its most basic, voting implies agreement with the status quo. It is worth quoting the Scottish libertarian socialist James Kelman at length on this:

*"State propaganda insists that the reason why at least 40 percent of the voting public don't vote at all is because they have no feelings one way or the other. They say the same*

*thing in the USA, where some 85 percent of the population are apparently 'apolitical' since they don't bother registering a vote. Rejection of the political system is inadmissible as far as the state is concerned. . . Of course the one thing that does happen when you vote is that someone else has endorsed an unfair political system. . . A vote for any party or any individual is always a vote for the political system. You can interpret your vote in whichever way you like but it remains an endorsement of the apparatus. . . If there was any possibility that the apparatus could effect a change in the system then they would dismantle it immediately. In other words the political system is an integral state institution, designed and refined to perpetuate its own existence. Ruling authority fixes the agenda by which the public are allowed 'to enter the political arena' and that's the fix they've settled on" [Some Recent Attacks, p.87]*

We are taught from an early age that voting in elections is right and a duty. In US schools, children elect class presidents and other officers. Often mini-general elections are held to "educate" children in "democracy". Periodically, election coverage monopolises the media. We are made to feel guilty about shirking our "civic responsibility" if we don't vote. Countries that have no elections, or only rigged elections, are regarded as failures [Benjamin Ginsberg, **The Consequences of Consent: Elections, Citizen Control and Popular Acquiescence**, Addison-Wesley, 1982]. As a result, elections have become a quasi-religious ritual.

As Brian Martin points out, however, "*elections in practice have served well to maintain dominant power structures such as private property, the military, male domination, and economic inequality. None of these has been seriously threatened through voting. It is from the point of view of radical critics that elections are most limiting.*" ["Democracy without Elections," **Social Anarchism, Reinventing Anarchy, Again**, Howard J. Ehrlich (ed.), p. 124]

Benjamin Ginsberg has noted other ways in which elections serve the interests of state power. Firstly, voting helps to legitimate government; hence suffrage has often been expanded at times when there was little popular demand for it but when mass support of government was crucial, as during a war or revolution. Secondly, since voting is organised and supervised by government, it comes to be seen as the only legitimate form of political participation, thus making it likely that any revolts by oppressed or marginalized groups will be viewed by the general public as illegitimate. [**The Consequences of Consent**]

In addition, Ginsberg argues that, historically, by enlarging the number of people who participate in 'politics,' and by turning this participation into the "safe" activities of campaigning and voting, elections have reduced the risk of more radical direct action. That is, voting disempowers the grassroots by diverting energy from grassroots action. After all, the goal of electoral politics is to elect a representative who will act **for** us. Therefore, instead taking direct action to solve problems ourselves, action becomes indirect, through the government. This is an insidiously easy trap to fall into, as we have been conditioned in hierarchical society from day one into attitudes of passivity and obedience, which gives most of us a deep-seated tendency to leave important matters to the "experts" and "authorities."

Anarchists also criticise elections for giving citizens the false impression that the government serves, or can serve, the people. As Martin puts it, *"the founding of the modern state a few centuries ago was met with great resistance: people would refuse to pay taxes, to be conscripted or to obey laws passed by national governments. The introduction of voting and the expanded suffrage have greatly aided the expansion of state power. Rather than seeing the system as one of ruler and ruled, people see at least the possibility of using state power to serve themselves. As electoral participation has increased, the degree of resistance to taxation, military service, and the immense variety of laws regulating behaviour, has been greatly attenuated"* [Op. Cit., p. 126]

Ironically, however, voting has legitimated the growth of state power to such an extent that the state is now beyond any real popular control by the form of participation that made that growth possible. Nevertheless, as Ginsberg observes, the idea that electoral participation means popular control of government is so deeply implanted in people's psyches *"that even the most overtly skeptical cannot fully free themselves from it"* [The Consequences of Consent, op. cit., p. 241].

Therefore, voting has the important political implication of encouraging people to identify with state power and to justify the status quo. In addition, it feeds the illusion that the state is neutral and that electing parties to office means that people have control over their own lives. Moreover, elections have a tendency to make people passive, to look for salvation from above and not from their own self-activity. As such it produces a division between leaders and led, with the voters turned into spectators of activity, not the participants within it.

All this does not mean, obviously, that anarchists prefer dictatorship or an "enlightened" monarchy. Far from it, democratising state power can be an important step towards abolishing it. All anarchists agree with Bakunin when he argued that *"the most imperfect republic is a thousand times better than even the most enlightened monarchy."* [cited by Guerin, **Anarchism**, p. 20] But neither does it mean that anarchists will join in with the farce of electioneering, particularly when there are more effective means available for changing things for the better.

## J.2.4 Surely voting for radical parties will be effective?

There is no doubt that voting can lead to changes in policies, which can be a good thing as far as it goes. But such policies are formulated and implemented within the authoritarian framework of the hierarchical capitalist state -- a framework which itself is never open to challenge by voting. To the contrary, voting legitimates the state framework, ensuring that social change will be mild, gradual, and reformist rather than rapid and radical. Indeed, the "democratic" process will (and has) resulted in all successful political parties becoming committed to "more of the same" or tinkering with the details at best (which is usually the limits of any policy changes).

Therefore, given the need for radical systemic changes as soon as possible due to the exponentially accelerating crises of modern civilisation, working for gradual reforms within the electoral system must be seen as a potentially deadly tactical error. In addition, it can never get to the root causes of our

problems. Anarchists reject the idea that our problems can be solved by the very institutions that cause them in the first place! What happens in our communities, workplaces and environment is too important to be left to politicians - or the ruling elite who control governments.

Because of this anarchists reject political parties and electioneering. Electioneering has always been the death of radicalism. Political parties are only radical when they don't stand a chance of election. However, many social activists continue to try to use elections, so participating in the system which disempowers the majority and so helps create the social problems they are protesting against.

*"It should be a truism that elections empower the politicians and not the voters," Brian Martin writes, "yet many social movements continually are drawn into electoral politics." There are a number of reasons for this. "One is the involvement of party members in social movements. Another is the aspirations for power and influence by leaders in movements. Having the ear of a government minister is a heady sensation for many; getting elected to parliament oneself is even more of an ego boost. What is forgotten in all this 'politics of influence' is the effect on ordinary activists." ["Democracy without Elections", **Reinventing Anarchy, Again**, Howard J. Ehrlich (ed.),p. 125]*

Rudolph Bahro gives an example of how working "within the system" disempowered grassroots Green activists in Germany during the early eighties, pointing out that the coalitions into which the Greens entered with Social Democrats in the German legislature often had the effect of strengthening the status quo by co-opting those whose energies might otherwise have gone into more radical and effective forms of activism [**Building the Green Movement**, New Society Publishers, 1986].

No doubt the state is more complicated than the simple "executive committee of the ruling class" pictured by Marxists. There are continual struggles both within and without the state bureaucracies, struggles that influence policies and empower different groups of people. Because of this, many radical parties believe that it makes sense to work within the state -- for example, to obtain labour, consumer, and environmental protection laws. However, this reasoning ignores the fact that the organisational structure of the state is not neutral.

To quote Martin again:

*"The basic anarchist insight is that the structure of the state, as a centralised administrative apparatus, is inherently flawed from the point of view of human freedom and equality. Even though the state can be used occasionally for valuable ends, as a means the state is flawed and impossible to reform. The nonreformable aspects of the state include, centrally, its monopoly over 'legitimate' violence and its consequent power to coerce for the purpose of war, internal control, taxation and the protection of property and bureaucratic privilege.*

*"The problem with voting is that the basic premises of the state are never considered open for debate, much less challenge. The state's monopoly over the use of violence for war is*

*never at issue. Neither is the state's use of violence against revolt from within. The state's right to extract economic resources from the population is never questioned. Neither is the state's guarantee of either private property (under capitalism) or bureaucratic prerogative (under state socialism) -- or both" [Op Cit., p. 127]*

But, it may be said, if a new political group is radical enough, it will be able to use state power for good purposes. While we discuss this in more detail later in [section J.2.6](#), let us consider a specific case: that of the Greens, many of whom believe that the best way to achieve their aims is to work within the representative political system.

By pledging to use the electoral system to achieve change, Green parties necessarily commit themselves to formulating their proposals as legislative agendas. But once legislation is passed, the coercive mechanisms of the state will be needed to enforce it. Therefore, Green parties are committed to upholding state power. However, our analysis in [section B.2](#) indicated that the state is a set of hierarchical institutions through which a ruling elite dominates society and individuals. And, as we have seen in the introduction to [section E](#), ecologists, feminists, and peace activists -- who are key constituencies of the Green movement -- all need to **dismantle** hierarchies and domination in order to achieve their respective aims. Therefore, since the state is not only the largest and most powerful hierarchy but also serves to maintain the hierarchical form of all major institutions in society (since this form is the most suitable for achieving ruling-class interests), the state itself is the main obstacle to the success of key constituencies of the Green movement. Hence it is impossible **in principle** for a parliamentary Green party to achieve essential objectives of the Green movement. A similar argument would apply to any radical party whose main emphasis was social justice, which like the goals of feminists, radical ecologists, and peace activists, depends on dismantling hierarchies.

And surely no one who even is remotely familiar with history will suggest that 'radical' politicians, even if by some miracle they were to obtain a majority in the national legislature, might dismantle the state. It should be axiomatic by now that when a 'radical' politician (e.g. a Lenin) says to voters, "Give me and my party state power and we will 'wither away'" it's just more campaign rhetoric (in Lenin's case, the ultimate campaign promise), and hence not to be taken seriously. And, as we argued in the previous [section](#), radical parties are under pressure from economic and state bureaucracies that ensure that even a sincere radical party would be powerless to introduce significant reforms.

The only real response to the problems of representative democracy is to urge people not to vote. This can be a valuable way of making others aware of the limitations of the current system, which is a necessary condition for their seriously considering the anarchist alternative, as we have outlined in this FAQ. The implications of abstentionism are discussed in the [next section](#).

## **J.2.5 Why do anarchists support abstentionism and what are its implications?**



At its most basic, anarchists support abstentionism because *"participation in elections means the transfer of one's will and decisions to another, which is contrary to the fundamental principles of anarchism."* [Emma Goldman, "Anarchists and Elections", **Vanguard** III, June-July 1936, p. 19]

If you reject hierarchy and government then participating in a system by which you elect those who will govern you is almost like adding insult to injury! And as Luigi Galleani points out, *"[b]ut whoever has the political competence to choose his own rulers is, by implication, also competent to do without them."* [**The End of Anarchism?**, p. 37] In other words, because anarchists reject the idea of authority, we reject the idea that picking the authority (be it bosses or politicians) makes us free. Therefore, anarchists reject governmental elections in the name of self-government and free association. We refuse to vote as voting is endorsing authoritarian social structures. We are (in effect) being asked to make obligations to the state, not our fellow citizens, and so anarchists reject the symbolic process by which our liberty is alienated from us.

For anarchists, then, when you vote, you are choosing between rulers. Instead of urging people to vote we raise the option of choosing to rule yourself, to organise freely with others - in your workplace, in your community, everywhere - as equals. The option of something you cannot vote for, a new society. And instead of waiting for others to do make some changes for you, anarchists urge that you do it yourself. This is the core of the anarchist support for abstentionism.

In addition, beyond this basic anarchist rejection of elections from a anti-statist position, anarchists also support abstentionism as it allows us to put across our ideas at election time. It is a fact that at election times individuals are often more interested in politics than usual. So, by arguing for abstentionism we can get our ideas across about the nature of the current system, how elected politicians do not control the state bureaucracy, now the state acts to protect capitalism and so on. In addition, it allows us to present the ideas of direct action and encourage those disillusioned with political parties and the current system to become anarchists by presenting a viable alternative to the farce of politics.

And a sizeable percentage of non-voters and voters are disillusioned with the current set-up. According to the US paper **The Nation** (dated February 10, 1997):

*"Protest is alive and well in the growing non-electorate, now the majority (last fall's turnout was 48.8 percent). According to a little-noticed post-election survey of 400 nonvoters conducted by the Polling Company, a Washington-based firm, 38 percent didn't vote for essentially political reasons: they 'did not care for any of the candidates' (16 percent), they were 'fed up with the political system' (15 percent) or they 'did not feel like candidates were interested in people like me' (7 percent). That's at least 36 million people--almost as many as voted for Bob Dole. The nonvoting majority is also disproportionately liberal-leaning, compared with those who did vote."*

So, anarchist abstentionism is a means of turning this negative reaction to an unjust system into positive activity. So, anarchist opposition to electioneering has deep political implications which Luigi Galleani

addresses when he writes that the *"anarchists' electoral abstentionism implies not only a conception that is opposed to the principle of representation (which is totally rejected by anarchism), it implies above all an absolute lack of confidence in the State. . . Furthermore, anarchist abstentionism has consequences which are much less superficial than the inert apathy ascribed to it by the sneering careerists of 'scientific socialism' [i.e. Marxism]. It strips the State of the constitutional fraud with which it presents itself to the gullible as the true representative of the whole nation, and, in so doing, exposes its essential character as representative, procurer and policeman of the ruling classes.*

*"Distrust of reforms, of public power and of delegated authority, can lead to direct action [in the class struggle]. . . It can determine the revolutionary character of this . . . action; and, accordingly, anarchists regard it as the best available means for preparing the masses to manage their own personal and collective interests; and, besides, anarchists feel that even now the working people are fully capable of handling their own political and administrative interests."* [**The End of Anarchism?**, pp. 13-14]

Therefore abstentionism stresses the importance of self-activity and self-libertarian as well as having an important educational effect in highlighting that the state is not neutral, but serves to protect class rule, and that meaningful change only comes from below, by direct action. For the dominant ideas within any class society reflect the opinion of the ruling elite of that society and so any campaign at election times which argues for abstentionism and indicates why voting is a farce will obviously challenge these dominant ideas. In other words, abstentionism combined with direct action and the building of socialist alternatives is a very effective means of changing people's ideas and encouraging a process of self-education and, ultimately, self-liberation.

Anarchists are aware that elections serve to legitimate government. We have always warned that since the state is an integral part of the system that perpetuates poverty, inequality, racism, imperialism, sexism, environmental destruction, and war, we should not expect to solve any of these problems by changing a few nominal state leaders every four or five years (See P. Kropotkin, *"Representative Government," The Commonweal*, Vol. 7, 1892; Errico Malatesta, **Vote: What For?**, Freedom Press, 1942). Therefore anarchists (usually) advocate abstentionism at election time as a means of exposing the farce of "democracy", the disempowering nature of elections and the real role of the state.

Therefore, anarchists urge abstentionism in order to **encourage** activity, not apathy. The reasons **why** people abstain is more important than the act. The idea that the USA is closer to anarchy because around 50% of people do not vote is nonsense. Abstentionism in this case is the product of apathy and cynicism, not political ideas. So anarchists recognise that apathetic abstentionism is **not** revolutionary or an indication of anarchist sympathies. It is produced by apathy and a general level of cynicism at **all** forms of political ideas and the possibility of change.

Not voting is **not** enough, and anarchists urge people to **organise** and **resist** as well. Abstentionism must be the political counterpart of class struggle, self-activity and self-management in order to be effective - otherwise it is as pointless as voting is.

## J.2.6 What are the effects of radicals using electioneering?

While many radicals would be tempted to agree with our analysis of the limitations of electioneering and voting, few would automatically agree with anarchist abstentionist arguments. Instead, they argue that we should combine direct action with electioneering. In that way (it is argued) we can overcome the limitations of electioneering by invigorating the movement with self-activity. In addition, it is argued, the state is too powerful to leave in the hands of the enemies of the working class. A radical politician will refuse to give the orders to crush social protest that a right-wing, pro-capitalist one would.

This reformist idea met a nasty end in the 1900s (when, we may note, social democracy was still considered revolutionary). In 1899, the Socialist Alexandre Millerand joined the cabinet of the French Government. However, nothing changed:

*"thousands of strikers. . . appealed to Millerand for help, confident that, with him in the government, the state would be on their side. Much of this confidence was dispelled within a few years. The government did little more for workers than its predecessors had done; soldiers and police were still sent in to repress serious strikes."* [Peter N. Stearns, **Revolutionary Syndicalism and French Labour**, p. 16]

In 1910, the Socialist Prime Minister Briand used scabs and soldiers to again break a general strike on the French railways. And these events occurred during the period when social democratic and socialist parties were self-proclaimed revolutionaries and arguing against anarcho-syndicalism by using the argument that working people needed their own representatives in office to stop troops being used against them during strikes!

Looking at the British Labour government of 1945 to 1951 we find the same actions. What is often considered the most left-wing Labour government ever used troops to break strikes in every year it was in office, starting with a dockers' strike days after it became the new government. And again in the 1970s Labour used troops to break strikes. Indeed, the Labour Party has used troops to break strikes more often than the right-wing Conservative Party.

In other words, while these are important arguments in favour of radicals using elections, they ultimately fail to take into account the nature of the state and the corrupting effect it has on radicals. If history is anything to go by, the net effect of radicals using elections is that by the time they are elected to office the radicals will happily do what they claimed the right-wing would have done. Many blame the individuals elected to office for these betrayals, arguing that we need to elect **better** politicians, select **better** leaders. For anarchists nothing could be more wrong as its the means used, not the individuals involved, which is the problem.

At its most basic, electioneering results in the party using it becoming more moderate and reformist - indeed the party often becomes the victim of its own success. In order to gain votes, the party must appear "moderate" and "practical" and that means working within the system. This has meant that (to

use Rudolf Rocker words):

*"Participation in the politics of the bourgeois States has not brought the labour movement a hair's-breadth nearer to Socialism, but thanks to this method, Socialism has almost been completely crushed and condemned to insignificance. . . Participation in parliamentary politics has affected the Socialist Labour movement like an insidious poison. It destroyed the belief in the necessity of constructive Socialist activity, and, worse of all, the impulse to self-help, by inoculating people with the ruinous delusion that salvation always comes from above."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 49]

This corruption does not happen overnight. Alexander Berkman indicates how it slowly develops when he writes:

*"[At the start, the Socialist Parties] claimed that they meant to use politics only for the purpose of propaganda. . . and took part in elections on order to have an opportunity to advocate Socialism*

*"It may seem a harmless thing but it proved the undoing of Socialism. Because nothing is truer than the means you use to attain your object soon themselves become your object. . . [so] There is a deeper reason for this constant and regular betrayal [than individual scoundrels being elected] . . . no man turns scoundrel or traitor overnight.*

*"It is **power** which corrupts. . . Moreover, even with the best intentions Socialists [who get elected]. . . find themselves entirely powerless to accomplishing anything of a socialistic nature. . . The demoralisation and vitiation [this brings about] take place little by little, so gradually that one hardly notices it himself. . . [The elected Socialist] perceives that he is regarded as a laughing stock [by the other politicians]. . . and finds more and more difficulty in securing the floor. . . he knows that neither by his talk nor by his vote can he influence the proceedings . . . His speeches don't even reach the public. . . [and so] He appeals to the voters to elect more comrades. . . Years pass. . . [and a] number . . . are elected. Each of them goes through the same experience. . . [and] quickly come to the conclusion. . . [that] They must show that they are practical men. . . that they are doing something for their constituency. . . In this manner the situation compels them to take a 'practical' part in the proceedings, to 'talk business,' to fall in line with the matters actually dealt with in the legislative body. . . Spending years in that atmosphere, enjoying good jobs and pay, the elected Socialists have themselves become part and parcel of the political machinery. . . With growing success in elections and securing political power they turn more and more conservative and content with existing conditions. Removal from the life and suffering of the working class, living in the atmosphere of the bourgeoisie. . . they have become what they call 'practical'. . . Power and position have gradually stifled their conscience and they have not the strength and honesty to swim against the current. . . They have become the strongest bulwark of capitalism."* [**What is Communist**

**Anarchism?**, pp. 78-82]

And so the *"political power which they had wanted to conquer had gradually conquered their Socialism until there was scarcely anything left of it."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 50] Not that these arguments are the result of hindsight, we may add. Bakunin was arguing in the early 1870s that the *"inevitable result [of using elections] will be that workers' deputies, transferred to a purely bourgeois environment, and into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois political ideas. . . will become middle class in their outlook, perhaps even more so than the bourgeois themselves."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 216] History proved Bakunin's prediction correct (as it did with his prediction that Marxism would result in elite rule).

History is littered with examples of radical parties becoming a part of the system. From Marxian Social Democracy at the turn of the 19th century to the German Green Party in the 1980s, we have seen radical parties, proclaiming the need for direct action and extra-parliamentary activity denouncing these activities once in power. From only using parliament as a means of spreading their message, the parties involved end up considering votes as more important than the message. Janet Biehl sums up the effects on the German Green Party of trying to combine radical electioneering with direct action:

*"the German Greens, once a flagship for the Green movement worldwide, should now be considered stink normal, as their **de facto** boss himself declares. Now a repository of careerists, the Greens stand out only for the rapidity with which the old cadre of careerism, party politics, and business-as-usual once again played itself out in their saga of compromise and betrayal of principle. Under the superficial veil of their old values - a very thin veil indeed, now - they can seek positions and make compromises to their heart's content. . . They have become 'practical,' 'realistic' and 'power-orientated.' This former New Left ages badly, not only in Germany but everywhere else. But then, it happened with the S.P.D. [The German Social Democratic Party] in August 1914, then why not with Die Grunen in 1991? So it did."* ["Party or Movement?", **Greenline**, no. 89, p. 14]

This, sadly, is the end result of all such attempts. Ultimately, supporters of using political action can only appeal to the good intentions and character of their candidates. Anarchists, however, present an analysis of the structures and other influences that will determine how the character of the successful candidates will change. In other words, in contrast to Marxists and other radicals, anarchists present a materialist, scientific analysis of the dynamics of electioneering and its effects on radicals. And like most forms of idealism, the arguments of Marxists and other radicals flounder on the rocks of reality as their theory *"inevitably draws and enmeshes its partisans, under the pretext of political tactics, into ceaseless compromises with governments and political parties; that is, it pushes them toward downright reaction."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 288]

However, many radicals refuse to learn this lesson of history and keep trying to create a new party which will not repeat the saga of compromise and betrayal which all other radical parties have suffered. And they say that anarchists are utopian! In other words, its truly utopian to think that *"You cannot dive into a*

*swamp and remain clean.*" [Alexander Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 83] Such is the result of rejecting (or "supplementing" with electioneering) direct action as the means to change things, for any social movement *"to ever surrender their commitment to direct action for 'working within the system' is to destroy their personality as socially innovative movements. It is to dissolve back into the hopeless morass of 'mass organisations' that seek respectability rather than change."* [Murray Bookchin, **Toward an Ecological Society**, p. 47]

Moreover, the use of electioneering has a centralising effect on the movements that use it. Political actions become considered as parliamentary activities made **for** the population by their representatives, with the 'rank and file' left with no other role than that of passive support. Only the leaders are actively involved and the main emphasis falls upon the leaders and it soon becomes taken for granted that they should determine policy (even ignoring conference decisions when required - how many times have politicians turned round and done the exact opposite of what they promised or introduced the exact opposite of party policy?). In the end, party conferences become simply like parliamentary elections, with party members supporting this leader against another.

Soon the party reflects the division between manual and mental labour so necessary for the capitalist system. Instead of working class self-activity and self-determination, there is a substitution and a non working class leadership acting **for** people replaces self-management in social struggle and within the party itself. Electoralism strengthens the leaders dominance over the party and the party over the people it claims to represent. And, of course, the real causes and solutions to the problems we face are mystified by the leadership and rarely discussed in order to concentrate on the popular issues that will get them elected.

And, of course, this results in radicals *"instead of weakening the false and enslaving belief in law and government . . . actually work[ing] to **strengthen** the people's faith in forcible authority and government."* [A. Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 84] Which has always proved deadly to encouraging a spirit of revolt, self-management and self-help -- the very keys to creating change in a society.

Thus the 1870 resolution of the Spanish section of the **First International** seems to have been proven to be totally correct:

*"Any participation of the working class in the middle class political government would merely consolidate the present state of affairs and necessarily paralyse the socialist revolutionary action of the proletariat. The Federation [of unions making up the Spanish section of the International] is the true representative of labour, and should work outside the political system."* [quoted by Jose Pierats, **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 169]

Instead of trying to gain control of the state, for whatever reasons, anarchists try to promote a culture of resistance within society that makes the state subject to pressure from without. Or, to quote Proudhon, we see the *"problem before the labouring classes . . . [as] consist[ing of] not in capturing, but in*

*subduing both power and monopoly, -- that is, in generating from the bowels of the people, from the depths of labour, a greater authority, a more potent fact, which shall envelop capital and the state and subjugate them." For, "to combat and reduce power, to put it in its proper place in society, it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings: an agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave." [System of Economical Contradictions, p. 398 and p. 397]*

To use an analogy, the pro-election radical argues that the state is like a person with a stick that intends to use it against you and your friends. Then you notice that their grasp of that stick is uncertain, and you can grab that stick away from them. If you take the stick away from them, that does not mean you have to hit them. After you take the weapon away from them, you can also break it in half and throw it away. They will have been deprived of its use, and that is the important thing.

In response the anarchist argues that instead of making plans to take their stick, we develop our muscles and skill so that we don't need a stick, so that we can beat them on our own. It takes longer, sure, to build up genuinely libertarian working class organs, but it's worth it simply because then our strength is part of us, and it can't be taken away by someone offering to "wield it on our behalf" (or saying that they will break the stick when they get it). And what do socialist and radical parties do? Offer to fight on our behalf and if we rely on others to act for us then we will be disarmed when they do not (and instead use the stick against us). Given the fact that power corrupts, any claim that by giving the stick of state power to a party we can get rid of it once and for all is naive to say the least.

And, we feel, history has proven us right time and time again.

## **J.2.7 Surely we should vote for reformist parties in order to show them up for what they are?**

Some Leninist socialists (like the British Socialist Workers Party and their offshoots like ISO in the USA) argue that we should urge people to vote for Labour and other social democratic parties. This is because of two reasons.

Firstly, it is argued, radicals will be able to reach more people by being seen to support popular, trade union based parties. If they do not, then they are in danger of alienating sizeable sections of the working class by arguing that such parties will be no better than explicitly pro-capitalist ones.

The second argument, and the more important one, is that by electing reformist parties into office the experience of living under such a government will shatter whatever illusions its supporters had in them. In other words, by getting reformist parties elected into office they will be given the test of experience. And when they betray their supporters to protect the status quo the experience will radicalise those who voted for them, who will then seek out **real** socialist parties (namely the likes of the SWP and ISO).

Anarchists reject these arguments for three reasons.

Firstly, it is a deeply dishonest tactic as it hides the true thoughts of those who support the tactic. To tell the truth is a revolutionary act. Radicals should not follow the capitalist media by telling half-truths or distorting the facts or what they believe. They should not hide their politics or suggest they support a system or party they are opposed to. If this means being less popular in the short run, then so be it. Attacking capitalism, religion, or a host of other things can alienate people but few radicals would be so opportunistic as to hold their tongues attacking these. In the long run being honest about your ideas is the best way of producing a movement which aims to get rid of a corrupt social system. Starting such a movement with half-truths is doomed to failure.

Secondly, anarchists reject the logic of this theory. The logic underlying this argument is that by being disillusioned by their reformist leaders and party, voters will look for **new**, "better" leaders and parties. However, this fails to go to the root of the problem, namely the dependence on leaders which hierarchical society creates within people. Anarchists do not want people to follow the "best" leadership, they want them to govern themselves, to be **self**-active, manage their own affairs and not follow any would-be leaders. If you seriously think that the liberation of the oppressed is the task of the oppressed themselves (as these Leninists claim to do) then you **must** reject this tactic in favour of ones that promote working class self-activity.

And the third reason is that this tactic has been proven to fail time and time again. What most of its supporters seem to fail to notice is that voters have indeed put reformist parties into office many times (for example, there have been 7 Labour Party governments in Britain before 1997, all of whom attacked the working class) and there has been no movement away from them to something more radical. Lenin suggested this tactic over 70 years ago and there has been no general radicalisation of the voting population by this method, nor even in reformist party militants. Indeed, ironically enough, most such activists have left their parties when its been out of office and they have become disgusted by the party's attempts to appear "realistic" in order to win the next election! And this disgust often expresses itself as a demoralisation with socialism **as such**, rather than with their party's watered down version of it.

This total failure, for anarchists, is not surprising, considering the reasons why we reject this tactic. Given that this tactic does not attack hierarchy or dependence on leaders, does not attack the ideology and process of voting, it will obviously fail to present a real alternative to the voting population (who will turn to other alternatives available at election time and not embrace direct action). Also, the sight of a so-called "socialist" or "radical" government managing capitalism, imposing cuts, breaking strikes and generally attacking its supporters will damage the credibility of any form of socialism and discredit all socialist and radical ideas in the eyes of the population. And if the experience of the Labour Government in Britain during the 1970s is anything to go by, it may result in the rise of the right-wing who will capitalise on this disillusionment.

By refusing to argue that no government is "on our side," radicals who urge us to vote reformist "without illusions" help to disarm theoretically the people who listen to them. Working class people, surprised,



confused and disorientated by the constant "betrayals" of left-wing parties may turn to right wing parties (who can be elected) to stop the attacks rather than turn to direct action as the radical minority within the working class did not attack voting as part of the problem.

How many times must we elect the same party, go through the same process, the same betrayals before we realise this tactic does not work? And, if it **is** a case of having to experience something before people reject it, few state socialists take this argument to its logical conclusion. We rarely hear them argue we must experience the hell of fascism or Stalinism or the nightmare of free market capitalism in order to ensure working class people "see through" them.

Anarchists, in contrast, say that we can argue against reformist politics without having to associate ourselves with them by urging people to vote for them. By arguing for abstentionism we can help arm theoretically people who will come into conflict with these parties once they are in office. By arguing that all governments will be forced to attack us (due to the pressure from capital and state) and that we have to rely on our own organisations and power to defend ourselves, we can promote working class self-confidence in its own abilities, and encourage the rejection of capitalism, the state and hierarchical leadership as well as encouraging the use of direct action.

And, we may add, it is not required for radicals to associate themselves with the farce of parliamentary propaganda in order to win people over to our ideas. Non-anarchists will see us use **direct action**, see us **act**, see the anarchistic alternatives we create and see and read our propaganda. Non-anarchists can be reached quite well without taking part or associating ourselves with parliamentary action.

## J.2.8 Will abstentionism lead to the right winning elections?

Possibly. However anarchists don't just say "*don't vote*", we say "*organise*" as well. Apathy is something anarchists have no interest in encouraging. So, "*[i]f the anarchists could persuade half the electorate to abstain from voting this would, from an electoral point of view, contribute to the [electoral] victory of the Right. But it would be a hollow victory, for what government could rule when half the electorate by not voting had expressed its lack of confidence in all governments?*" [Vernon Richards, **The Impossibilities of Social Democracy**, p. 142]

In other words, whichever party was in office would have to rule over a country in which a sizeable minority, even a majority, had rejected government as such. This would mean that the politicians "*would be subjected to real pressures from people who believed in their own power*" and acted accordingly. So anarchists call on people **not** to vote, but instead organise themselves and be conscious of their own power both as individuals and as part of a union with others. Only this "*can command the respect of governments, can curb the power of government as millions of crosses on bits of paper never will.*" [**Ibid.**]

As Emma Goldman pointed out, "*if the Anarchists were strong enough to swing the elections to the Left, they must also have been strong enough to rally the workers to a general strike, or even a series of*

*strikes. . . In the last analysis, the capitalist class knows too well that officials, whether they belong to the Right or the Left, can be bought. Or they are of no consequence to their pledge."* [**Vision on Fire**, p. 90]

The mass of the population, however, cannot be bought off and if they are willing and able to resist then they can become a power second to none. Only by organising, fighting back and practicing solidarity where we live and work can we **really** change things. That is where **our** power lies, that is where we can create a **real** alternative. By creating a network of self-managed, pro-active community and workplace organisations we can impose by direct action that which politicians can never give us from Parliament. And only such a movement can stop the attacks upon us by whoever gets into office. A government (left or right) which faces a mass movement based upon direct action and solidarity will always think twice before proposing cuts or introducing authoritarian laws.

Of course, all the parties claim that they are better than the others and this is the logic of this question - namely, we must vote for the lesser evil as the right-wing in office will be terrible. But what this forgets is that the lesser evil is still an evil. What happens is that instead of the greater evil attacking us, we get the lesser evil doing what the right-wing was going to do. And, since we are discussing the "lesser evil," let us not forget it was the "lesser evil" of the Democrats (in the USA) and Labour (in the UK) who introduced the monetarist and other policies that Reagan and Thatcher made their own (and we may add that the US Air Traffic Controllers union endorsed Reagan against Carter in 1980 because they thought they would get a better deal out of the Republicans. Reagan then went on to bust the union once in office). Simply put, we cannot expect a different group of politicians to react differently to the same economic and political pressures and influences.

So, voting for other politicians will make little difference. The reality is that politicians are puppets. As we argued above (in [section J.2.2](#)) real power in the state does not lie with politicians, but instead within the state bureaucracy and big business. Faced with these powers, we have seen left-wing governments from Spain to New Zealand introduce right-wing policies. So even if we elected a radical party, they would be powerless to change anything important and soon be forced to attack us in the interests of capitalism. Politicians come and go, but the state bureaucracy and big business remain forever!

Therefore we cannot rely on voting for the lesser evil to safe us from the possible dangers of a right-wing election victory brought about by abstentionism. All we can hope for is that no matter who gets in, the population will resist the government because it knows and can use its real power - direct action. For the *"only limit to the oppression of government is the power with which the people show themselves capable of opposing it."* [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 196] Hence Vernon Richards:

*"If the anarchist movement has a role to play in practical politics it is surely that of suggesting to, and persuading, as many people as possible that their freedom from the Hilters, Francos and the rest, depends not on the right to vote or securing a majority of votes 'for the candidate of ones choice,' but on evolving new forms of political and social organisation which aim at the direct participation of the people, with the consequent*

*weakening of the power, as well of the social role, of government in the life of the community."* [**The Raven**, no. 14, pp. 177-8]

We discuss what new forms of political and social organisations anarchists encourage in [section J.5](#).

## J.2.9 What do anarchists do instead of voting?

While anarchists reject electioneering and voting, it does not mean that we are politically apathetic. Indeed, part of the reason why anarchists reject voting is because we think that voting is not part of the solution, its part of the problem. This is because it endorses an unjust and unfree political system and makes us look to others to fight our battles for us. It **blocks** constructive self-activity and direct action. It **stops** the building of alternatives in our communities and workplaces. Voting breeds apathy and apathy is our worse enemy.

Given that we have had universal suffrage for well over 50 years in many countries and we have seen the rise of Labour and Radical parties aiming to use that system to effect change in a socialistic manner, it seems strange that we are probably further away from socialism than when they started. The simple fact is that these parties have spent so much time trying to win elections that they have stopped even thinking about creating socialist alternatives in our communities and workplaces. That is in itself enough to prove that electioneering, far from eliminating apathy, in fact helps to create it.

So, because of this, anarchists argue that the only way to not waste your vote is to spoil it! We are the only political movement who argue that nothing will change unless you act for yourself, take back the power and fight the system **directly**. Only direct action breaks down apathy and gets results - and its the first steps towards real freedom, towards a free and just society.

Therefore anarchists are the first to point out that not voting is not enough - we need to actively struggle for an alternative to both voting **and** the current system. Just as the right to vote was won after a long series of struggles, so the creation of a free, decentralised, self-managed, libertarian socialist society will be the product of social struggle.

Anarchists are the last people to deny the importance of political liberties or the importance in winning the right to vote. The question we must ask is whether it is a more a fitting tribute to the millions of people who used direct action, fought and suffered for the right to vote to use that victory to endorse a deeply unfair and undemocratic system or to use other means (indeed the means they used to win the vote) to create a system based upon true popular self-government? If we are true to our (and their) desire for a real, meaningful democracy, we would have to reject political action in favour of direct action. So, if we desire a truly libertarian and democratic society then its clear that the vote will not achieve it (and indeed put back the struggle for such a society).

This obviously gives an idea of what anarchists do instead of voting, we agitate, organise and educate. While we will discuss the various alternatives anarchists propose and attempt to organise in more detail

in section J.5 ([What alternative social organisations do anarchists create?](#)) it is useful to give a brief introduction to anarchist activity here, activity which bases itself on the two broad strategies of encouraging direct action and building alternatives where we live and work.

Taking the first strategy, anarchists say that by using direct action we can force politicians to respect the wishes of the people. For example, if a government or boss tries to limit free speech, then anarchists would try to encourage a free speech fight to break the laws in question until such time as they were revoked. If a government or landlord refuses to limit rent increases or improve safety requirements for accommodation, anarchists would organise squats and rent strikes. In the case of environmental destruction, anarchists would support and encourage attempts at halting the damage by mass trespassing on sites, blocking the routes of developments, organising strikes and so on. If a boss refuses to introduce an 8 hour day, then workers should form a union and go on strike or stop working after 8 hours. Unlike laws, the boss cannot ignore direct action (and if such action is successful, the state will hurry to pass a law about it).

Similarly, strikes combined with social protest would be effective means of stopping authoritarian laws being passed. For example anti-union laws would be best fought by strike action and community boycotts (and given the utterly ineffectual defence pursued by pro-labour parties using political action to stop anti-union laws who can seriously say that the anarchist way would be any worse?). And of course collective non-payment of taxes would ensure the end of unpopular government decisions. The example of the poll tax rebellion in the UK in the late in 1980s shows the power of such direct action. The government could happily handle hours of speeches by opposition politicians but they could not ignore social protest (and we must add that the Labour Party which claimed to oppose the tax happily let the councils controlled by them introduce the tax and arrest non-payers).

As Noam Chomsky argues, "*[w]ithin the constraints of existing state institutions, policies will be determined by people representing centres of concentrated power in the private economy, people who, in their institutional roles, will not be swayed by moral appeals but by the costs consequent upon the decisions they make -- not because they are 'bad people,' but because that is what the institutional roles demands.*" He continues by arguing that "*[t]hose who own and manage the society want a disciplined, apathetic and submissive public that will not challenge their privilege and the orderly world in which it thrives. The ordinary citizen need not grant them this gift. Enhancing the Crisis of Democracy by organisation and political engagement is itself a threat to power, a reason to undertake it quite apart from its crucial importance in itself as an essential step towards social change.*" [**Turning the Tide**, p. 251-2]

In this way, by encouraging social protest, any government would think twice before pursuing authoritarian, destructive and unpopular policies. In the final analysis, governments can and will ignore the talk of opposition politicians, but they cannot ignore social action for very long. In the words of a Spanish anarchosyndicalist, anarchists

*"do not ask for any concessions from the government. Our mission and our duty is to*

*impose from the streets that which ministers and deputies are incapable of realising in parliament.*" [quoted by Graham Kelsey, **Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State**, p. 79]

The second strategy of building alternatives flows naturally from the first. Any form of campaign requires organisation and by organising in an anarchist manner we build organisations that *"bear in them the living seed of the new society which is replace the old world"* (to use Bakunin's words). In organising strikes in the workplace and community we can create a network of activists and union members who can encourage a spirit of revolt against authority. By creating assemblies where we live and work we can create an effective countering power to the state and capital. Such a union, as the anarchists in Spain and Italy proved, can be the focal point for recreating self-managed schools, social centres and so on. In this way the local community can ensure that it has sufficient independent, self-managed resources available to educate its members. Also, combined with credit unions (or mutual banks), cooperative workplaces and stores, a self-managed infrastructure could be created which would ensure that people can directly provide for their own needs without having to rely on capitalists or governments.

In other words, an essential part of anarchist activity is (in the words of a C.N.T. militant):

*"We must create that part of libertarian communism which can be created within bourgeois society and do so precisely to combat that society with our own special weapons."* [quoted **Op. Cit.**, p. 79]

So, far from doing nothing, by not voting the anarchist actively encourages alternatives. As the British anarchist John Turner argued, anarchists *"have a line to work upon, to teach the people self-reliance, to urge them to take part in non-political [i.e. non-electoral] movements directly started by themselves for themselves. . . as soon as people learn to rely upon themselves they will act for themselves. . . We teach the people to place their faith in themselves, we go on the lines of self-help. We teach them to form their own committees of management, to repudiate their masters, to despise the laws of the country. . ."* [quoted by John Quail, **The Slow Burning Fuse**, p. 87] In this way we encourage self-activity, self-organisation and self-help -- the opposite of apathy and doing nothing.

But what about government policies which actually do help people? While anarchists would *"hesitate to condemn those measures taken by governments which obviously benefited the people, unless we saw the immediate possibility of people carrying them out for themselves. This would not inhibit us from declaring at the same time that what initiatives governments take would be more successfully taken by the people themselves if they put their minds to the same problems. . . to build up a hospital service or a transport system, for instance, from local needs into a national organisation, by agreement and consent at all levels is surely more economical as well as efficient than one which is conceived at top level [by the state]. . . where Treasury, political and other pressures, not necessarily connected with what we would describe as **needs**, influence the shaping of policies."* [**The Raven**, no. 14, p. 179]

Ultimately, what the state and capital gives, they can also take away. What we build by our own self-

activity can last as long as we want it to and act to protect it. And anarchists are convinced that:

*"The future belongs to those who continue daringly, consistently, to fight power and governmental authority. The future belongs to us and to our social philosophy. For it is the only social ideal that teaches independent thinking and direct participation of the workers in their economic struggle [and working class people in their social struggles, we may add]. For it is only through the organized economic [and social] strength of the masses that they can and will do away with the capitalist system and all the wrongs and injustices it contains. Any diversion from this stand will only retard our movement and make it a stepping stone for political climbers."* [Emma Goldman, **Vision on Fire**, p. 92]

## J.2.10 Does rejecting electioneering mean that anarchists are apolitical?

No. Far from it. The "apolitical" nature of anarchism is Marxist nonsense. As it desires to fundamentally change society, anarchism can be nothing but political. However, anarchism does reject (as we have seen) "normal" political activity as ineffectual and corrupting. However, many (particularly Marxists) imply this reject of the con of capitalist politics means that anarchists concentration on purely "economic" issues like wages, working conditions and so forth. And, by so doing, Marxists claim that anarchists leave the political agenda to be dominated by capitalist ideology, with disastrous results for the working class.

This view, however, is **totally** wrong. Indeed, Bakunin explicitly rejected the idea that working people could ignore politics and actually agreed with the Marxists that political indifference only led to capitalist control of the labour movement:

*"[some of] the workers in Germany . . . [were organized in] a kind of federation of small associations. . . 'Self-help'. . . was its slogan, in the sense that labouring people were persistently advised not to anticipate either deliverance or help from the state and the government, but only from their own efforts. This advise would have been excellent had it not been accompanied by the false assurance that liberation for the labouring people is possible under **current conditions of social organisation** . . . Under this delusion. . . the workers subject to [this] influence were supposed to disengage themselves systematically from all political and social concerns and questions about the state, property, and so forth. . . [This] completely subordinated the proletariat to the bourgeoisie which exploits it and for which it was to remain an obedient and mindless tool."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 174]

In addition, Bakunin argued that the labour movement (and so the anarchist movement) would have to take into account political ideas and struggles but to do so in a working class way:

*"The International does not reject politics of a general kind; it will be compelled to intervene in politics so long as it is forced to struggle against the bourgeoisie. It rejects only bourgeois politics."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 313]

So, anarchists reject capitalist politics (i.e. electioneering), but we do not ignore politics nor wider political discussion. Anarchists have always recognised the importance of political debate and ideas in social movements. As Bakunin argued should *"the International [an international organisation of working class unions and groups]. . . cease to concern itself with political and philosophical questions? Would [it] . . . ignore progress in the world of thought as well as the events which accompany or arise from the political struggle in and between states[?]. . . We hasten to say that it is absolutely impossible to ignore political and philosophical questions. An exclusive pre-occupation with economic questions would be fatal for the proletariat. . . [I]t is impossible for the workers to stop there without renouncing their humanity and depriving themselves of the intellectual and moral power which is so necessary for the conquest of their economic rights"* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 301]

Nor do anarchists ignore elections. As Vernon Richards argues, anarchists *"cannot be uninterested in . . . election results, whatever their view about the demerits of the contending Parties. The fact that the anarchist movement has campaigned to persuade people not to use their vote is proof of our commitment and interest. If there is, say, a 60 per cent. poll we will not assume that the 40 per cent. abstentions are anarchists, but we would surely be justified in drawing the conclusion that among the 40 per cent. there are a sizeable minority who have lost faith in political parties and were looking for other instruments, other values."* [**The Impossibilities of Social Democracy**, p. 141]

Thus the charge anarchists are apolitical or indifferent to politics (even capitalist politics) is a myth. Rather, *"we are not concerned with choosing between governments but with creating the situation where government can no longer operate, because only then will we organise locally, regionally, nationally and internationally to satisfy real needs and common aspirations."* For *"so long as we have capitalism and government, the job of anarchists is to fight both, and at the same time encourage people to take what steps they can to run their own lives."* [Vernon Richards, **The Raven**, no. 14, p. 179]

Part of this process will be the discussion of political, social and economic issues in whatever self-managed organisations people create in their communities and workplaces (as Bakunin argued) and the use of these organisations to fight for (political, social and economic) improvements and reforms in the here and now using direct action and solidarity.

This means, as Rudolf Rocker points out, anarchists desire a unification of political and economic struggles as the two as inseparable:

*"[T]he Anarchists represent the viewpoint that the war against capitalism must be at the same time a war against all institutions of political power, for in history economic exploitation has always gone hand in hand with political and social oppression. The exploitation of man by man and the domination of man over man are inseparable, and*

*each is the condition of the other.*" [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 15]

Such a unification must take place on the social and economic field, not the political, as that is where the working class is strongest. In other words anarchists *"are not in any way opposed to the political struggle, but in their opinion this struggle. . . must take the form of direct action. . . It would. . . be absurd for them [the working class] to overlook the importance of the political struggle. Every event that affects the live of the community is of a political nature. In this sense every important economic action. . . is also a political action and, moreover, one of incomparably greater importance than any parliamentary proceeding."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 65-66] Hence the comments in the C.N.T.'s newspaper **Solidaridad Obrera**:

*"Does anyone not know that we want to participate in public life? Does anyone not know that we have always done so? Yes, we want to participate. With our organisations. With our papers. Without intermediaries, delegates or representatives. No. We will not go to the Town Hall, to the Provincial Capitol, to Parliament."* [quoted by Jose Pierats, **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 173]

So, anarchists reject the idea that political and economic struggles can be divided. Such an argument just reproduces the artificially created division of labour between mental and physical activity of capitalism within working class organisations and within anti-capitalist movements. We say that we should not separate out politics into some form of specialised activity that only certain people (i.e. our "representatives") can do. Instead, anarchists argue that political struggles, ideas and debates must be brought into the **social** and **economic** organisations of our class where they must be debated freely by all members as they see fit and that political and economic struggle and change must go hand in hand.

History indicates that any attempt at taking social and economic issues into political parties has resulting in wasted energy and the watering down of these issues into pure reformism. In the words of Bakunin, such activity suggests that *"a political revolution should precede a social revolution... [which] is a great and fatal error, because every political revolution taking place prior to and consequently without a social revolution must necessarily be a bourgeois revolution, and a bourgeois revolution can only be instrumental in bringing about bourgeois Socialism"*, i.e. State Capitalism. [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 289]

We have discussed this process of socialist parties becoming reformist in [section J.2.6](#) and will not repeat ourselves here. Only by rejecting the artificial divisions of capitalist society can we remain true to our ideals of liberty, equality and solidarity. Anarchists *"maintain that the State organisation, having been the force to which minorities resorted for establishing and organising their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy these privileges."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 170]. Every example of radicals using the state has resulted in them being changed by the system instead of them changing it and, to use Bakunin's words, *"tied the proletariat to the bourgeois towline"* (i.e. resulted in working class movements becoming dominated by capitalist ideas and activity - becoming "realistic" and "practical").



Therefore Anarchist argue that such a union of political ideas and social organisation and activity is essential for promoting radical politics as it *"digs a chasm between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and places the proletariat outside the activity and political conniving of all parties within the State. . . in placing itself outside all bourgeois politics, the proletariat necessarily turns against it."* So, by *"placing the proletariat outside the politics in the State and of the bourgeois world, [the union movement] thereby constructed a new world, the world of the united proletarians of all lands."* [Michael Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 303, p. 305]

In addition, so-called "economic" struggles do not occur in a social vacuum. They take place in a social and political context and so, necessarily, there can exist an separation of political and economic struggles only in the mind. Strikers or eco-warriors, for example, face the power of the state enforcing laws which protect the power of employers and polluters. This necessarily has a "political" impact on those involved in struggle. As Bakunin argued social struggle results in *"the spontaneous and direct development of philosophical and sociological in the International [i.e. union/social movement], ideas which inevitably develop side by side with and are produced by the first two movements [of strikes and union organising]"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 304]. By channeling any "political" conclusions drawn by those involved in struggle into electoral politics, this development of political ideas and discussion will be distorted into discussions of what is possible in the current system, and so the radical impact of direct action and social struggle is weakened.

Therefore anarchists reject electioneering not because they are "apolitical" but because they do not desire to see politics remain a thing purely for politicians and experts. Political issues are far too important to leave to such people. Anarchists desire to see political discussion and change develop from the bottom up, this is hardly "apolitical" - in fact with our desire to see ordinary people directly discuss the issues that affect them, act to change things by their own action and draw their own conclusions from their own activity anarchists are very "political." The process of individual and social liberation is the most political activity we can think of!

## B.2 Why are anarchists against the state?

As previously noted (see [section B.1](#)), anarchists oppose all forms of hierarchical authority. Historically, however, they have spent most of their time and energy opposing two main forms in particular. One is capitalism, the other, the state. These two forms of authority have a symbiotic relationship and cannot be easily separated. In this section, as well as explaining why anarchists oppose the state, we will necessarily have to analyse the relationship between it and capitalism.

So what is the state? As Malatesta put it, anarchists *"have used the word State . . . to mean the sum total of the political, legislative, judiciary, military and financial institutions through which the management of their own affairs, the control over their personal behaviour, the responsibility for their personal safety, are taken away from the people and entrusted to others who, by usurpation or delegation, are vested with the power to make laws for everything and everybody, and to oblige the people to observe them, if need be, by the use of collective force."* [**Anarchy**, p. 13]

He continues:

*"For us, governments [or the state] is up of all governors . . . those who have the power to make laws regulating inter-human relations and to see that they are carried out . . . [and] who have the power, to a greater or lesser degree, to make use of the social power, that is of the physical, intellectual and economic power of the whole community, in order to oblige everybody to carry out their wishes."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 15-16 -- see also Kropotkin's **The State: Its Historic Role**, p. 10]

This means that many, if not most, anarchists would agree with Randolph Bourne's characterisation of the state as the politico-military domination of a certain geographical territory by a ruling elite (see his *"Unfinished Fragment on the State,"* in **Untimely Papers**). On this subject Murray Bookchin writes:

*"Minimally, the State is a professional system of social coercion . . . It is only when coercion is institutionalised into a professional, systematic and organised form of social control - . . . with the backing of a monopoly of violence - that we can properly speak of a State."* [**Remaking Society**, p. 66]

Therefore, we can say that, for anarchists, the state is marked by three things:

- 1) A "monopoly of violence" in a given territorial area;
- 2) This violence having a "professional," institutional nature; and
- 3) A hierarchical nature, centralisation of power and initiative into the hands of a few.

Of these three aspects, the last one (its centralised, hierarchical nature) is the most important simply

because the concentration of power into the hands of the few ensures a division of society into government and governed (which necessitates the creation of a professional body to enforce that division). Without such a division, we would not need a monopoly of violence and so would simply have an association of equals, unmarked by power and hierarchy (such as exists in many stateless "primitive" tribes).

Some types of states, e.g. Communist and social-democratic ones, are directly involved not only in politico-military domination but also in economic domination via state ownership of the means of production; whereas in liberal democratic capitalist states, such ownership is in the hands of private individuals. In liberal democratic states, however, the mechanisms of politico-military domination are controlled by and for a corporate elite, and hence the large corporations are often considered to belong to a wider "state-complex."

As the state is the delegation of power into the hands of the few, it is obviously based on hierarchy. This delegation of power results in the elected people becoming isolated from the mass of people who elected them and outside of their control. In addition, as those elected are given power over a host of different issues and told to decide upon them, a bureaucracy soon develops around them to aid in their decision-making. However, this bureaucracy, due to its control of information and its permanency, soon has more power than the elected officials. This means that those who serve the people's (so-called) servant have more power than those they serve, just as the politician has more power than those who elected him. All forms of state-like (i.e. hierarchical) organisations inevitably spawn a bureaucracy about them. This bureaucracy soon becomes the de facto focal point of power in the structure, regardless of the official rules.

This marginalisation and disempowerment of ordinary people (and so the empowerment of a bureaucracy) is the key reason for anarchist opposition to the state. Such an arrangement ensures that the individual is disempowered, subject to bureaucratic, authoritarian rule which reduces the person to a object or a number, **not** a unique individual with hopes, dreams, thoughts and feelings. As Proudhon forcefully argued:

*"To be GOVERNED is to be kept in sight, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right, nor the wisdom, nor the virtue to do so... To be GOVERNED is to be at every operation, at every transaction, noted, registered, enrolled, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorised, admonished, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished. It is, under the pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest, to be placed under contribution, trained, ransomed, exploited, monopolised, extorted, squeezed, mystified, robbed; then, at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, despised, harassed, tracked, abused, clubbed, disarmed, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and, to crown it all, mocked, ridiculed, outraged, dishonoured. That is government; that is its justice; that is its morality." [General Idea of the Revolution, p. 294]*

Anarchists see the state, with its vast scope and control of deadly force, as the "ultimate" hierarchical structure, suffering from all the negative characteristics associated with authority described in the [last section](#). "Any logical and straightforward theory of the State," argued Bakunin, "is essentially founded upon the principle of **authority**, that is the eminently theological, metaphysical, and political idea that the masses, **always** incapable of governing themselves, must at all times submit to the beneficent yoke of a wisdom and a justice imposed upon them, in some way or other, from above." [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 142] Such a system of authority cannot help being centralised, hierarchical and bureaucratic in nature. And because of its centralised, hierarchical, and bureaucratic nature, the state becomes a great weight over society, restricting its growth and development and making popular control impossible. As Bakunin puts it:

*"the so-called general interests of society supposedly represented by the State . . . [are] in reality . . . the general and permanent negation of the positive interests of the regions, communes, and associations, and a vast number of individuals subordinated to the State . . . [in which] all the best aspirations, all the living forces of a country, are sanctimoniously immolated and interred."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 207]

In the rest of this section we will discuss the state, its role, its impact on a society's freedom and who benefits from its existence. Kropotkin's classic essay, **The State: It's Historic Role** is recommended for further reading on this subject.

## B.2.1 What is main function of the state?

The main function of the state is to enable the ruling elite to exploit lower social strata, i.e. derive an economic surplus from them. The state, to use Malatesta's words, is basically "*the property owners' gendarme*" [**Anarchy**, p. 19] (compare to the maxim of the Founding Fathers of American "democracy" -- "*the people who own the country ought to govern it*" (John Jay)). Those in the upper-middle levels of the social pyramid also frequently use the state to obtain income without working, as from investments, but the elite gain by far the most economic advantages, which is why in the US, one percent of the population controls over 40 percent of total wealth. It is therefore no exaggeration to say that the state is the extractive apparatus of society's parasites.

The state ensures the exploitative privileges of its ruling elite by protecting certain economic monopolies from which its members derive their wealth (see [section B.3.2](#)). This service is referred to as "protecting private property" and is said to be one of the two main functions of the state, the other being to ensure that individuals are "secure in their persons." However, although this second aim is professed, in reality most state laws and institutions are concerned with the protection of property (for the anarchist definition of "property" see [section B.3.1](#)).

From this fact we may infer that references to the "security of persons," "crime prevention," etc. are

mostly rationalisations of the state's existence and smokescreens for its perpetuation of elite power and privileges. Moreover, even though the state does take a secondary interest in protecting the security of persons (particularly elite persons), the vast majority of crimes against persons are motivated by poverty and alienation due to state-supported exploitation and also by the desensitisation to violence created by the state's own violent methods of protecting private property.

Hence, anarchists maintain that without the state and the crime-engendering conditions to which it gives rise, it would be possible for decentralised, voluntary community associations to deal compassionately (not punitively) with the few incorrigibly violent people who might remain (see [section I.5.8](#)).

It is clear that the state represents the essential coercive mechanisms by which capitalism and the authority relations associated with private property are sustained. The protection of property is fundamentally the means of assuring the social domination of owners over non-owners, both in society as a whole and in the particular case of a specific boss over a specific group of workers. Class domination is the authority of property owners over those who use that property and it is the primary function of the state to uphold that domination (and the social relationships that generate it). In Kropotkin's words, *"the rich perfectly well know that if the machinery of the State ceased to protect them, their power over the labouring classes would be gone immediately."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 98]

In other words, protecting private property and upholding class domination are the same thing. Yet this primary function of the state is disguised by the "democratic" facade of the representative electoral system, through which it is made to appear that the people rule themselves. Thus Bakunin writes that the modern state *"unites in itself the two conditions necessary for the prosperity of the capitalistic economy: State centralisation and the actual subjection of . . . the people . . . to the minority allegedly representing it but actually governing it."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 210]

The historian Charles Beard makes a similar point:

*"Inasmuch as the primary object of a government, beyond mere repression of physical violence, is the making of the rules which determine the property relations of members of society, the dominant classes whose rights are thus to be protected must perforce obtain from the government such rules as are consonant with the larger interests necessary to the continuance of their economic processes, or they must themselves control the organs of government"* [**An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution**, quoted by Howard Zinn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 89].

This role of the state -- to protect capitalism and the property, power and authority of the property owner -- was also noticed by Adam Smith:

*"[T]he inequality of fortune . . . introduces among men a degree of authority and subordination which could not possibly exist before. It thereby introduces some degree of*

*that civil government which is indispensably necessary for its own preservation . . . [and] to maintain and secure that authority and subordination. The rich, in particular, are necessarily interested to support that order of things which can alone secure them in the possession of their own advantages. Men of inferior wealth combine to defend those of superior wealth in the possession of their property, in order that men of superior wealth may combine to defend them in the possession of theirs . . . [T]he maintenance of their lesser authority depends upon that of his greater authority, and that upon their subordination to him depends his power of keeping their inferiors in subordination to them. They constitute a sort of little nobility, who feel themselves interested to defend the property and to support the authority of their own little sovereign in order that he may be able to defend their property and to support their authority. Civil government, so far as it is instituted for the security of property, is in reality instituted for the defence of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against those who have none at all."* [Adam Smith, **The Wealth of Nations**, book 5]

In a nutshell, the state is the means by which the ruling class rules. Hence Bakunin:

*"the State is the organised authority, domination and power of the possessing classes over the masses."* [quoted by David DeLeon, **Reinventing Anarchy**, p. 71]

However, while recognising that the state protects the power and position of the economically dominant class within a society anarchists also argue that the state has, due to its hierarchical nature, interests of its own. Thus it cannot be considered as simply the tool of the economically dominant class in society. States have their own dynamics, due to their structure, which generate their own classes and class interests and privileges (and which allows them to escape from the control of the economic ruling class and pursue their own interests, to a greater or lesser degree). As Malatesta put it *"the government, though springing from the bourgeoisie and its servant and protector, tends, as with every servant and every protector, to achieve its own emancipation and to dominate whoever it protects."* [**Anarchy**, p. 22]

This means that the state machine (and structure), while its modern form is intrinsically linked to capitalism, cannot be seen as being a tool usable by the majority. This is because the *"State, any State -- even when it dresses-up in the most liberal and democratic form -- is essentially based on domination, and upon violence, that is upon despotism -- a concealed but no less dangerous despotism."* The State *"denotes force, authority, predominance; it presupposes inequality in fact."* [**The Political Philosophy of Michael Bakunin**, p. 211 and p. 223]

This is due to its hierarchical and centralised nature, which empowers the few who control the state machine -- *"[e]very state power, every government, by its nature places itself outside and over the people and inevitably subordinates them to an organisation and to aims which are foreign to and opposed to the real needs and aspirations of the people."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 328] If *"the whole proletariat . . . [are] members of the government . . . there will be no government, no state, but, if there is to be a state there will be those who are ruled and those who are slaves."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 330]

In other words, the state bureaucracy is itself directly an oppressor and can exist independently of an economically dominant class. In Bakunin's prophetic words:

*"What have we seen throughout history? The State has always been the patrimony of some privileged class: the sacerdotal class, the nobility, the bourgeoisie -- and finally, when all other classes have exhausted themselves, the class of the bureaucracy enters the stage and then the State falls, or rises, if you please, to the position of a machine."* [**The Political Philosophy of Michael Bakunin**, p. 208]

The experience of Soviet Russian indicates the validity of his analysis (the working class was exploited and dominated by the state bureaucracy rather than by an economic class).

Thus the role of the state is to repress the individual and the working class as a whole in the interests of the capitalist class and in its own interests. This means that *"the State organisation . . . [is] the force to which minorities resorted for establishing and organising their power over the masses."* Little wonder, then, that Kropotkin argued that *"[i]n the struggle between the individual and the State, anarchism . . . takes the side of the individual as against the State, of society against the authority which oppresses it."* While the state is a *"superstructure in the interests of capitalism,"* it is a *"power which was created for the purpose of welding together the interests of the landlord, the judge, the warrior, and the priest"* and, we must add, cannot be considered purely as being a tool for the capitalist/landlord class. The state structure (*"the judge, the warrior"* etc.) has interests of its own. [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 170 and pp. 192-3]

## **B.2.2 Does the state have subsidiary functions?**

Besides its primary function of protecting private property, the state operates in other ways as an economic instrument of the ruling class.

First, the state intervenes in the modern economy to solve problems that arise in the course of capitalist development. These interventions have taken different forms in different times and include state funding for industry (e.g. military spending); the creation of social infrastructure too expensive for private capital to provide (railways, motorways); tariffs to protect developing industries from more efficient international competition (the key to successful industrialisation as it allows capitalists to rip-off consumers, making them rich and increasing funds available for investment); imperialist ventures to create colonies (or protect citizen's capital invested abroad) in order to create markets or get access to raw materials and cheap labour; government spending to stimulate consumer demand in the face of underconsumption and stagnation; maintaining a "natural" level of unemployment that can be used to discipline the working class, so ensuring they produce more, for less; manipulating the interest rate in order to try and reduce the effects of the business cycle and undermine workers' gains in the class struggle.

Second, because of the inordinate political power deriving from wealth (see [next section](#)), capitalists use the state directly to benefit their class, as from subsidies, tax breaks, government contracts, protective tariffs, bailouts of corporations judged by state bureaucrats as too important to let fail, and so on.

And third, the state may be used to grant concessions to the working class in cases where not doing so would threaten the integrity of the system as a whole.

Hence David DeLeon:

*"Above all, the state remains an institution for the continuance of dominant socioeconomic relations, whether through such agencies as the military, the courts, politics or the police . . . Contemporary states have acquired . . . less primitive means to reinforce their property systems [than state violence -- which is always the means of last, often first, resort]. States can regulate, moderate or resolve tensions in the economy by preventing the bankruptcies of key corporations, manipulating the economy through interest rates, supporting hierarchical ideology through tax benefits for churches and schools, and other tactics. In essence, it is not a neutral institution; it is powerfully for the status quo. The capitalist state, for example, is virtually a gyroscope centred in capital, balancing the system. If one sector of the economy earns a level of profit, let us say, that harms the rest of the system -- such as oil producers' causing public resentment and increased manufacturing costs -- the state may redistribute some of that profit through taxation, or offer encouragement to competitors."* [**Reinventing Anarchy**, pp. 71-72]

The example of state legislation to set the length of the working day is an example of both the first and third functions enumerated above. In the early period of capitalist development, a shortage of labour power led to the state's ignoring the lengthening working day, thus allowing capitalists to appropriate more surplus value from workers and increase the rate of profit without interference. Later, however, after workers began to organise, reducing the length of the working day became a key demand around which revolutionary socialist fervour was developing. Hence, in order to defuse this threat (and socialist revolution is the worst-case scenario for the capitalist), the state passed legislation to reduce the length of the working day (which, once workers' struggle calmed down, were happily ignored and became "dead laws"). Initially, the state was functioning purely as the protector of the capitalist class, using its powers to solve problems that arise in the course of capitalist development (namely repressing the labour movement to allow the capitalists to do as they liked). In the second it was granting concessions to the working class to eliminate a threat to the integrity of the system as a whole.

It should be noted that none of these three subsidiary functions implies that capitalism can be changed through a series of piecemeal reforms into a benevolent system that primarily serves working class interests. To the contrary, these functions grow out of, and supplement, the basic role of the state as the protector of capitalist property and the social relations they generate -- i.e. the foundation of the capitalist's ability to exploit. Therefore reforms may modify the functioning of capitalism but they can never threaten its basis. As Malatesta argued:



*"The basic function of government . . . is always that of oppressing and exploiting the masses, of defending the oppressors and the exploiters . . . It is true that to these basic functions . . . other functions have been added in the course of history . . . hardly ever has a government existed . . . which did not combine with its oppressive and plundering activities others which were useful . . . to social life. But this does not detract from the fact that government is by nature oppressive . . . and that it is in origin and by its attitude, inevitably inclined to defend and strengthen the dominant class; indeed it confirms and aggravates the position . . . [I]t is enough to understand how and why it carries out these functions to find the practical evidence that whatever governments do is always motivated by the desire to dominate, and is always geared to defending, extending and perpetuating its privileges and those of the class of which it is both the representative and defender.*

*"A government cannot maintain itself for long without hiding its true nature behind a pretence of general usefulness; it cannot impose respect for the lives of the privileged if it does not appear to demand respect for all human life; it cannot impose acceptance of the privileges of the few if it does not pretend to be the guardian of the rights of all." [Op. Cit., pp. 20-1]*

Ultimately, what the state concedes, it can also take back (as was the case of the laws limiting the working day). Thus the rise and fall of the welfare state -- granted to stop more revolutionary change (see [section D.1.3](#)), it did not fundamentally challenge the existence of wage labour and was useful as a means of regulating capitalism but was "reformed" (i.e. made worse, rather than better) when its existence conflicted with the needs of the capitalist economy.

In other words, the state acts to protect the long-term interests of the capitalist class **as a whole** (and ensure its own survival) by protecting the system. This role can and does clash with the interests of particular capitalists or even whole sections of the ruling class (see [next section](#)). But this conflict does not change the role of the state as the property owners' policeman. Indeed, the state can be considered as a means for settling (in a peaceful and apparently independent manner) upper-class disputes over what to do to keep the system going.

### **B.2.3 How does the ruling class maintain control of the state?**

For simplicity, let's just consider the capitalist state, whose main purpose is to protect the exploitative monopolies described below. Because their economic monopolies are protected by the state, the elites whose incomes are derived from them -- namely, finance capitalists, industrial capitalists, and landlords -- are able to accumulate vast wealth from those whom they exploit. This stratifies society into a hierarchy of economic classes, with a huge disparity of wealth between the small property-owning elite at the top and the non-property-owning majority at the bottom.

Then, because it takes enormous wealth to win elections and lobby or bribe legislators, the propertied

elite are able to control the political process -- and hence the state -- through the "power of the purse." For example, it costs well over \$20 million to run for President of the USA. In other words, elite control of politics through huge wealth disparities insures the continuation of such disparities and thus the continuation of elite control. In this way the crucial political decisions of those at the top are insulated from significant influence by those at the bottom.

Moreover, the ability of capital to disinvest (capital flight) and otherwise adversely impact the economy is a powerful weapon to keep the state as its servant. As Noam Chomsky notes:

*"In capitalist democracy, the interests that must be satisfied are those of capitalists; otherwise, there is no investment, no production, no work, no resources to be devoted, however marginally, to the needs of the general population" [Turning the Tide, p. 233]*

Hence, even allegedly "democratic" capitalist states are in effect dictatorships of the propertariat. Errico Malatesta put it this way:

*"Even with universal suffrage - we could well say even more so with universal suffrage - the government remained the bourgeoisie's servant and **gendarme**. For were it to be otherwise with the government hinting that it might take up a hostile attitude, or that democracy could ever be anything but a pretence to deceive the people, the bourgeoisie, feeling its interests threatened, would be quick to react, and would use all the influence and force at its disposal, by reason of its wealth, to recall the government to its proper place as the bourgeoisie's **gendarme**." [Anarchy, p. 20]*

The existence of a state bureaucracy is a key feature in ensuring that the state remains the ruling class's "policeman" and will be discussed in greater detail in section J.2.2 ([Why do anarchists reject voting as a means for change?](#)). As far as economic forces go, we see their power implied when the news report that changes in government, policies and law have been "welcomed by the markets." As the richest 1% of households in America (about 2 million adults) owned 35% of the stock owned by individuals in 1992 - with the top 10% owning over 81% - we can see that the "opinion" of the markets actually means the power of the richest 1-5% of a country's population (and their finance experts), power derived from their control over investment and production. Given that the bottom 90% of the US population has a smaller share (23%) of all kinds of investable capital than the richest 1/2% (who own 29%), with stock ownership being even more concentrated (the top 5% holding 95% of all shares), it's obvious why Doug Henwood (author of **Wall Street**) argues that stock markets are "a way for the very rich as a class to own an economy's productive capital stock as a whole," are a source of "political power" and a way to have influence over government policy (see [section D.2](#)). [**Wall Street: Class Racket**]

Of course, this does not mean that the state and the capitalist class always see "eye to eye." Top politicians, for example, are part of the ruling elite, but they are in competition with other parts of it. In addition, different sectors of the capitalist class are competing against each other for profits, political influence, privileges, etc. The bourgeoisie, argued Malatesta, "are always at war among themselves . . .

*and . . . the government, though springing from the bourgeoisie and its protector, tends . . . to dominate whoever it protects. Thus the games of the swings, the manoeuvres, the concessions and withdrawals, the attempts to find allies among the people against the conservatives, and among the conservatives against the people."* [Op. Cit., p. 22] As such, the state is often in conflict with sections of the capitalist class, just as sections of that class use the state to advance their own interests within the general framework of protecting the capitalist system (i.e. the interests of the ruling class **as a class**). Such conflicts sometimes give the impression of the state being a "neutral" body, but this is an illusion -- it exists to defend class power and privilege, and to resolve disputes within that class peacefully via the "democratic" process (within which we get the chance of picking the representatives of the elite who will oppress us least).

Nevertheless, without the tax money from successful businesses, the state would be weakened. Hence the role of the state is to ensure the best conditions for capital **as a whole**, which means that, when necessary, it can and does work against the interests of certain parts of the capitalist class. This is what can give the state the appearance of independence and can fool people into thinking that it represents the interests of society as a whole. (For more on the ruling elite and its relation to the state, see C. Wright Mills, **The Power Elite** [Oxford, 1956]; cf. Ralph Miliband, **The State in Capitalist Society** [Basic Books, 1969] and **Divided Societies** [Oxford, 1989]; G. William Domhoff, **Who Rules America?** [Prentice Hall, 1967]; **Who Rules America Now? A View for the '80s** [Touchstone, 1983] and **Toxic Sludge is Good For You! Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry** by John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton [Common Courage Press, 1995]).

## **B.2.4 How does state centralisation affect freedom?**

It's a common but false idea that voting every four or so years to elect the public face of a highly centralised and bureaucratic machine means that ordinary people control the state. Obviously, to say that this idea is false does not imply that there is no difference between a liberal republic and a fascistic or monarchical state. Far from it.

The vote is an important victory wrested from the powers that be. It is one small step on the road to libertarian socialism. Nevertheless, all forms of hierarchy, even those in which the top officers are elected are marked by authoritarianism and centralism. Power is concentrated in the centre (or at the "top"), which means that society becomes *"a heap of dust animated from without by a subordinating, centralist idea."* [P.J. Proudhon, quoted by Martin Buber, **Paths in Utopia**, p. 29] For, once elected, top officers can do as they please, and in all political bureaucracies, many important decisions are made by non-elected staff.

The nature of centralisation places power into the hands of the few. Representative democracy is based on this delegation of power, with voters electing others to govern them. This cannot help but create a situation in which freedom is endangered -- universal suffrage *"does not prevent the formation of a body of politicians, privileged in fact though not in law, who, devoting themselves exclusively to the administration of the nation's public affairs, end by becoming a sort of political aristocracy or*

*oligarchy.*" [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 240]

Centralism makes democracy meaningless, as political decision-making is given over to professional politicians in remote capitals. Lacking local autonomy, people are isolated from each other (atomised) by having no political forum where they can come together to discuss, debate, and decide among themselves the issues they consider important. Elections are not based on natural, decentralised groupings and thus cease to be relevant. The individual is just another "voter" in the mass, a political "constituent" and nothing more. The amorphous basis of modern, statist elections "*aims at nothing less than to abolish political life in towns, communes and departments, and through this destruction of all municipal and regional autonomy to arrest the development of universal suffrage*" [Proudhon, **Ibid.**] Thus people are disempowered by the very structures that claim to allow them to express themselves. To quote Proudhon again, in the centralised state "*the citizen divests himself of sovereignty, the town and the Department and province above it, absorbed by central authority, are no longer anything but agencies under direct ministerial control.*" He continues:

*"The Consequences soon make themselves felt: the citizen and the town are deprived of all dignity, the state's depredations multiply, and the burden on the taxpayer increases in proportion. It is no longer the government that is made for the people; it is the people who are made for the government. Power invades everything, dominates everything, absorbs everything. . ."* [**The Principle of Federation**, p. 59]

As intended, isolated people are no threat to the powers that be. This process of marginalisation can be seen from American history, for example, when town meetings were replaced by elected bodies, with the citizens being placed in passive, spectator roles as mere "voters" (see section B.5 ["Is capitalism empowering and based on human action?"](#)). Being an atomised voter is hardly an ideal notion of "freedom," despite the rhetoric of politicians about the virtues of a "free society" and "The Free World" -- as if voting once every four or five years could ever be classed as "liberty" or even "democracy."

In this way, social concern and power are taken away from ordinary citizens and centralised in the hands of the few. Marginalisation of the people is the key control mechanism in the state and authoritarian organisations in general. Considering the European Community (EC), for example, we find that the "*mechanism for decision-making between EC states leaves power in the hands of officials (from Interior ministries, police, immigration, customs and security services) through a myriad of working groups. Senior officials . . . play a critical role in ensuring agreements between the different state officials. The EC Summit meetings, comprising the 12 Prime Ministers, simply rubber-stamp the conclusions agreed by the Interior and Justice Ministers. It is only then, in this intergovernmental process, that parliaments and people are informed (and them only with the barest details).*" [Tony Bunyon, **Statewatching the New Europe**, p. 39]

As well as economic pressures from elites, governments also face pressures within the state itself due to the bureaucracy that comes with centralism. There is a difference between the state and government. The state is the permanent collection of institutions that have entrenched power structures and interests. The

government is made up of various politicians. It's the institutions that have power in the state due to their permanence, not the representatives who come and go. As Clive Ponting (an ex-civil servant himself) indicates, *"the function of a political system in any country... is to regulate, but not to alter radically, the existing economic structure and its linked power relationships. The great illusion of politics is that politicians have the ability to make whatever changes they like . . ."* [quoted in **Alternatives**, no.5, p. 19].

Therefore, as well as marginalising the people, the state also ends up marginalising "our" representatives. As power rests not in the elected bodies, but in a bureaucracy, popular control becomes increasingly meaningless. As Bakunin pointed out, *"liberty can be valid only when . . . [popular] control [of the state] is valid. On the contrary, where such control is fictitious, this freedom of the people likewise becomes a mere fiction"* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 212].

This means that state centralism can become a serious source of danger to the liberty and well-being of most of the people under it. However, **some** people do benefit from state centralisation, namely those with power who desire to be "left alone" to use it: that is, the two sections of the ruling elite, bureaucrats of capital and state (as will be discussed further in the [next section](#)).

## B.2.5 Who benefits from centralisation?

No social system would exist unless it benefited someone or some group. Centralisation, be it in the state or the company, is no different. In all cases, centralisation directly benefits those at the top, because it shelters them from those who are below, allowing the latter to be controlled and governed more effectively. Therefore, it is in the direct interests of bureaucrats and politicians to support centralism.

Under capitalism, however, various sections of the business class also support state centralism. This is the symbiotic relationship between capital and the state. As will be discussed later, (in [section F.8](#)) the state played an important role in "nationalising" the market, i.e. forcing the "free market" onto society. By centralising power in the hands of representatives and so creating a state bureaucracy, ordinary people were disempowered and thus became less likely to interfere with the interests of the wealthy. *"In a republic,"* writes Bakunin, *"the so-called people, the legal people, allegedly represented by the State, stifle and will keep on stifling the actual and living people" by "the bureaucratic world" for "the greater benefit of the privileged propertied classes as well as for its own benefit"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 211].

Examples of increased political centralisation being promoted by wealthy business interests by can be seen throughout the history of capitalism. *"In revolutionary America, 'the nature of city government came in for heated discussion,' observes Merrill Jensen . . . Town meetings . . . 'had been a focal point of revolutionary activity'. The anti-democratic reaction that set in after the American revolution was marked by efforts to do away with town meeting government . . . Attempts by conservative elements were made to establish a 'corporate form (of municipal government) whereby the towns would be governed by mayors and councils' elected from urban wards . . . [T]he merchants 'backed incorporation consistently in their efforts to escape town meetings' . . ."* [Murray Bookchin, **Towards an Ecological Society**, p.

182]

Here we see local policy making being taken out of the hands of the many and centralised in the hands of the few (who are always the wealthy). France provides another example:

*"The Government found . . . the folknotes [of all households] 'too noisy', too disobedient, and in 1787, elected councils, composed of a mayor and three to six syndics, chosen among the wealthier peasants, were introduced instead" [Peter Kropotkin, **Mutual Aid**, pp. 185-186].*

This was part of a general movement to disempower the working class by centralising decision making power into the hands of the few (as in the American revolution). Kropotkin indicates the process at work:

*"[T]he middle classes, who had until then had sought the support of the people, in order to obtain constitutional laws and to dominate the higher nobility, were going, now that they had seen and felt the strength of the people, to do all they could to dominate the people, to disarm them and to drive them back into subjection.*

[. . .]

*"[T]hey made haste to legislate in such a way that the political power which was slipping out of the hand of the Court should not fall into the hands of the people. Thus . . . [it was] proposed . . . to divide the French into two classes, of which one only, the **active** citizens, should take part in the government, whilst the other, comprising the great mass of the people under the name of **passive** citizens, should be deprived of all political rights . . . [T]he [National] Assembly divided France into departments . . . always maintaining the principle of excluding the poorer classes from the Government . . . [T]hey excluded from the primary assemblies the mass of the people . . . who could no longer take part in the primary assemblies, and accordingly had no right to nominate the electors [who chose representatives to the National Assembly], or the municipality, or any of the local authorities . . .*

*"And finally, the **permanence** of the electoral assemblies was interdicted. Once the middle-class governors were appointed, these assemblies were not to meet again. Once the middle-class governors were appointed, they must not be controlled too strictly. Soon the right even of petitioning and of passing resolutions was taken away -- 'Vote and hold your tongue!' "As to the villages . . . the general assembly of the inhabitants . . . [to which] belonged the administration of the affairs of the commune . . . were forbidden by the . . . law. Henceforth only the well-to-do peasants, the **active** citizens, had the right to meet, **once a year**, to nominate the mayor and the municipality, composed of three or four middle-class men of the village.*

*"A similar municipal organisation was given to the towns. . .*

*"[Thus] the middle classes surrounded themselves with every precaution in order to keep the municipal power in the hands of the well-to-do members of the community." [The Great French Revolution, vol. 1, pp. 179-186]*

Thus centralisation aimed to take power away from the mass of the people and give it to the wealthy. The power of the people rested in popular assemblies, such as the "**Sections**" and "**Districts**" of Paris (expressing, in Kropotkin's words, "*the principles of anarchism*" and "*practising . . . Direct Self-Government*" [Op. Cit., p. 204 and p. 203]) and village assemblies. However, the National Assembly "*tried all it could to lessen the power of the districts . . . [and] put an end to those hotbeds of Revolution . . . [by allowing] active citizens only . . . to take part in the electoral and administrative assemblies.*" [Op. Cit., p. 211] Thus the "*central government was steadily endeavouring to subject the sections to its authority*" with the state "*seeking to centralise everything in its own hands . . . [I]ts depriving the popular organisations . . . all . . . administrative functions . . . its subjecting them to its bureaucracy in police matters, meant the death of the sections.*" [Op. Cit., vol. 2, p. 549 and p. 552]

As can be seen, in both the French and American revolutions saw a similar process by which the wealthy centralised power into their own hands. This ensured that working class people (i.e. the majority) were excluded from the decision making process and subject to the laws and power of others. Which, of course, benefits the minority class whose representatives have that power. (Volume one of Murray Bookchin's **The Third Revolution** discusses the French and American revolutions in some detail).

On the federal and state levels in the US after the Revolution, centralisation of power was encouraged, since "*most of the makers of the Constitution had some direct economic interest in establishing a strong federal government . . . there was . . . a positive need for strong central government to protect the large economic interests.*" [Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, p. 90] In particular, state centralisation was essential to mould US society into one dominated by capitalism:

*"In the thirty years leading up to the Civil War, the law was increasingly interpreted in the courts to suit capitalist development. Studying this, Morton Horwitz (**The Transformation of American Law**) points out that the English common-law was no longer holy when it stood in the way of business growth . . . Judgements for damages against businessmen were taken out of the hands of juries, which were unpredictable, and given to judges . . . The ancient idea of a fair price for goods gave way in the courts to the idea of caveat emptor (let the buyer beware) . . . contract law was intended to discriminate against working people and for business . . . The pretence of the law was that a worker and a railroad made a contract with equal bargaining power . . . 'The circle was completed; the law had come simply to ratify those forms of inequality that the market system had produced.'"* [Op. Cit., p. 234]

The US state was created on elitist liberal doctrine and actively aimed to reduce democratic tendencies

(in the name of "individual liberty"). What happened in practice (unsurprisingly enough) was that the wealthy elite used the state to undermine popular culture and common right in favour of protecting and extending their own interests and power. In the process, US society was reformed in their own image:

*"By the middle of the nineteenth century the legal system had been reshaped to the advantage of men of commerce and industry at the expense of farmers, workers, consumers, and other less powerful groups in society . . . it actively promoted a legal distribution of wealth against the weakest groups in society."* [Horwitz, quoted by Zinn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 235]

In more modern times, state centralisation and expansion has gone hand in glove with rapid industrialisation and the growth of business. As Edward Herman points out, *"[t]o a great extent, it was the growth in business size and power that elicited the countervailing emergence of unions and the growth of government. Bigness **beyond** business was to a large extent a response to bigness **in** business."* [**Corporate Control, Corporate Power**, p. 188 -- see also, Stephen Skowronek, **Building A New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920**] State centralisation was required to produce bigger, well-defined markets and was supported by business when it acted in their interests (i.e. as markets expanded, so did the state in order to standardise and enforce property laws and so on). On the other hand, this development towards "big government" created an environment in which big business could grow (often encouraged by the state by subsidies and protectionism - as would be expected when the state is run by the wealthy) as well as further removing state power from influence by the masses and placing it more firmly in the hands of the wealthy. It is little wonder we see such developments, for *"[s]tructures of governance tend to coalesce around domestic power, in the last few centuries, economic power."* [Noam Chomsky, **World Orders, Old and New**, p. 178]

State centralisation makes it easier for business to control government, ensuring that it remains their puppet and to influence the political process. For example, the European Round Table (ERT) *"an elite lobby group of . . . chairmen or chief executives of large multi-nationals based mainly in the EU... [with] 11 of the 20 largest European companies [with] combined sales [in 1991] . . . exceeding \$500 billion, . . . approximately 60 per cent of EU industrial production,"* makes much use of the EU. As two researchers who have studied this body note, the ERT *"is adept at lobbying . . . so that many ERT proposals and 'visions' are mysteriously regurgitated in Commission summit documents."* The ERT *"claims that the labour market should be more 'flexible,' arguing for more flexible hours, seasonal contracts, job sharing and part time work. In December 1993, seven years after the ERT made its suggestions [and after most states had agreed to the Maastricht Treaty and its "social chapter"], the European Commission published a white paper . . . [proposing] making labour markets in Europe more flexible."* [Doherty and Hoedeman, *"Knights of the Road,"* **New Statesman**, 4/11/94, p. 27]

The current talk of globalisation, NAFTA, and the Single European Market indicates an underlying transformation in which state growth follows the path cut by economic growth. Simply put, with the growth of transnational corporations and global finance markets, the bounds of the nation-state have been made economically redundant. As companies have expanded into multi-nationals, so the pressure



has mounted for states to follow suit and rationalise their markets across "nations" by creating multi-state agreements and unions.

As Noam Chomsky notes, G7, the IMF, the World Bank and so forth are a *"de facto world government,"* and *"the institutions of the transnational state largely serve other masters [than the people], as state power typically does; in this case the rising transnational corporations in the domains of finance and other services, manufacturing, media and communications."* [Op. Cit., p. 179]

As multi-nationals grow and develop, breaking through national boundaries, a corresponding growth in statism is required. Moreover, a *"particularly valuable feature of the rising de facto governing institutions is their immunity from popular influence, even awareness. They operate in secret, creating a world subordinated to the needs of investors, with the public 'put in its place', the threat of democracy reduced."* [Chomsky, Op. Cit., p. 178]

This does not mean that capitalists desire state centralisation for everything. Often, particularly for social issues, relative decentralisation is often preferred (i.e. power is given to local bureaucrats) in order to increase business control over them. By devolving control to local areas, the power which large corporations, investment firms and the like have over the local government increases proportionally. In addition, even middle-sized enterprise can join in and influence, constrain or directly control local policies and set one workforce against another. Private power can ensure that "freedom" is safe, **their** freedom.

No matter which set of bureaucrats are selected, the need to centralise social power, thus marginalising the population, is of prime importance to the business class. It is also important to remember that capitalist opposition to "big government" is often financial, as the state feeds off the available social surplus, so reducing the amount left for the market to distribute to the various capitals in competition.

In reality, what capitalists object to about "big government" is its spending on social programs designed to benefit the poor and working class, an "illegitimate" function which "wastes" part of the surplus that might go to capital (and also makes people less desperate and so less willing to work cheaply). Hence the constant push to reduce the state to its "classical" role as protector of private property and the system, and little else. Other than their specious quarrel with the welfare state, capitalists are the staunchest supports of government (and the "correct" form of state intervention, such as defence spending), as evidenced by the fact that funds can always be found to build more prisons and send troops abroad to advance ruling-class interests, even as politicians are crying that there is "no money" in the treasury for scholarships, national health care, or welfare for the poor.

## B.1 Why are anarchists against authority and hierarchy?

First, it is necessary to indicate what kind of authority anarchism challenges. As Erich Fromm points out in **To Have or To Be**, "authority" is "a broad term with two entirely different meanings: it can be either 'rational' or 'irrational' authority. Rational authority is based on competence, and it helps the person who leans on it to grow. Irrational authority is based on power and serves to exploit the person subjected to it." [pp. 44-45] The same point was made by Bakunin 100 years earlier (see **God and the State**, for example) when he indicated the difference between authority and influence.

This crucial point is expressed in the difference between **having** authority and **being** an authority. Being an authority just means that a given person is generally recognised as competent for a given task, based on his or her individual skills and knowledge. Put differently, it is socially acknowledged expertise. In contrast, having authority is a social relationship based on status and power derived from a hierarchical position, not on individual ability. Obviously this does not mean that competence is not an element for obtaining a hierarchical position; it just means that the real or alleged initial competence is transferred to the title or position of the authority and so becomes independent of individuals, i.e. institutionalised.

This difference is important because the way people behave is more a product of the institutions in which we are raised than of any inherent nature. In other words, social relationships **shape** the individuals involved. This means that the various groups individuals create have traits, behaviours and outcomes that cannot be understood by reducing them to the individuals within them. That is, groups consist not only of individuals, but also relationships between individuals and these relationships will effect those subject to them. For example, obviously "*the exercise of power by some disempowers others*" and so through a "*combination of physical intimidation, economic domination and dependency, and psychological limitations, social institutions and practices affect the way everyone sees the world and her or his place in it.*" [Martha A. Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, p. 20]

Authoritarian social relationships means dividing society into (the few) order givers and (the many) order takers, impoverishing the individuals involved (mentally, emotionally and physically) and society as a whole. Human relationships, in all parts of life, are stamped by authority, not liberty. And as freedom can only be created by freedom, authoritarian social relationships (and the obedience they require) do not and cannot educate a person in freedom - only participation (self-management) in all areas of life can do that.

Of course, it will be pointed out that in any collective undertaking there is a need for co-operation and co-ordination and this need to "subordinate" the individual to group activities is a form of authority. Yes, but there are two different ways of co-ordinating individual activity within groups - either by authoritarian means or by libertarian means. Proudhon, in relation to workplaces, makes the difference clear:

*"either the workman. . . will be simply the employee of the proprietor-capitalist-promoter; or he will participate. . . [and] have a voice in the council, in a word he will become an associate.*

*"In the first case the workman is subordinated, exploited: his permanent condition is one of obedience. . . In the second case he resumes his dignity as a man and citizen. . . he forms part of the producing organisation, of which he was before but the slave; as, in the town, he forms part of the sovereign power, of which he was before but the subject . . . we need not hesitate, for we have no choice. . . it is necessary to form an ASSOCIATION among workers . . . because without that, they would remain related as subordinates and superiors, and there would ensue two . . . castes of masters and wage-workers, which is repugnant to a free and democratic society." [Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, **General Idea of the Revolution**, pp. 215-216]*

In other words, associations can be based upon a form of **rational** authority, based upon **natural influence** and so reflect freedom, the ability of individuals to think, act and feel and manage their own time and activity. Otherwise, we include elements of slavery into our relationships with others, elements that poison the whole and shape us in negative ways (see section [B.1.1](#)). Only the reorganisation of society in a libertarian way (and, we may add, the mental transformation such a change requires and would create) will allow the individual to *"achieve more or less complete blossoming, whilst continuing to develop"* and banish *"that spirit of submission that has been artificially thrust upon him [or her]"* [Nestor Makhno, **The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays**, p. 62]

So, anarchists *"ask nothing better than to see [others]. . . exercise over us a natural and legitimate influence, freely accepted, and never imposed . . . We accept all natural authorities and all influences of fact, but none of right. . . "* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 255] Anarchist support for free association within directly democratic groups is based upon such organisational forms increasing influence and reducing irrational authority in our lives. Members of such organisations can create and present their own ideas and suggestions, critically evaluate the proposals and suggestions from their fellows, accept those that they agree with or become convinced by and have the option of leaving the association if they are unhappy with its direction. Hence the influence of individuals and their free interaction determine the nature of the decisions reached, and no one has the right to impose their ideas on another. As Bakunin argued, in such organisations *"no function remains fixed and it will not remain permanently and irrevocably attached to one person. Hierarchical order and promotion do not exist. . . In such a system, power, properly speaking, no longer exists. Power is diffused to the collectivity and becomes the true expression of the liberty of everyone."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 415]

Therefore, anarchists are opposed to **irrational** (e.g., illegitimate) authority, in other words, hierarchy -- hierarchy being the institutionalisation of authority within a society. Hierarchical social institutions include the state (see section [B.2](#)), private property (see section [B.3](#)) and, therefore, capitalism (see section [B.4](#)). Due to their hierarchical nature, anarchists oppose these institutions with passion.

However, hierarchy exists beyond these institutions. For example, hierarchical social relationships include sexism, racism and homophobia (see section [B.1.4](#)), and anarchists oppose, and fight, them all.

As noted earlier (A.2.8), anarchists consider all hierarchies to be not only harmful but unnecessary, and think that there are alternative, more egalitarian ways to organise social life. In fact, they argue that hierarchical authority creates the conditions it is presumably designed to combat, and thus tends to be self-perpetuating. Thus, bureaucracies ostensibly set up to fight poverty wind up perpetuating it, because without poverty, the high-salaried top administrators would be out of work. The same applies to agencies intended to eliminate drug abuse, fight crime, etc. In other words, the power and privileges deriving from top hierarchical positions constitute a strong incentive for those who hold them **not** to solve the problems they are supposed to solve. (For further discussion see Marilyn French, **Beyond Power: On Women, Men, and Morals**, Summit Books, 1985.)

## B.1.1 What are the effects of authoritarian social relationships?

Hierarchical authority is inextricably connected with the marginalisation and disempowerment of those without authority. This has negative effects on those over whom authority is exercised, since *"[t]hose who have these symbols of authority and those who benefit from them must dull their subject people's realistic, i.e. critical, thinking and make them believe the fiction [that irrational authority is rational and necessary], . . . [so] the mind is lulled into submission by cliches. . . [and] people are made dumb because they become dependent and lose their capacity to trust their eyes and judgement."* [Erich Fromm, **Op. Cit.**, p. 47]

Or, in the words of Bakunin, *"the principle of authority, applied to men who have surpassed or attained their majority, becomes a monstrosity, a source of slavery and intellectual and moral depravity."* [**God and the State**, p. 41]

This is echoed by the syndicalist miners who wrote the classic **The Miners' Next Step** when they indicate the nature of authoritarian organisations and their effect on those involved. Leadership (i.e. hierarchical authority) *"implies power held by the leader. Without power the leader is inept. The possession of power inevitably leads to corruption. . . in spite of. . . good intentions . . . [Leadership means] power of initiative, this sense of responsibility, the self-respect which comes from expressed manhood [sic!], is taken from the men, and consolidated in the leader. The sum of their initiative, their responsibility, their self-respect becomes his. . . [and the] order and system he maintains is based upon the suppression of the men, from being independent thinkers into being 'the men'. . . In a word, he is compelled to become an autocrat and a foe to democracy."* Indeed, for the "leader," such marginalisation can be beneficial, for a leader *"sees no need for any high level of intelligence in the rank and file, except to applaud his actions. Indeed such intelligence from his point of view, by breeding criticism and opposition, is an obstacle and causes confusion."* [**The Miners' Next Step**, pp. 16-17 p. 15]

Anarchists argue that hierarchical social relationships will have a negative effect on those subject to

them, who can no longer exercise their critical, creative and mental abilities **freely**. As Colin Ward argues, people *"do go from womb to tomb without realising their human potential, precisely because the power to initiate, to participate in innovating, choosing, judging, and deciding is reserved for the top men"* (and it usually **is** men!) [**Anarchy in Action**, p, 42]. Anarchism is based on the insight that there is an interrelationship between the authority structures of institutions and the psychological qualities and attitudes of individuals. Following orders all day hardly builds an independent, empowered, creative personality. As Emma Goldman made clear, if a person's *"inclination and judgement are subordinated to the will of a master"* (such as a boss, as most people have to sell their labour under capitalism) then little wonder such an authoritarian relationship *"condemns millions of people to be mere nonentities."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 36]

As the human brain is a bodily organ, it needs to be used regularly in order to be at its fittest. Authority concentrates decision-making in the hands of those at the top, meaning that most people are turned into executants, following the orders of others. If muscle is not used, it turns to fat; if the brain is not used, creativity, critical thought and mental abilities become blunted and side-tracked onto marginal issues, like sports and fashion.

Therefore, *"[h]ierarchical institutions foster alienated and exploitative relationships among those who participate in them, disempowering people and distancing them from their own reality. Hierarchies make some people dependent on others, blame the dependent for their dependency, and then use that dependency as a justification for further exercise of authority. . . .Those in positions of relative dominance tend to define the very characteristics of those subordinate to them. . . .Anarchists argue that to be always in a position of being acted upon and never to be allowed to act is to be doomed to a state of dependence and resignation. Those who are constantly ordered about and prevented from thinking for themselves soon come to doubt their own capacities. . .[and have] difficulty acting on [their] sense of self in opposition to societal norms, standards and expectations."* [Martha Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, pp. 19-20]

Thus, in the words of Colin Ward, the *"system makes its morons, then despises them for their ineptitude, and rewards its 'gifted few' for their rarity."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 43]

In addition to these negative psychological effects from the denial of liberty, authoritarian social relationships also produce social inequality. This is because an individual subject to the authority of another has to obey the orders of those above them in the social hierarchy. In capitalism this means that workers have to follow the orders of their boss (see [next section](#)), orders that are designed to make the boss richer (for example, from 1994 to 1995 alone, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) compensation in the USA rose 16 percent, compared to 2.8 percent for workers, which did not even keep pace with inflation, and whose stagnating wages cannot be blamed on corporate profits, which rose a healthy 14.8 percent for that year). Inequality in terms of power will translate itself into inequality in terms of wealth (and vice versa). The effects of such social inequality are wide-reaching.

For example, poor people are more likely to be sick and die at an earlier age, compared to rich people.

Moreover, the degree of inequality is important (i.e. the size of the gap between rich and poor). According to an editorial in the **British Medical Journal** "*what matters in determining mortality and health in a society is less the overall wealth of that society and more how evenly wealth is distributed. The more equally wealth is distributed the better the health of that society,*" [Vol. 312, April 20, 1996, p. 985]

Research in the USA found overwhelming evidence of this. George Kaplan and his colleagues measured inequality in the 50 US states and compared it to the age-adjusted death rate for all causes of death, and a pattern emerged: the more unequal the distribution of income, the greater the death rate. In other words, it is the gap between rich and poor, and not the average income in each state, that best predicts the death rate in each state. [*Inequality in income and mortality in the United States: analysis of mortality and potential pathways,* **British Medical Journal** Vol. 312, April 20, 1996, pp. 999-1003]

This measure of income inequality was also tested against other social conditions besides health. States with greater inequality in the distribution of income also had higher rates of unemployment, higher rates of incarceration, a higher percentage of people receiving income assistance and food stamps, a greater percentage of people without medical insurance, greater proportion of babies born with low birth weight, higher murder rates, higher rates of violent crime, higher costs per-person for medical care, and higher costs per person for police protection.

Moreover states with greater inequality of income distribution also spent less per person on education, had fewer books per person in the schools, and had poorer educational performance, including worse reading skills, worse mathematics skills, and lower rates of completion of high school.

As the gap grows between rich and poor (indicating an increase in social hierarchy within and outwith of workplaces) the health of a people deteriorates and the social fabric unravels. The psychological hardship of being low down on the social ladder has detrimental effects on people, beyond whatever effects are produced by the substandard housing, nutrition, air quality, recreational opportunities, and medical care enjoyed by the poor (see George Davey Smith, "*Income inequality and mortality: why are they related?*" **British Medical Journal**, Vol. 312, April 20, 1996, pp. 987-988).

The growing gap between rich and poor has not been ordained by god, nature or some other superhuman force. It has been created by a specific social system, its institutions and workings - a system based upon authoritarian social relationships which effect us both physically and mentally.

All this is not to suggest that those at the bottom of hierarchies are victims nor that those at the top of hierarchies only gain benefits - far from it. Those at the bottom are constantly resisting the negative effects of hierarchy and creating non-hierarchical ways of living and fighting. This constant process of self-activity and self-liberation can be seen from the labour, women's and other movements - in which, to some degree, people create their own alternatives based upon their own dreams and hopes. Anarchism is based upon, and grew out of, this process of resistance, hope and direct action.

If we look at those at the top of the system, yes, indeed they often do **very** well in terms of material goods and access to education, leisure, health and so on but they can lose their humanity and individuality. As Bakunin pointed out, "*power and authority corrupt those who exercise them as much as those who are compelled to submit to them.*" [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 249] Power operates destructively, even on those who have it, reducing their individuality as it "*renders them stupid and brutal, even when they were originally endowed with the best of talents. One who is constantly striving to force everything into a mechanical order at last becomes a machine himself and loses all human feeling.*" [Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 22]

When it boils down to it, hierarchy is self-defeating, for if "*wealth is other people,*" then by treating others as less than yourself, restricting their growth, you lose all the potential insights and abilities these individuals have, so impoverishing your own life and **restricting your own growth**. Unfortunately in these days material wealth (a particularly narrow form of "self-interest") has replaced concern for developing the whole person and leading a fulfilling and creative life (a broad self-interest, which places the individual **within** society, one that recognises that relationships with others shape and develop all individuals). In a hierarchical, class based society everyone loses to some degree, even those at the "top."

## B.1.2 Is capitalism hierarchical?

Yes. Under capitalism workers do not exchange the products of their labour they exchange the labour itself for money. They sell themselves for a given period of time, and in return for wages, promise to obey their paymasters. Those who pay and give the orders -- owners and managers -- are at the top of the hierarchy, those who obey at the bottom. This means that capitalism, by its very nature, is hierarchical.

As Carole Pateman argues, "*[c]apacities or labour power cannot be used without the worker using his will, his understanding and experience, to put them into effect. The use of labour power requires the presence of its 'owner,' and it remains mere potential until he acts in the manner necessary to put it into use, or agrees or is compelled so to act; that is, the worker must labour. To contract for the use of labour power is a waste of resources unless it can be used in the way in which the new owner requires. The fiction 'labour power' cannot be used; what is required is that the worker labours as demanded. The employment contract must, therefore, create a relationship of command and obedience between employer and worker. . . In short, the contract in which the worker allegedly sells his labour power is a contract in which, since he cannot be separated from his capacities, he sells command over the use of his body and himself. To obtain the right to use another is to be a (civil) master*" [**The Sexual Contract**, pp. 150-1 -- compare to Proudhon quoted above]

This hierarchical control of wage labour has the effect of alienating workers from their own work, and so from themselves. Workers no longer govern themselves during work hours and so are no longer free. Capitalism, by treating labour as analogous to all other commodities denies the key distinction between labour and other "resources" - that is to say its inseparability from its bearer - labour, unlike other "property," is endowed with will and agency. Thus when one speaks of selling labour there is a

necessary subjugation of will (hierarchy). As Karl Polanyi writes:

*"Labour is only another name for human activity which goes with life itself, which is in turn not produced for sale but for entirely different reasons, nor can that activity be detached from the rest of life itself, be stored or mobilised."* [**The Great Transformation**, p. 72]

In other words, labour is much more than the commodity to which capitalism tries to reduce it. Creative, self-managed work is a source of pride and joy and part of what it means to be fully human. Wrenching control of work from the hands of the worker profoundly harms his or her mental and physical health. Indeed, Proudhon went so far as to argue that capitalist companies "*plunder the bodies and souls of the wage-workers*" and were an "*outrage upon human dignity and personality.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 219]

Separating labour from other activities of life and subjecting it to the laws of the market means to annihilate its natural, organic form of existence -- a form that evolved with the human race through tens of thousands of years of co-operative economic activity based on sharing and mutual aid -- and replacing it with an atomistic and individualistic one based on contract and competition.

The social relationship of wage labour, which is a very recent development, is then claimed by capitalists to be a source of "freedom," whereas in fact it is a form of involuntary servitude (see section [B.4](#) and [A.2.14](#)). Therefore a libertarian who did not support economic liberty (i.e. self-government in industry, socialism) would be no libertarian at all, and no believer in liberty.

Therefore capitalism is based upon hierarchy and the denial of liberty. To present it otherwise denies the nature of wage labour. However supporters of capitalism try to but - as Karl Polanyi points out - the idea that wage labour is based upon some kind of "natural" liberty is false:

*"To represent this principle [wage labour] as one of non-interference [with freedom], as economic liberals were wont to do, was merely the expression of an ingrained prejudice in favour of a definite kind of interference, namely, such as would destroy non-contractual relations between individuals and prevent their spontaneous re-formation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p.163]

This replacement of human relationships by economic ones soon results in the replacement of human values by economic ones, giving us an "ethics" of the account book, in which people are valued by how much they earn. It also leads, as Murray Bookchin argues, to a debasement of human values:

*"[S]o deeply rooted is the market economy in our minds that its grubby language has replaced our most hallowed moral and spiritual expressions. We now 'invest' in our children, marriages, and personal relationships, a term that is equated with words like 'love' and 'care.' We live in a world of 'trade-offs' and we ask for the 'bottom line' of any emotional 'transaction.' We use the terminology of contracts rather than that of loyalties*



*and spiritual affinities.*" [The Modern Crisis, p. 79]

With human values replaced by the ethics of calculation, and with only the laws of market and state "binding" people together, social breakdown is inevitable. As Karl Polanyi argues, *"in disposing of a man's labour power the [market] system would, incidently, dispose of the physical, psychological, and moral entity 'man' attached to that tag."* [Op. Cit., p. 73]

Little wonder modern capitalism has seen a massive increase in crime and dehumanisation under the freer markets established by "conservative" governments, such as those of Thatcher and Reagan and their transnational corporate masters. We now live in a society where people live in self-constructed fortresses, "free" behind their walls and defences (both emotional and physical).

Of course, some people **like** the "ethics" of mathematics. But this is mostly because -- like all gods -- it gives the worshipper an easy rule book to follow. "Five is greater than four, therefore five is better" is pretty simple to understand. John Steinbeck noticed this when he wrote:

*"Some of them [the owners] hated the mathematics that drove them [to kick the farmers off their land], and some were afraid, and some worshipped the mathematics because it provided a refuge from thought and from feeling"* [The Grapes of Wrath, p. 34].

### B.1.3 What kind of hierarchy of values does capitalism create?

Capitalism produces a perverted hierarchy of values -- one that places humanity below property. As Erich Fromm argues, *"the use [i.e. exploitation] of man by man is expressive of the system of values underlying the capitalistic system. **Capital, the dead past, employs labour -- the living vitality and power of the present.** In the capitalistic hierarchy of values, capital stands higher than labour, amassed things higher than the manifestations of life. Capital employs labour, and not labour capital. The person who owns capital commands the person who 'only' owns his life, human skill, vitality and creative productivity. 'Things' are higher than man. The conflict between capital and labour is much more than the conflict between two classes, more than their fight for a greater share of the social product. It is the conflict between two principles of value: that between the world of things, and their amassment, and the world of life and its productivity."* [The Sane Society, pp. 94-95]

Capitalism only values a person as representing a certain amount of the commodity called "labour power," in other words, as a **thing**. Instead of being valued as an individual -- a unique human being with intrinsic moral and spiritual worth -- only one's price tag counts.

This debasement of the individual in the workplace, where so much time is spent, necessarily affects a person's self-image, which in turn carries over into the way he or she acts in other areas of life. If one is regarded as a commodity at work, one comes to regard oneself and others in that way also. Thus all social relationships -- and so, ultimately, **all** individuals -- are commodified. In capitalism, literally nothing is sacred -- "everything has its price" -- be it dignity, self-worth, pride, honour -- all become

commodities up for grabs.

Such debasement produces a number of social pathologies. "Consumerism" is one example which can be traced directly to the commodification of the individual under capitalism. To quote Fromm again, "*Things have no self, and men who have become things [i.e. commodities on the labour market] can have no self.*" [**The Sane Society**, p. 143]

However, people still feel the **need** for selfhood, and so try to fill the emptiness by consuming. The illusion of happiness, that one's life will be complete if one gets a new commodity, drives people to consume. Unfortunately, since commodities are yet more things, they provide no substitute for selfhood, and so the consuming must begin anew. This process is, of course, encouraged by the advertising industry, which tries to convince us to buy what we don't need because it will make us popular/sexy/happy/free/etc. (delete as appropriate!). But consuming cannot really satisfy the needs that the commodities are bought to satisfy. Those needs can only be satisfied by social interaction based on truly human values and by creative, self-directed work.

This does not mean, of course, that anarchists are against higher living standards or material goods. To the contrary, they recognise that liberty and a good life are only possible when one does not have to worry about having enough food, decent housing, and so forth. Freedom and 16 hours of work a day do not go together, nor do equality and poverty or solidarity and hunger. However, anarchists consider consumerism to be a distortion of consumption caused by the alienating and inhuman "account book" ethics of capitalism, which crushes the individual and his or her sense of identity, dignity and selfhood.

## **B.1.4 Why do racism, sexism and homophobia exist?**

Since racism, sexism and homophobia (hatred/fear of homosexuals) are institutionalised throughout society, sexual, racial and gay oppression are commonplace. The primary cause of these three evil attitudes is the need for ideologies that justify domination and exploitation, which are inherent in hierarchy -- in other words, "theories" that "justify" and "explain" oppression and injustice. As Tacitus said, "*We hate those whom we injure.*" Those who oppress others always find reasons to regard their victims as "inferior" and hence deserving of their fate. Elites need some way to justify their superior social and economic positions. Since the social system is obviously unfair and elitist, attention must be distracted to other, less inconvenient, "facts," such as alleged superiority based on biology or "nature." Therefore, doctrines of sexual, racial, and ethnic superiority are inevitable in hierarchical, class-stratified societies.

We will take each form of bigotry in turn.

From an economic standpoint, racism is associated with the exploitation of cheap labour at home and imperialism abroad. Indeed, early capitalist development in both America and Europe was strengthened by the bondage of people, particularly those of African descent. In the Americas, Australia and other parts of the world the slaughter of the original inhabitants and the expropriation of their land was also a

key aspect in the growth of capitalism. As the subordination of foreign nations proceeds by force, it appears to the dominant nation that it owes its mastery to its special natural qualities, in other words to its "racial" characteristics. Thus imperialists have frequently appealed to the Darwinian doctrine of "Survival of the Fittest" to give their racism a basis in "nature."

In Europe, one of the first theories of racial superiority was proposed by Gobineau in the 1850s to establish the natural right of the aristocracy to rule over France. He argued that the French aristocracy was originally of Germanic origin while the "masses" were Gallic or Celtic, and that since the Germanic race was "superior", the aristocracy had a natural right to rule. Although the French "masses" didn't find this theory particularly persuasive, it was later taken up by proponents of German expansion and became the origin of German racial ideology, used to justify Nazi oppression of Jews and other "non-Aryan" types. Notions of the "white man's burden" and "Manifest Destiny" developed at about the same time in England and to a lesser extent in America, and were used to rationalise Anglo-Saxon conquest and world domination on a "humanitarian" basis.

The idea of racial superiority was also found to have great domestic utility. As Paul Sweezy points out, *"[t]he intensification of social conflict within the advanced capitalist countries. . . has to be directed as far as possible into innocuous channels -- innocuous, that is to say, from the standpoint of capitalist class rule. The stirring up of antagonisms along racial lines is a convenient method of directing attention away from class struggle,"* which of course is dangerous to ruling-class interests [**Theory of Capitalist Development**, p. 311]. Indeed, employers have often deliberately fostered divisions among workers on racial lines as part of a strategy of "divide and rule."

In other words, racism (like other forms of bigotry) can be used to split and divide the working class by getting people to blame others of their class for the conditions they all suffer. Thus white workers are subtly encouraged, for example, to blame unemployment on blacks instead of capitalism, crime on Hispanics instead of poverty. In addition, discrimination against racial minorities and women has the full sanction of capitalist economics, *"for in this way jobs and investment opportunities can be denied to the disadvantaged groups, their wages and profits can be depressed below prevailing levels, and the favoured sections of the population can reap substantial material rewards."* [**Ibid.**]

Thus capitalism has continued to benefit from its racist heritage. Racism has provided pools of cheap labour for capitalists to draw upon (blacks still, usually, get paid less than whites for the same work) and permitted a section of the population to be subjected to worse treatment, so increasing profits by reducing working conditions and other non-pay related costs.

All this means that blacks are *"subjected to oppression and exploitation on the dual grounds of race and class, and thus have to fight the extra battles against racism and discrimination."* [Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, **Anarcho-syndicalists of the world unite**]

Sexism only required a "justification" once women started to act for themselves and demand equal rights. Before that point, sexual oppression did not need to be "justified" -- it was "natural" (saying that,

of course, equality between the sexes was stronger before the rise of Christianity as a state religion and capitalism so the "place" of women in society has fallen over the last few hundred years before rising again thanks to the women's movement).

The nature of sexual oppression can be seen from marriage. Emma Goldman pointed out that marriage "*stands for the sovereignty of the man over the women,*" with her "*complete submission*" to the husbands "*whims and commands.*" [Red Emma Speaks, p. 139] As Carole Pateman notes, until "*the late nineteenth century the legal and position of a wife resembled that of a slave. . . A slave had no independent legal existence apart from his master, and husband and wife became 'one person,' the person of the husband.*" [The Sexual Contract, p. 119] Indeed, the law "*was based on the assumption that a wife was (like) property*" and only the marriage contract "*includes the explicit commitment to obey.*" [Ibid., p. 122, p. 181]

However, when women started to question the assumptions of male domination, numerous theories were developed to explain why women's oppression and domination by men was "natural." Because men enforced their rule over women by force, men's "superiority" was argued to be a "natural" product of their gender, which is associated with greater physical strength (on the premise that "might makes right"). In the 17th century, it was argued that women were more like animals than men, thus "proving" that women had as much right to equality with men as sheep did. More recently, elites have embraced socio-biology in response to the growing women's movement. By "explaining" women's oppression on biological grounds, a social system run by men and for men could be ignored.

Women's subservient role also has economic value for capitalism (we should note that Goldman considered capitalism to be another "*paternal arrangement*" like marriage, both of which robbed people of their "*birthright,*" "*stunts*" their growth, "*poisons*" their bodies and keeps people in "*ignorance, in poverty and dependence.*" [Op. Cit., p. 164]). Women often provide necessary (and unpaid) labour which keeps the (usually) male worker in good condition; and it is primarily women who raise the next generation of wage-slaves (again without pay) for capitalist owners to exploit. Moreover, women's subordination gives working-class men someone to look down upon and, sometimes, a convenient target on whom they can take out their frustrations (instead of stirring up trouble at work). As Lucy Parsons pointed out, a working class woman is "*a slave to a slave.*"

The oppression of lesbians, gays and bisexuals is inextricably linked with sexism. A patriarchal, capitalist society cannot see homosexual practices as the normal human variations they are because they blur that society's rigid gender roles and sexist stereotypes. Most young gay people keep their sexuality to themselves for fear of being kicked out of home and all gays have the fear that some "straights" will try to kick their sexuality out of them if they express their sexuality freely.

Gays are not oppressed on a whim but because of the specific need of capitalism for the nuclear family. The nuclear family, as the primary - and inexpensive - creator of submissive people (growing up within the authoritarian family gets children used to, and "respectful" of, hierarchy and subordination - see section [B.1.5](#)) as well as provider and carer for the workforce fulfils an important need for capitalism.

Alternative sexuality represent a threat to the family model because they provide a different role model for people. This means that gays are going to be in the front line of attack whenever capitalism wants to reinforce "family values" (i.e. submission to authority, "tradition", "morality" and so on). The introduction of Clause 28 in Britain is a good example of this, with the government making it illegal for public bodies to promote gay sexuality (i.e. to present it as anything other than a perversion). Therefore, the oppression of people based on their sexuality will not end until sexism is eliminated.

Before discussing how anarchists think these forms of oppression can be got rid of, it is useful to highlight why they are harmful to those who practice them (and in some way benefit from them) as well as the oppressed.

Sexism, racism and homophobia divide the working class, which means that whites, males and heterosexuals hurt themselves by maintaining a pool of low-paid competing labour, ensuring low wages for their own wives, daughters, mothers, relatives and friends. Such divisions create inferior conditions and wages for all as capitalists gain a competitive advantage using this pool of cheap labour, forcing all capitalists to cut conditions and wages to survive in the market (in addition, such social hierarchies, by undermining solidarity against the employer on the job and the state possibly create a group of excluded workers who could become scabs during strikes). Also, "privileged" sections of the working class lose out because their wages and conditions are less than those which unity could have won them. Only the boss really wins.

This can be seen from research into this subject. The researcher Al Szymanski sought to systematically and scientifically test the proposition that white workers gain from racism [*Racial Discrimination and White Gain*", in **American Sociological Review**, vol. 41, no. 3, June 1976, pp. 403-414]. He compared the situation of "white" and "non-white" (i.e. black, Native American, Asian and Hispanic) workers in United States and found several key things:

(1) the narrower the gap between white and black wages in an American state, the higher white earnings were relative to white earnings elsewhere. This means that *"whites do not benefit economically by economic discrimination. White workers especially appear to benefit economically from the **absence** of economic discrimination. . . both in the absolute level of their earnings **and** in relative equality among whites."*[p. 413] In other words, the less wage discrimination there was against black workers, the better were the wages that white workers received.

(2) the more "non-white" people in the population of a given American State, the more inequality there was between whites. In other words, the existence of a poor, oppressed group of workers reduced the wages of white workers, although it did not affect the earnings of non-working class whites very much (*"the greater the discrimination against [non-white] people, the greater the inequality among whites"* [p. 410]). So white workers clearly lost economically from this discrimination.

(3) He also found that *"the more intense racial discrimination is, the lower are the white earnings because of . . . [its effect on] working-class solidarity."* [p. 412] In other words, racism economically disadvantages white workers because it undermines the solidarity between black and white workers and weakens trade union organisation.

So overall, these white workers receive some apparent privileges from racism, but are in fact screwed by it. Thus racism and other forms of hierarchy actually works against the interests of those working class people who practice it -- and, by weakening workplace and social unity, benefits the ruling class.

In addition, a wealth of alternative viewpoints, insights, experiences, cultures, thoughts and so on are denied the racist, sexist or homophobe. Their minds are trapped in a cage, stagnating within a monoculture -- and stagnation is death for the personality. Such forms of oppression are dehumanising for those who practice them, for the oppressor lives as a **role**, not as a person, and so are restricted by it and cannot express their individuality **freely** (and so do so in very limited ways). This warps the personality of the oppressor and impoverishes their own life and personality. Homophobia and sexism also limits the flexibility of all people, gay or straight, to choose the sexual expressions and relationships that are right for them. The sexual repression of the sexist and homophobe will hardly be good for their mental health, their relationships or general development.

From the anarchist standpoint, oppression based on race, sex or sexuality will remain forever intractable under capitalism or, indeed, under any economic system based on domination and exploitation. While individual members of "minorities" may prosper, racism as a justification for inequality is too useful a tool for elites to discard. By using the results of racism (e.g. poverty) as a justification for racist ideology, criticism of the status quo can, yet again, be replaced by nonsense about "nature" and "biology." Similarly with sexism or discrimination against gays.

The long-term solution is obvious: dismantle capitalism and the hierarchical, economically class-stratified society with which it is bound up. By getting rid of capitalist oppression and exploitation and its consequent imperialism and poverty, we will also eliminate the need for ideologies of racial or sexual superiority used to justify the oppression of one group by another or to divide and weaken the working class.

As part of that process, anarchists encourage and support all sections of the population to stand up for their humanity and individuality by resisting racist, sexist and anti-gay activity and challenging such views in their everyday lives, everywhere (as Carole Pateman points out, *"sexual domination structures the workplace as well as the conjugal home"* [Op. Cit., p. 142]). It means a struggle of all working class people against the internal and external tyrannies we face -- we must fight against our own prejudices while supporting those in struggle against our common enemies, no matter their sex, skin colour or sexuality. Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin words on fighting racism are applicable to all forms of oppression:

*"Racism must be fought vigorously wherever it is found, even if in our own ranks, and even in ones own breast. Accordingly, we must end the system of white skin privilege"*

*which the bosses use to split the class, and subject racially oppressed workers to super-exploitation. White workers, especially those in the Western world, must resist the attempt to use one section of the working class to help them advance, while holding back the gains of another segment based on race or nationality. This kind of class opportunism and capitulationism on the part of white labour must be directly challenged and defeated. There can be no workers unity until the system of super-exploitation and world White Supremacy is brought to an end." [Op. Cit.]*

Progress towards equality can and has been made. While it is still true that (in the words of Emma Goldman) "[n]owhere is woman treated according to the merit of her work, but rather as a sex" [Op. Cit., p. 145] and that education is still patriarchal, with young women still often steered away from traditionally "male" courses of study and work (which teaches children that men and women are assigned different roles in society and sets them up to accept these limitations as they grow up) it is also true that the position of women, like that of blacks and gays, **has** improved. This is due to the various self-organised, self-liberation movements that have continually developed throughout history and these are **the** key to fighting oppression in the short term (and creating the potential for the long term solution of dismantling capitalism and the state).

Emma Goldman argued that emancipation begins "*in [a] woman's soul.*" Only by a process of internal emancipation, in which the oppressed get to know their own value, respect themselves and their culture, can they be in a position to effectively combat (and overcome) external oppression and attitudes. Only when you respect yourself can you be in a position to get others to respect you. Those men, whites and heterosexuals who are opposed to bigotry, inequality and injustice, must support oppressed groups and refuse to condone racist, sexist or homophobia attitudes and actions by others or themselves. For anarchists, "*not a single member of the Labour movement may with impunity be discriminated against, suppressed or ignored. . . Labour [and other] organisations must be built on the principle of equal liberty of all its members. This equality means that only if each worker is a free and independent unit, co-operating with the others from his or her mutual interests, can the whole labour organisation work successfully and become powerful.*" [Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, **Op. Cit.**]

We must all treat people as equals, while at the same time respecting their differences. Diversity is a strength and a source of joy, and anarchists reject the idea that equality means conformity. By these methods, of internal self-liberation and solidarity against external oppression, we can fight against bigotry. Racism, sexism and homophobia can be reduced, perhaps almost eliminated, before a social revolution has occurred by those subject to them organising themselves, fighting back **autonomously** and refusing to be subjected to racial, sexual or anti-gay abuse or to allowing others to get away with it (which plays an essential role in making others aware of their own attitudes and actions, attitudes they may not even be blind to!). An essential part of this process is for such autonomous groups to actively support others in struggle (including members of the dominant race/sex/sexuality). Such practical solidarity and communication can, when combined with the radicalising effects of the struggle itself on those involved, help break down prejudice and bigotry, undermining the social hierarchies that oppress us all. For example, gay and lesbian groups supporting the 1984/5 UK miners' strike resulted in such groups being given pride of place in many miners' marches.

For whites, males and heterosexuals, the only anarchistic approach is to support others in struggle, refuse to tolerate bigotry in others and to root out their own fears and prejudices (while refusing to be uncritical of self-liberation struggles -- solidarity does not imply switching your brain off!). This obviously involves taking the issue of social oppression into all working class organisations and activity, ensuring that no oppressed group is marginalised within them.

Only in this way can the hold of these social diseases be weakened and a better, non-hierarchical system be created. An injury to one is an injury to all.

The example of the *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women) in Spain during the 1930s shows what is possible. Women anarchists involved in the C.N.T. and F.A.I. organised themselves autonomously raise the issue of sexism in the wider libertarian movement, to increase women involvement in libertarian organisations and help the process of women's self-liberation against male oppression. Along the way they also had to combat the (all too common) sexist attitudes of their "revolutionary" male fellow anarchists. Martha A. Ackelsberg's book **Free Women of Spain** is an excellent account of this movement and the issues it raises for all people concerned about freedom.

Needless to say, anarchists totally reject the kind of "equality" that accepts other kinds of hierarchy, that accepts the dominant priorities of capitalism and the state and accedes to the devaluation of relationships and individuality in name of power and wealth. There is a kind of "equality" in having "equal opportunities," in having black, gay or women bosses and politicians, but one that misses the point. Saying "Me too!" instead of "What a mess!" does not suggest real liberation, just different bosses and new forms of oppression. We need to look at the way society is organised, not at the sex, colour, nationality or sexuality of who is giving the orders!

## **B.1.5 How is the mass-psychological basis for authoritarian civilisation created?**

We noted in section [A.3.6](#) that hierarchical, authoritarian institutions tend to be self-perpetuating, because growing up under their influence creates submissive/authoritarian personalities -- people who both "respect" authority (based on fear of punishment) and desire to exercise it themselves on subordinates. Individuals with such a character structure do not really want to dismantle hierarchies, because they are afraid of the responsibility entailed by genuine freedom. It seems "natural" and "right" to them that society's institutions, from the authoritarian factory to the patriarchal family, should be pyramidal, with an elite at the top giving orders while those below them merely obey. Thus we have the spectacle of so-called "Libertarians" and "anarcho" capitalists bleating about "liberty" while at the same time advocating factory fascism and privatised states. In short, authoritarian civilisation reproduces itself with each generation because, through an intricate system of conditioning that permeates every aspect of society, it creates masses of people who support the status quo.



Wilhelm Reich has given one of the most thorough analyses of the psychological processes involved in the reproduction of authoritarian civilisation. Reich based his analysis on four of Freud's most solidly grounded discoveries, namely, (1) that there exists an unconscious part of the mind which has a powerful though irrational influence on behaviour; (2) that even the small child develops a lively "genital" sexuality, i.e. a desire for sexual pleasure which has nothing to do with procreation; (3) that childhood sexuality along with the Oedipal conflicts that arise in parent-child relations under monogamy and patriarchy are usually repressed through fear of punishment or disapproval for sexual acts and thoughts; (4) that this blocking of the child's natural sexual activity and extinguishing it from memory does not weaken its force in the unconscious, but actually intensifies it and enables it to manifest itself in various pathological disturbances and anti-social drives; and (5) that, far from being of divine origin, human moral codes are derived from the educational measures used by the parents and parental surrogates in earliest childhood, the most effective of these being the ones opposed to childhood sexuality.

By studying Bronislaw Malinowski's research on the Trobriand Islanders, a woman-centred (matricentric) society in which children's sexual behaviour was not repressed and in which neuroses and perversions as well as authoritarian institutions and values were almost non-existent, Reich came to the conclusion that patriarchy and authoritarianism originally developed when tribal chieftains began to get economic advantages from a certain type of marriage ("cross-cousin marriages") entered into by their sons. In such marriages, the brothers of the son's wife were obliged to pay a dowry to her in the form of continuous tribute, thus enriching her husband's clan (i.e. the chief's). By arranging many such marriages for his sons (which were usually numerous due to the chief's privilege of polygamy), the chief's clan could accumulate wealth. Thus society began to be stratified into ruling and subordinate clans based on wealth.

To secure the permanence of these "good" marriages, strict monogamy was required. However, it was found that monogamy was impossible to maintain without the repression of childhood sexuality, since, as statistics show, children who are allowed free expression of sexuality often do not adapt successfully to life-long monogamy. Therefore, along with class stratification and private property, authoritarian child-rearing methods were developed to inculcate the repressive sexual morality on which the new patriarchal system depended for its reproduction. Thus there is a historical correlation between, on the one hand, pre-patriarchal society, primitive libertarian communism (or "*work democracy*," to use Reich's expression), economic equality, and sexual freedom, and on the other, patriarchal society, a private-property economy, economic class stratification, and sexual repression. As Reich puts it:

*"Every tribe that developed from a [matricentric] to a patriarchal organisation had to change the sexual structure of its members to produce a sexuality in keeping with its new form of life. This was a necessary change because the shifting of power and of wealth from the democratic gens [maternal clans] to the authoritarian family of the chief was mainly implemented with the help of the suppression of the sexual strivings of the people. It was in this way that sexual suppression became an essential factor in the division of society into classes.*

*"Marriage, and the lawful dowry it entailed, became the axis of the transformation of the one organisation into the other. In view of the fact that the marriage tribute of the wife's gens to the man's family strengthened the male's, especially the chief's, position of power, the male members of the higher ranking gens and families developed a keen interest in making the nuptial ties permanent. At this stage, in other words, only the man had an interest in marriage. In this way natural work-democracy's simple alliance, which could be easily dissolved at any time, was transformed into the permanent and monogamous marital relationship of patriarchy. The permanent monogamous marriage became the basic institution of patriarchal society -- which it still is today. To safeguard these marriages, however, it was necessary to impose greater and greater restrictions upon and to depreciate natural genital strivings." [The Mass Psychology of Fascism, p. 90]*

The suppression of natural sexuality involved in this transformation from matricentric to patriarchal society created various anti-social drives (sadism, destructive impulses, rape fantasies, etc.), which then also had to be suppressed through the imposition of a compulsive morality, which took the place the natural self-regulation that one finds in pre-patriarchal societies. In this way, sex began to be regarded as "dirty," "diabolical," "wicked," etc. -- which it had indeed become through the creation of secondary drives. Thus:

*"The patriarchal- authoritarian sexual order that resulted from the revolutionary processes of latter-day [matricentrism] (economic independence of the chief's family from the maternal gens, a growing exchange of goods between the tribes, development of the means of production, etc.) becomes the primary basis of authoritarian ideology by depriving the women, children, and adolescents of their sexual freedom, making a commodity of sex and placing sexual interests in the service of economic subjugation. From now on, sexuality is indeed distorted; it becomes diabolical and demonic and has to be curbed" [Ibid. p. 88].*

Once the beginnings of patriarchy are in place, the creation of a fully authoritarian society based on the psychological crippling of its members through sexual suppression follows:

*"The moral inhibition of the child's natural sexuality, the last stage of which is the severe impairment of the child's **genital** sexuality, makes the child afraid, shy, fearful of authority, obedient, 'good,' and 'docile' in the authoritarian sense of the words. It has a crippling effect on man's rebellious forces because every vital life-impulse is now burdened with severe fear; and since sex is a forbidden subject, thought in general and man's critical faculty also become inhibited. In short, morality's aim is to produce acquiescent subjects who, despite distress and humiliation, are adjusted to the authoritarian order. Thus, the family is the authoritarian state in miniature, to which the child must learn to adapt himself as a preparation for the general social adjustment required of him later. Man's authoritarian structure -- this must be clearly established -- is basically produced by the embedding of sexual inhibitions and fear" in the person's bioenergetic structure. [Ibid., p. 30]*

In this way, by damaging the individual's power to rebel and think for him/herself, the inhibition of childhood sexuality -- and indeed other forms of free, natural expression of bioenergy (e.g. shouting, crying, running, jumping, etc.) -- becomes the most important weapon in creating reactionary personalities. This is why every reactionary politician puts such an emphasis on "strengthening the family" and promoting "family values" (i.e. patriarchy, compulsive monogamy, premarital chastity, corporal punishment, etc.).

*"Since authoritarian society reproduces itself in the individual structures of the masses with the help of the authoritarian family, it follows that political reaction has to regard and defend the authoritarian family as **the** basis of the 'state, culture, and civilisation. . . .' [It is] **political reaction's germ cell**, the most important centre for the production of reactionary men and women. Originating and developing from definite social processes, it becomes the most essential institution for the preservation of the authoritarian system that shapes it." [Op. cit., pp. 104-105]*

The family is the most essential institution for this purpose because children are most vulnerable to psychological maiming in their first few years, from the time of birth to about six years of age, during which time they are mostly in the charge of their parents. The schools and churches then continue the process of conditioning once the children are old enough to be away from their parents, but they are generally unsuccessful if the proper foundation has not been laid very early in life by the parents. Thus A.S. Neill observes that *"the nursery training is very like the kennel training. The whipped child, like the whipped puppy, grows into an obedient, inferior adult. And as we train our dogs to suit our own purposes, so we train our children. In that kennel, the nursery, the human dogs must be clean; they must feed when we think it convenient for them to feed. I saw a hundred thousand obedient, fawning dogs wag their tails in the Templehof, Berlin, when in 1935, the great trainer Hitler whistled his commands."* [**Summerhill: a Radical Approach to Child Rearing**, p. 100]

The family is also the main agency of repression during adolescence, when sexual energy reaches its peak. This is because the vast majority of parents provide no private space for adolescents to pursue undisturbed sexual relationships with their partners, but in fact actively discourage such behaviour, often (as in fundamentalist Christian families) demanding complete abstinence -- at the very time when abstinence is most impossible! Moreover, since teenagers are economically dependent on their parents under capitalism, with no societal provision of housing or dormitories allowing for sexual freedom, young people have no alternative but to submit to irrational parental demands for abstention from premarital sex. This in turn forces them to engage in furtive sex in the back seats of cars or other out-of-the-way places where they cannot relax or obtain full sexual satisfaction. As Reich found, when sexuality is repressed and laden with anxiety, the result is always some degree of what he terms *"orgastic impotence"*: the inability to fully surrender to the flow of energy discharged during orgasm. Hence there is an incomplete release of sexual tension, which results in a state of chronic bioenergetic stasis. Such a condition, Reich found, is the breeding ground for neuroses and reactionary attitudes. (For further details see the section [J.6](#)).

In this connection it is interesting to note that "primitive" societies, such as the Trobriand Islanders, prior to their developing patriarchal-authoritarian institutions, provided special community houses where teenagers could go with their partners to enjoy undisturbed sexual relationships -- and this with society's full approval. Such an institution would be taken for granted in an anarchist society, as it is implied by the concept of freedom. (For more on adolescent sexual liberation, see section [J.6.8.](#))

Nationalistic feelings can also be traced to the authoritarian family. A child's attachment to its mother is, of course, natural and is the basis of all family ties. Subjectively, the emotional core of the concepts of homeland and nation are mother and family, since the mother is the homeland of the child, just as the family is the "nation in miniature." According to Reich, who carefully studied the mass appeal of Hitler's "National Socialism," nationalistic sentiments are a direct continuation of the family tie and are rooted in a **fixated** tie to the mother. As Reich points out, although infantile attachment to the mother is natural, **fixated** attachment is not, but is a social product. In puberty, the tie to the mother would make room for other attachments, i.e., natural sexual relations, **if** the unnatural sexual restrictions imposed on adolescents did not cause it to be eternalised. It is in the form of this socially conditioned externalisation that fixation on the mother becomes the basis of nationalist feelings in the adult; and it is only at this stage that it becomes a reactionary social force.

Later writers who have followed Reich in analysing the process of creating reactionary character structures have broadened the scope of his analysis to include other important inhibitions, besides sexual ones, that are imposed on children and adolescents. Rianne Eisler, for example, in her book **Sacred Pleasure**, stresses that it is not just a sex-negative attitude but a **pleasure**-negative attitude that creates the kinds of personalities in question. Denial of the value of pleasurable sensations permeates our unconscious, as reflected, for example, in the common idea that to enjoy the pleasures of the body is the "animalistic" (and hence "bad") side of human nature, as contrasted with the "higher" pleasures of the mind and "spirit." By such dualism, which denies a spiritual aspect to the body, people are made to feel guilty about enjoying any pleasurable sensations -- a conditioning that does, however, prepare them for lives based on the sacrifice of pleasure (or indeed, even of life itself) under capitalism and statism, with their requirements of mass submission to alienated labour, exploitation, military service to protect ruling-class interests, and so on. And at the same time, authoritarian ideology emphasises the value of suffering, as for example through the glorification of the tough, insensitive warrior hero, who suffers (and inflicts "necessary" suffering on others ) for the sake of some pitiless ideal.

Eisler also points out that there is *"ample evidence that people who grow up in families where rigid hierarchies and painful punishments are the norm learn to suppress anger toward their parents. There is also ample evidence that this anger is then often deflected against traditionally disempowered groups (such as minorities, children, and women)"* [**Ibid.**, p. 187]. This repressed anger then becomes fertile ground for reactionary politicians, whose mass appeal usually rests in part on scapegoating minorities for society's problems.

As the psychologist Else Frenkel-Brunswick documents in **The Authoritarian Personality**, people who have been conditioned through childhood abuse to surrender their will to the requirements of feared

authoritarian parents, also tend to be very susceptible as adults to surrender their will and minds to authoritarian leaders. *"In other words, at the same time that they learn to deflect their repressed rage against those they perceive as weak, they also learn to submit to autocratic or 'strong-man' rule. Moreover, having been severely punished for any hint of rebellion (even 'talking back' about being treated unfairly), they gradually also learn to deny to themselves that there was anything wrong with what was done to them as children -- and to do it in turn to their own children"* [**Ibid.**, p. 187].

These are just some of the mechanisms that perpetuate the status quo by creating the kinds of personalities who worship authority and fear freedom. Consequently, anarchists are generally opposed to traditional child-rearing practices, the patriarchal-authoritarian family (and its "values"), the suppression of adolescent sexuality, and the pleasure-denying, pain-affirming attitudes taught by the Church and in most schools. In place of these, anarchists favour non-authoritarian, non-repressive child-rearing practices and educational methods (see sections [J.6](#) and [secJ.5.13](#), respectively) whose purpose is to prevent, or at least minimise, the psychological crippling of individuals, allowing them instead to develop natural self-regulation and self-motivated learning. This, we believe, is the only way to for people to grow up into happy, creative, and truly freedom-loving individuals who will provide the psychological ground where anarchist economic and political institutions can flourish.

## B.3 Why are anarchists against private property?

Capitalism is one of the two things all anarchists oppose. Capitalism is marked by two main features, "*private property*" (or in some cases, state-owned property) and wage labour. The latter, however, is dependent on the former, i.e. for wage labour to exist, workers must not own or control the means of production they use. In turn, private (or state) ownership of the means of production is only possible if there is a state, meaning mechanisms of organised coercion at the disposal of the propertied class (see section [B.2](#)).

Anarchists oppose private property (i.e. capitalism) because it is a source of coercive, hierarchical authority and elite privilege ("*Property . . . violates equality by the rights of exclusion and increase, and freedom by despotism. . . [and has] perfect identity with robbery,*" to use Proudhon's words - **What is Property**, p. 251). And so private property (capitalism) necessarily excludes participation, influence, and control by those who use, but do not own, the means of life.

Therefore, for all true anarchists, property is opposed as a source of authority, indeed despotism. To quote Proudhon on this subject:

*"The proprietor, the robber, the hero, the sovereign - for all these titles are synonymous - imposes his will as law, and suffers neither contradiction nor control; that is, he pretends to be the legislative and the executive power at once. . . [and so] property engenders despotism. . . That is so clearly the essence of property that, to be convinced of it, one need but remember what it is, and observe what happens around him. Property is the right to **use and abuse** . . . if goods are property, why should not the proprietors be kings, and despotic kings -- kings in proportion to their **facultes bonitaires**? And if each proprietor is sovereign lord within the sphere of his property, absolute king throughout his own domain, how could a government of proprietors be any thing but chaos and confusion?"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 266-7]

In other words, private property is the state writ small, with the property owner acting as the "*sovereign lord*" over their property, and so the absolute king of those who use it. As in any monarchy, the worker is the subject of the capitalist, having to follow their orders, laws and decisions while on their property. This, obviously, is the total denial of liberty (and dignity, we may note, as it is degrading to have to follow orders). Little wonder, then, that anarchists oppose private property as Anarchy is "*the absence of a master, of a sovereign*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 264] and call capitalism for what it is, namely **wage slavery!**

Also, it ought to be easy to see that capitalism, by giving rise to an ideologically inalienable "right" to private property, will also quickly give rise to inequalities in the distribution of external resources, and that this inequality in resource distribution will give rise to a further inequality in the relative bargaining positions of the propertied and the property less. While apologists for capitalism usually attempt to

justify private property by claiming that "self-ownership" is a "universal right" (see section B.4.2 - "[Is capitalism based on self-ownership?](#)"), it is clear that capitalism actually makes universal self-ownership, in its true sense, impossible. For the real principle of self-ownership implies that people are not used in various ways against their will. The capitalist system, however, has undermined this principle, and ironically, has used the **term** "self-ownership" as the "logical" basis for doing so. Under capitalism, as will be seen in section [B.4](#), most people are usually left in a situation where their best option is to allow themselves to be used in just those ways that are logically incompatible with genuine self-ownership.

For these reasons, anarchists agree with Rousseau when he states:

*"The first man who, having fenced off a plot of land, thought of saying, 'This is mine' and found people simple enough to believe him was the real founder of civil society. How many crimes, wars, murders, how many miseries and horrors might the human race had been spared by the one who, upon pulling up the stakes or filling in the ditch, had shouted to his fellow men: 'Beware of listening to this impostor; you are lost if you forget the fruits of the earth belong to all and that the earth belongs to no one.'" ["Discourse on Inequality," **The Social Contract and Discourses**, p. 84]*

Only libertarian socialism can continue to affirm self-ownership whilst building the conditions that guarantee it. Only by abolishing private property can there be access to the means of life for all, so making self-ownership a reality by universalising self-management in all aspects of life.

Before discussing the anti-libertarian aspects of capitalism, it will be necessary to define "private property" as distinct from "personal possessions" and show in more detail why the former requires state protection and is exploitative.

### **B.3.1 What is the difference between private property and possession?**

Anarchists define "**private property**" (or just "**property**," for short) as state-protected monopolies of certain objects or privileges which are used to exploit others. "**Possession**," on the other hand, is ownership of things that are not used to exploit others (e.g. a car, a refrigerator, a toothbrush, etc.). Thus many things can be considered as either property or possessions depending on how they are used. For example, a house that one lives in is a possession, whereas if one rents it to someone else at a profit it becomes property. Similarly, if one uses a saw to make a living as a self-employed carpenter, the saw is a possession; whereas if one employs others at wages to use the saw for one's own profit, it is property.

While it may initially be confusing to make this distinction, it is very useful to understand the nature of capitalist society. Capitalists tend to use the word "property" to mean anything from a toothbrush to a transnational corporation -- two very different things, with very different impacts upon society. Hence Proudhon:

*"Originally the word **property** was synonymous with **proper** or **individual possession**. . . But when this right of use . . . became active and paramount - that is, when the usufructuary converted his right to personally use the thing into the right to use it by his neighbour's labour - then property changed its nature and this idea became complex."* [**What is Property**, pp. 395-6]

As Alexander Berkman frames this distinction, anarchism *"abolishes private ownership of the means of production and distribution, and with it goes capitalistic business. Personal possession remains only in the things you use. Thus, your watch is your own, but the watch factory belongs to the people. Land, machinery, and all other public utilities will be collective property, neither to be bought nor sold. Actual use will be considered the only title -- not to ownership but to possession."* [**The ABC of Anarchism**, p. 68] (For more on the anarchist theory of property, see P.-J. Proudhon, **What is Property?**. William Godwin, in **Enquiry Concerning Political Justice**, makes the same point concerning the difference between property and possession -- which indicates its central place in anarchist thought). Proudhon graphically illustrated the distinction by comparing a lover as a possessor, and a husband as a proprietor!

The difference between property and possession can be seen from the types of authority relations each generates. Taking the example of a capitalist workplace, it's clear that those who own the workplace determine how it is used, not those who do the actual work. This leads to an almost totalitarian system. As Noam Chomsky points out, *"the term 'totalitarian' is quite accurate. There is no human institution that approaches totalitarianism as closely as a business corporation. I mean, power is completely top-down. You can be inside it somewhere and you take orders from above and hand 'em down. Ultimately, it's in the hands of owners and investors."*

In an anarchist society, as noted, actual use is considered the only title. This means that a workplace is organised and run by those who work within it, thus reducing hierarchy and increasing freedom and equality within society. Hence anarchist opposition to private property and capitalism flows naturally from its basic principles and ideas.

## **B.3.2 What kinds of property does the state protect?**

Kropotkin argued that the state was *"the instrument for establishing monopolies in favour of the ruling minorities."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 286] While some of these monopolies are obvious (such as tariffs, state granted market monopolies and so on - see section [F.8](#) on the state's role in developing capitalism) most are "behind the scenes" and work to ensure that capitalist domination does not need extensive force to maintain.

The state therefore maintains various kinds of *"class monopolies"* (to use Tucker's phrase) to ensure that workers do not receive their *"natural wage,"* the full product of their labour. There are four major kinds of property, or exploitative monopolies, that the state protects:



- (1) the power to issue credit and currency, the basis of capitalist banking;
- (2) land and buildings, the basis of landlordism;
- (3) productive tools and equipment, the basis of industrial capitalism;
- (4) ideas and inventions, the basis of copyright and patent ("intellectual property") royalties.

By enforcing these forms of property, capitalism ensures that the objective conditions within the economy favour the capitalist, with the worker free only to accept oppressive and exploitative contracts within which they forfeit their autonomy and promise obedience or face misery and poverty. Due to these "initiations of force" conducted **previously** to any specific contract being signed, capitalists enrich themselves at the expense of us as well as making a mockery of free agreement (see section [B.4](#)). Of course, despite the supposedly subtle role of such "objective" pressures in controlling the working class, working class resistance has been such that capital has never been able to dispense with the powers of the state, both direct and indirect. When "objective" means of control fail, the capitalists will always turn to the use of state repression to restore the "natural" order.

To indicate the importance of these state backed monopolies, we shall sketch their impact.

The credit monopoly, by which the state controls who can and cannot loan money, reduces the ability of working class people to create their own alternatives to capitalism. By charging high amounts of interest on loans (which is only possible because competition is restricted) few people can afford to create co-operatives or one-person firms. In addition, having to repay loans at high interest to capitalist banks ensures that co-operatives often have to undermine their own principles by having to employ wage labour to make ends meet (see section [J.5.11](#)). It is unsurprising, therefore, that the very successful Mondragon co-operatives in the Basque Country created their own credit union which is largely responsible for the experiments success.

Just as increasing wages is an important struggle within capitalism, so is the question of credit. Proudhon and his followers supported the idea of a **People's Bank**. If the working class could take over and control increasing amounts of money it could undercut capitalist power while building its own alternative social order (for money is ultimately the means of buying labour power, and so authority over the labourer - which is the key to surplus value production). Proudhon hoped that by credit being reduced to cost (namely administration charges) workers would be able to buy the means of production they needed. While most anarchists would argue that increased working class access to credit would no more bring down capitalism than increased wages, all anarchists recognise how more credit, like more wages, and how the struggle for credit, like the struggle for wages, might play a useful role in the development of the power of the working class within capitalism. Obvious cases that spring to mind are those where money has been used by workers to finance their struggles against capital, from strike funds and weapons to the periodical avoidance of work made possible by sufficiently high money income. Increased access to cheap credit would give working class people slightly more options than selling their liberty or facing misery (just as increased wages and unemployment benefit also gives us more options).

Therefore, the credit monopoly reduces competition to capitalism from co-operatives (which are

generally more productive than capitalist firms) while at the same time forcing down wages for all workers as the demand for labour is lower than it would otherwise be. This, in turn, allows capitalists to use the fear of the sack to extract higher levels of surplus value from employees, so consolidating capitalist power (within and outwith the workplace) and expansion (increasing set-up costs and so creating oligarchic markets dominated by a few firms). In addition, high interest rates transfer income directly from producers to banks. Credit and money are both used as weapons in the class struggle. This is why, again and again, we see the ruling class call for centralised banking and use state action (from the direct regulation of money itself to the management of its flows) in the face of repeated threats to the nature (and role) of money within capitalism.

So the credit monopoly, by artificially restricting the option to work for ourselves, ensures we work for a boss.

The land monopoly consists of enforcement by government of land titles which do not rest upon personal occupancy and cultivation. In addition, it also includes making the squatting of abandoned housing and other forms of property illegal. This leads to ground-rent, by which landlords get payment for letting others use the land they own but do not actually cultivate. While this monopoly is less important in a modern capitalist society (as few people know how to farm) it did, however, play an important role in **creating** capitalism (also see section [F.8.3](#)). Economist Williamazon summaries this process:

*"The reorganisation of agricultural land [the enclosure movement] . . . inevitably undermined the viability of traditional peasant agriculture. . . [it] created a sizeable labour force of disinherited peasants with only tenuous attachments to the land. To earn a living, many of these peasants turned to 'domestic industry' - the production of goods in their cottages . . . It was the eighteenth century expansion of domestic industry. . . that laid the basis for the British Industrial Revolution. The emergence of labour-saving machine technology transformed. . . textile manufacture. . . and the factory replaced the family home as the predominant site of production."* [**Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, pp. 3-4]

By being able to "legally" bar people from "their" property, the landlord class used the land monopoly to ensure the creation of a class of people with nothing to sell but their labour (i.e. liberty). Land was taken from those who traditionally used it, violating common rights, and it was used by the landlord to produce for their own profit (more recently, a similar process has been going on in the Third World as well). Personal occupancy was replaced by landlordism and agricultural wage slavery, and so *"the Enclosure Acts. . . reduced the agricultural population to misery, placed them at the mercy of the landowners, and forced a great number of them to migrate to the towns where, as proletarians, they were delivered to the mercy of the middle-class manufacturers."* [Peter Kropotkin, **The Great French Revolution**, p. 117]

This was the land monopoly in action (also see section [F.8.3](#)) and from it sprang the tools and equipment

monopoly as domestic industry could not survive in the face of industrial capitalism. The tools and equipment monopoly is based upon the capitalist denying workers access to their capital unless the worker pays tribute to the owner for using it. While capital is *"simply stored-up labour which has already received its pay in full"* and so *"the lender of capital is entitled to its return intact, and nothing more"* (to use Tucker's words), due to legal privilege the capitalist is in a position to charge a "fee" for its use. This is because, with the working class legally barred from both the land and available capital (the means of life), members of that class have little option but to agree to wage contracts which let capitalists extract a "fee" for the use of their equipment (see section [B.3.3](#)).

While the initial capital for investing in industry came from wealth plundered from overseas or from the proceeds of feudalist and landlordist exploitation, the fact of state protection of property ensured that the manufacturer was able to exact usury from labour. The "fee" charged to workers was partly reinvested into capital, which reduced the prices of goods, ruining domestic industry. In addition, investment also increased the set-up costs of potential competitors, which continued the dispossession of the working class from the means of production as these "natural" barriers to entry into markets ensured few members of that class had the necessary funds to create co-operative workplaces of appropriate size. So while the land monopoly was essential to create capitalism, the "tools and equipment" monopoly that sprang from it soon became the mainspring of the system.

In this way usury became self-perpetuating, with apparently "free exchanges" being the means by which capitalist domination survives. In other words, "past initiations of force" combined with the current state protection of property ensure that capitalist domination of society continues with only the use of "defensive" force (i.e. violence used to protect the power of property owners against unions, strikes, occupations, etc.). The "fees" extracted from previous generations of workers has ensured that the current one is in no position to re-unite itself with the means of life by "free competition" (in other words, the paying of usury ensures that usury continues). Needless to say, the surplus produced by this generation will be used to increase the capital stock and so ensure the dispossession of future generations and so usury becomes self-perpetuating. And, of course, state protection of "property" against "theft" by working people ensures that property remains theft and the **real** thieves keep their plunder.

As far as the "ideas" monopoly is concerned, this has been used to enrich capitalist corporations at the expense of the general public and the inventor. As David Noble points out, the *"inventor, the original focus of the patent system, tended to increasingly to 'abandon' his patent in exchange for corporate security; he either sold or licensed his patent rights to industrial corporations or assigned them to the company of which he became an employee, bartering his genius for a salary. In addition, by means of patent control gained through purchase, consolidation, patent pools, and cross-licensing agreements, as well as by regulated patent production through systematic industrial research, the corporations steadily expanded their 'monopoly of monopolies.'"* As well as this, corporations used *"patents to circumvent anti-trust laws."* This reaping of monopoly profits at the expense of the customer made such *"tremendous strides"* between 1900 and 1929 and *"were of such proportions as to render subsequent judicial and legislative effects to check corporate monopoly through patent control too little too late."* [**American By Design**, p. 87, 84 and 88]

By creating "legal" monopolies and reaping the excess profits these create, capitalists not only enriched themselves at the expense of others, they also ensured their dominance in the market. Some of the excess profits reaped due to the legal monopolies were invested back into the company, securing advantages for the company by creating various barriers to potential competitors.

Moreover, the ruling class, by means of the state, is continually trying to develop new forms of private property by creating artificial scarcities and monopolies, e.g. by requiring expensive licenses to engage in particular types of activities, such as broadcasting. In the "Information Age," usury (use fees) from intellectual property are becoming a much more important source of income for elites, as reflected in the attention paid to strengthening mechanisms for enforcing copyright in the recent GATT agreements, or in US pressure on foreign countries (like China) to respect copyright laws, and so on.

In other words, capitalists desire to restrict competition in the "free market" by ensuring that the law reflects and protects their interests, namely their "property rights." By this process they ensure that co-operative tendencies within society are crushed by state-supported "market forces." As Noam Chomsky puts it, modern capitalism is *"state protection and public subsidy for the rich, market discipline for the poor."* [*Rollback, Part I*, **Z Magazine**] Self-proclaimed defenders of "free market" capitalism are usually nothing of the kind, while the few who actually support it only object to the "public subsidy" aspect of modern capitalism and happily support state protection for property rights. (For more on capitalism as based on state-protected monopolies, see Benjamin Tucker, **Instead of a Book by a Man Too Busy to Write One**).

All these monopolies seek to enrich the capitalist (and increase their capital stock) at the expense of working people, to restrict their ability to undermine the ruling elites power and wealth. All aim to ensure that any option we have to work for ourselves (either individually or collectively) is restricted by tilting the playing field against us, making sure that we have little option but to sell our labour on the "free market" and be exploited. In other words, the various monopolies make sure that "natural" barriers to entry (see section [C.4](#)) are created, leaving the heights of the economy in the control of big business while alternatives to capitalism are marginalised at its fringes.

So it is these kinds of property and the authoritarian social relationships that they create which the state exists to protect. It should be noted that converting private to state ownership (i.e. nationalisation) does not fundamentally change the nature of property relationships; it just removes private capitalists and replaces them with bureaucrats.

### B.3.3 Why is property exploitative?

To answer this question, consider the monopoly of productive "tools and equipment." This monopoly, obtained by the class of industrial capitalists, allows this class in effect to charge workers a "fee" for the privilege of using the monopolised tools and equipment.

This occurs because property, in Proudhon words, "*excommunicates*" the working class. The state enforces property rights in land, workplaces and so on, meaning that the owner can bar others from using them and enforce **their** rules on those they do let use "their" property. So the boss "*gives you a job: that is permission to work in the factory or mill which was not built by him but by other workers like yourself. And for that permission you help to support him for . . .as long as you work for him.*" [Alexander Berkman, **What is Communist Anarchism?**, p. 11]

Therefore, due to the dispossession of the vast majority of the population from the means of life, capitalists are in an ideal position to charge a "use-fee" for the capital they own, but neither produced nor use. Having little option, workers agree to contracts within which they forfeit their autonomy during work and the product of that work. This results in capitalists having access to a "commodity" (labour) that can potentially produce more value than it gets paid for in wages. During working hours, the owner can dictate (within certain limits determined by worker resistance and solidarity as well as objective conditions, such as the level of unemployment within an industry or country) the level, duration and intensity of work, and so the amount of output (which the owner has sole rights over even though they did not produce it). Thus the "fee" (or "*surplus value*") is created by owners paying workers less than the full value added by their labour to the products or services they create for the firm. The capitalist's profit is thus the difference between this "surplus value," created by and appropriated from labour, minus the firm's overhead and cost of raw materials (See also section C.2, "[Where do profits come from?](#)").

So property is exploitative because it allows a surplus to be monopolised by the owners. Property creates hierarchical relationships within the workplace (the "tools and equipment monopoly" might better be called the "power monopoly") and as in any hierarchical system, those with the power use it to protect and further their own interests at the expense of others. Within the workplace there is resistance by workers to this oppression and exploitation, which the "*hierarchical. . . relations of the capitalist enterprise are designed to resolve this conflict in favour of the representatives of capital...*" [William Lazonick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 184]

Needless to say, the state is always on hand to protect the rights of property and management against the actions of the dispossessed. When it boils down to it, it is the existence of the state as protector of the "power monopoly" that allows it to exist at all.

So, capitalists are able to appropriate this surplus value from workers solely because they own the means of production, not because they earn it by doing productive work themselves. Of course some capitalists **may** also contribute to production, in which case they are in fairness entitled to the amount of value added to the firm's output by their own labour; but owners typically pay themselves much more than this, and are able to do so because the state guarantees them that right as property owners (which is unsurprising, as they alone have knowledge of the firms inputs and outputs and, like all people in unaccountable positions, abuse that power -- which is partly why anarchists support direct democracy as the essential counterpart of free agreement, for no one in power can be trusted not to prefer their own interests over those subject to their decisions). And of course many capitalists hire managers to run their businesses for them, thus collecting income for doing nothing except owning.

Capitalists' profits, then, are a form of state-supported exploitation. This is equally true of the interest collected by bankers and rents collected by landlords. Without some form of state, these forms of exploitation would be impossible, as the monopolies on which they depend could not be maintained. For instance, in the absence of state troops and police, workers would simply take over and operate factories for themselves, thus preventing capitalists from appropriating an unjust share of the surplus they create.

### B.3.4 Can private property be justified?

No. Even though a few supporters of capitalism recognise that private property, particularly in land, was created by the use of force, most maintain that private property is just. One common defence of private property is found in the work of Robert Nozick (a supporter of "free market" capitalism). For Nozick, the use of force makes acquisition illegitimate and so any current title to the property is illegitimate (in other words, theft and trading in stolen goods does not make ownership of these goods legal). So, if the initial acquisition of land was illegitimate then all current titles are also illegitimate. And since private ownership of land is the basis of capitalism, capitalism itself would be rendered illegal.

To get round this problem, Nozick utilises the work of Locke ("*The Lockean Proviso*") which can be summarised as:

1. People own themselves.
2. The world is initially owned in common (or unowned in Nozick's case.)
3. You can acquire absolute rights over a larger than average share in the world, if you do not worsen the condition of others.
4. Once people have appropriated private property, a free market in capital and labour is morally required.

Take for example two individuals who share land in common. Nozick allows for one individual to claim the land as their own as long as the "*process normally giving rise to a permanent bequeathable property right in a previously unowned thing will not do so if the position of others no longer at liberty to use the thing is therefore worsened.*" [Anarchy, State and Utopia, p. 178]

But, if one person appropriated the land then the other cannot live off the remaining land. However, if the new land owner offers the other a wage to work their land and this exceeds what the new wage slave originally produced, then this meets the "Lockean Proviso." Of course, the new wage slave has no option but to work for another, but this is irrelevant for the Lockean Proviso.

Interestingly, for a ideology that calls itself "libertarian" Nozick theory defines "worse off" in terms purely of material welfare, compared to the conditions that existed within the society based upon common use. In other words, being "worse off" in terms of liberty (i.e. self-ownership or self-government) is irrelevant for Nozick, a **very** telling position to take.

Nozick claims to place emphasis on self-ownership in his ideology because we are separate individuals, each with our own life to lead. It is strange, therefore, to see that Nozick does not emphasise people's ability to act on their own conception of themselves in his account of appropriation. Indeed, there is no objection to an appropriation that puts someone in an unnecessary and undesirable position of subordination and dependence on the will of others.

Notice that the fact that individuals are now subject to the decisions of other individuals is not considered by Nozick in assessing the fairness of the appropriation. The fact that the creation of private property results in the denial of important freedoms for wage slaves (namely, the wage slave has no say over the status of the land they had been utilising and no say over how their labour is used). Before the creation of private property, all managed their own work, had self-government in all aspects of their lives. After the appropriation, the new wage slave has no such liberty and indeed must accept the conditions of employment within which they relinquish control over how they spend much of their time.

Considering Nozick's many claims in favour of self-ownership and why it is important, you would think that the autonomy of the newly dispossessed wage slaves would be important to him. However, no such concern is to be found - the autonomy of wage slaves is treated as if it were irrelevant. Nozick claims that a concern for people's freedom to lead their own lives underlies his theory of unrestricted property-rights, but, this apparently does not apply to wage slaves. His justification for the creation of private property treats only the autonomy of the land owner as relevant. However, as Proudhon rightly argues:

*"if the liberty of man is sacred, it is equally sacred in all individuals; that, if it needs property for its objective action, that is, for its life, the appropriation of material is equally necessary for all . . . Does it not follow that if one individual cannot prevent another . . . from appropriating an amount of material equal to his own, no more can he prevent individuals to come."* [**What is Property?**, pp. 84-85]

Under capitalism people are claimed to own themselves, but this is purely formal as most people do not have independent access to resources. And as they have to use other peoples' resources, they become under the control of those who own the resources. In other words, private property reduces the autonomy of the majority of the population, and creates a regime of authority which has many similarities to enslavement. As John Stuart Mill put it:

*"No longer enslaved or made dependent by force of law, the great majority are so by force of property; they are still chained to a place, to an occupation, and to conformity with the will of an employer, and debarred by the accident of birth to both the enjoyments, and from the mental and moral advantages, which others inherit without exertion and independently of desert. That this is an evil equal to almost any of those against which mankind have hitherto struggles, the poor are not wrong in believing."* ["**Chapters on Socialism**", **Principles of Political Economy**, pp. 377-8]

Capitalism, even though claiming formal self-ownership, in fact not only restricts the self-determination

of working class people, it also makes them a resource for others. Those who enter the market after others have appropriated all the available property are limited to charity or working for others. The latter, as we discuss in [section C](#), results in exploitation as the worker's labour is used to enrich others. Working people are compelled to co-operate with the current scheme of property and are forced to benefit others. This means that self-determination requires resources as well as rights over one's physical and mental being. Concern for self-determination (i.e. meaningful self-ownership) leads us to common property plus workers' control of production and so some form of libertarian socialism - **not** private property and capitalism.

And, of course, the appropriation of the land requires a state to defend it against the dispossessed as well as continuous interference in people's lives. Left to their own devices, people would freely use the resources around them which they considered unjustly appropriated by others and it is only continuous state intervention that prevents them from violating Nozick's principles of justice (to use Nozick's own terminology, the "Lockean Proviso" is a patterned theory, his claims otherwise not withstanding).

In addition, we should note that private ownership by one person presupposes non-ownership by others ("*we who belong to the proletarian class, property excommunicates us!*" [Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 105]) and so the "free market" restricts as well as creates liberties just as any other economic system. Hence the claim that capitalism constitutes "economic liberty" is obviously false. In fact, it is **based** upon denying liberty for the vast majority during work hours (as well as having serious impacts on liberty outwith work hours due to the effects of concentrations of wealth upon society).

Perhaps Nozick can claim that the increased material benefits of private property makes the acquisition justified. However, it seems strange that a theory supporting "liberty" should consider well off slaves to be better than poor free men and women. As Nozick claims that the wage slaves consent is not required for the initial acquisition, so perhaps he can claim that the gain in material welfare outweighs the loss of autonomy and so allows the initial act as an act of paternalism. But as Nozick opposes paternalism when it restricts private property rights he can hardly invoke it when it is required to generate these rights. And if we exclude paternalism and emphasise autonomy (as Nozick claims he does elsewhere in his theory), then justifying the initial creation of private property becomes much more difficult, if not impossible.

And if each owner's title to their property includes the historical shadow of the Lockean Proviso on appropriation, then such titles are invalid. Any title people have over unequal resources will be qualified by the facts that "*property is theft*" and that "*property is despotism.*" The claim that private property is economic liberty is obviously untrue, as is the claim that private property can be justified in terms of anything except "might is right."

For more anarchist analysis on private property and why it cannot be justified (be it by occupancy, labour, natural right, or whatever) consult Proudhon's classic work **What is Property?**.



## B.4 How does capitalism affect liberty?

Private property is in many ways like a private form of state. The owner determines what goes on within the area he or she "owns," and therefore exercises a monopoly of power over it. When power is exercised over one's self, it is a source of freedom, but under capitalism it is a source of coercive authority. As Bob Black points out in **The Abolition of Work**:

*"The liberals and conservatives and Libertarians who lament totalitarianism are phoneyes and hypocrites. . . You find the same sort of hierarchy and discipline in an office or factory as you do in a prison or a monastery. . . A worker is a part-time slave. The boss says when to show up, when to leave, and what to do in the meantime. He tells you how much work to do and how fast. He is free to carry his control to humiliating extremes, regulating, if he feels like it, the clothes you wear or how often you go to the bathroom. With a few exceptions he can fire you for any reason, or no reason. He has you spied on by snitches and supervisors, he amasses a dossier on every employee. Talking back is called 'insubordination,' just as if a worker is a naughty child, and it not only gets you fired, it disqualifies you for unemployment compensation. . . The demeaning system of domination I've described rules over half the waking hours of a majority of women and the vast majority of men for decades, for most of their lifespans. For certain purposes it's not too misleading to call our system democracy or capitalism or -- better still -- industrialism, but its real names are factory fascism and office oligarchy. Anybody who says these people are 'free' is lying or stupid."*

Unlike a company, the democratic state can be influenced by its citizens, who are able to act in ways that limit (to some extent) the power of the ruling elite to be "left alone" to enjoy their power. As a result, the wealthy hate the democratic aspects of the state, and its ordinary citizens, as potential threats to their power. This "problem" was noted by Alexis de Tocqueville in early 19th-century America:

*"It is easy to perceive that the wealthy members of the community entertain a hearty distaste to the democratic institutions of their country. The populace is at once the object of their scorn and their fears."*

These fears have not changed, nor has the contempt for democratic ideas. To quote one US Corporate Executive, "one man, one vote will result in the eventual failure of democracy as we know it." [L. Silk and D. Vogel, **Ethics and Profits: The Crisis of Confidence in American Business**, pp. 189f]

This contempt for democracy does not mean that capitalists are **anti**-state. Far from it. As previously noted, capitalists depend on the state. This is because "[classical] Liberalism, is in theory a kind of anarchy without socialism, and therefore is simply a lie, for freedom is not possible without equality. . . The criticism liberals direct at government consists only of wanting to deprive it some of its functions

*and to call upon the capitalists to fight it out amongst themselves, but it cannot attack the repressive functions which are of its essence: for without the gendarme the property owner could not exist."* [Errico Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 46].

Capitalists call upon and support the state when it acts in **their** interests and when it supports **their** authority and power. The "conflict" between state and capital is like two gangsters fighting over the proceeds of a robbery: they will squabble over the loot and who has more power in the gang, but they need each other to defend their "property" against those from whom they stole it.

The statist nature of private property can be seen in "Libertarian" (i.e. minarchist, or "classical" liberal) works representing the extremes of laissez-faire capitalism:

*"[I]f one starts a private town, on land whose acquisition did not and does not violate the Lockean proviso [of non-aggression], persons who chose to move there or later remain there would have no **right** to a say in how the town was run, unless it was granted to them by the decision procedures for the town which the owner had established"* [Robert Nozick, **Anarchy, State and Utopia**, p. 270]

This is voluntary feudalism, nothing more. And, indeed, it was. Such private towns have existed, most notably the infamous company towns of US history. Howard Zinn summarises the conditions of such "private towns" in the Colorado mine fields:

*"Each mining camp was a feudal dominion, with the company acting as lord and master. Every camp had a marshal, a law enforcement officer paid by the company. The 'laws' were the company's rules. Curfews were imposed, 'suspicious' strangers were not allowed to visit the homes, the company store had a monopoly on goods sold in the camp. The doctor was a company doctor, the schoolteachers hired by the company . . . Political power in Colorado rested in the hands of those who held economic power. This meant that the authority of Colorado Fuel & Iron and other mine operators was virtually supreme . . . Company officials were appointed as election judges. Company-dominated coroners and judges prevented injured employees from collecting damages."* [**The Colorado Coal Strike, 1913-14**, pp. 9-11]

Unsurprisingly, when the workers rebelled against this tyranny, they were evicted from their homes and the private law enforcement agents were extremely efficient in repressing the strikers: *"By the end of the strike, most of the dead and injured were miners and their families."* The strike soon took on the features of a war, with battles between strikers and their supporters and the company thugs. Ironically, when the National Guard was sent in to "restore order" the *"miners, having faced in the first five weeks of the strike what they considered a reign of terror at the hands of the private guards, . . . looked forward"* to their arrival. They *"did not know that the governor was sending these troops under pressure from the mine operators."* Indeed, the banks and corporations lent the state funds to pay for the militia. It was these company thugs, dressed in the uniform of the state militia, who murdered woman and children in

the infamous Ludlow Massacre of April 20th, 1914. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 22, p. 25, p. 35]

Without irony the **New York Times** editorialised that the *"militia was as impersonal and impartial as the law."* The corporation itself hired Ivy Lee ("the father of public relations in the United States") to change public opinion after the slaughter. Significantly, Lee produced a series of tracts labelled *"Facts Concerning the Struggle in Colorado for Industrial Freedom."* The head of the corporation (Rockefeller) portrayed his repression of the strikers as blow for workers' freedom, to *"defend the workers' right to work."* [quoted by Zinn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 44, p. 51 and p. 50] So much for the capitalism being the embodiment of liberty.

Of course, it can be claimed that "market forces" will result in the most liberal owners being the most successful, but a nice master is still a master (and, of course, capitalism then was more "free market" than today, suggesting that this is simply wishful thinking). To paraphrase Tolstoy, *"the liberal capitalist is like a kind donkey owner. He will do everything for the donkey -- care for it, feed it, wash it. Everything except get off its back!"* And as Bob Black notes, *"Some people giving orders and others obeying them: this is the essence of servitude. . . . [F]reedom means more than the right to change masters."* [**The Libertarian as Conservative**]. That supporters of capitalism often claim that this "right" to change masters **is** the essence of "freedom" is a telling indictment of the capitalist notion of "liberty."

## B.4.1 Is capitalism based on freedom?

For anarchists, freedom means both *"freedom from"* and *"freedom to."* "Freedom from" signifies not being subject to domination, exploitation, coercive authority, repression, or other forms of degradation and humiliation. "Freedom to" means being able to develop and express one's abilities, talents, and potentials to the fullest possible extent compatible with the maximum freedom of others. Both kinds of freedom imply the need for self-management, responsibility, and independence, which basically means that people have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. And since individuals do not exist in a social vacuum, it also means that freedom **must** take on a collective aspect, with the associations that individuals form with each other (e.g. communities, work groups, social groups) being run in a manner which allows the individual to participate in the decisions that the group makes. Thus freedom for anarchists requires participatory democracy, which means face-to-face discussion and voting on issues by the people affected by them.

Are these conditions of freedom met in the capitalist system? Obviously not. Despite all their rhetoric about "democracy," most of the "advanced" capitalist states remain only superficially democratic -- and this because the majority of their citizens are employees who spend about half their waking hours under the thumb of capitalist dictators (bosses) who allow them no voice in the crucial economic decisions that affect their lives most profoundly and require them to work under conditions inimical to independent thinking. If the most basic freedom, namely freedom to think for oneself, is denied, then freedom itself is denied.

The capitalist workplace is profoundly undemocratic. Indeed, as Noam Chomsky points out, the

oppressive authority relations in the typical corporate hierarchy would be called fascist or totalitarian if we were referring to a political system. In his words :

*"There's nothing individualistic about corporations. These are big conglomerate institutions, essentially totalitarian in character, but hardly individualistic. There are few institutions in human society that have such strict hierarchy and top-down control as a business organisation. Nothing there about 'don't tread on me'. You're being tread on all the time."* [Keeping the Rabble in Line, p. 280]

Far from being "based on freedom," then, capitalism actually destroys freedom. In this regard, Robert E. Wood, the chief executive officer of Sears, spoke plainly when he said "[w]e stress the advantages of the free enterprise system, we complain about the totalitarian state, but... we have created more or less of a totalitarian system in industry, particularly in large industry." [quoted by Allan Engler, **Apostles of Greed**, p. 68]

Or, as Chomsky puts it, supporters of capitalism do not understand *"the fundamental doctrine, that you should be free from domination and control, including the control of the manager and the owner"* [Feb. 14th, 1992 appearance on **Pozner/Donahue**].

Under corporate authoritarianism, the psychological traits deemed most desirable for average citizens to possess are efficiency, conformity, emotional detachment, insensitivity, and unquestioning obedience to authority -- traits that allow people to survive and even prosper as employees in the company hierarchy. And of course, for "non-average" citizens, i.e., bosses, managers, administrators, etc., **authoritarian** traits are needed, the most important being the ability and willingness to dominate others.

But all such master/slave traits are inimical to the functioning of real (i.e. participatory/libertarian) democracy, which requires that citizens have qualities like flexibility, creativity, sensitivity, understanding, emotional honesty, directness, warmth, realism, and the ability to mediate, communicate, negotiate, integrate and co-operate. Therefore, capitalism is not only **undemocratic**, it is **anti-democratic**, because it promotes the development of traits that make real democracy (and so a libertarian society) impossible.

Many capitalist apologists have attempted to show that capitalist authority structures are "voluntary" and are, therefore, somehow not a denial of individual and social freedom. Milton Friedman (a leading free market capitalist economist) has attempted to do just this. Like most apologists for capitalism he ignores the authoritarian relations explicit within wage labour (within the workplace, "co-ordination" is based upon top-down command, **not** horizontal co-operation). Instead he concentrates on the decision of a worker to sell their labour to a **specific** boss and so ignores the lack of freedom within such contracts. He argues that *"individuals are effectively free to enter or not enter into any particular exchange, so every transaction is strictly voluntary. . . The employee is protected from coercion by the employer because of other employers for whom he can work."* [**Capitalism and Freedom**, pp. 14-15]

Friedman, to prove the free nature of capitalism, compares capitalism with a simple exchange economy based upon independent producers. He states that in such a simple economy each household *"has the alternative of producing directly for itself, [and so] it need not enter into any exchange unless it benefits from it. Hence no exchange will take place unless both parties do benefit from it. Co-operation is thereby achieved without coercion."* [Op. Cit., p. 13] Under capitalism (or the "complex" economy) Friedman states that *"individuals are effectively free to enter or not to enter into any particular exchange, so that every transaction is strictly voluntary."* [Op. Cit., p. 14]

A moment's thought, however, shows that capitalism is not based on "strictly voluntary" transactions as Friedman claims. This is because the proviso that is required to make every transaction "strictly voluntary" is **not** freedom not to enter any **particular** exchange, but freedom not to enter into any exchange **at all**.

This, and only this, was the proviso that proved the simple model Friedman presents (the one based upon artisan production) to be voluntary and non-coercive; and nothing less than this would prove the complex model (i.e. capitalism) is voluntary and non-coercive. But Friedman is clearly claiming above that freedom not to enter into any **particular** exchange is enough and so, **only by changing his own requirements**, can he claim that capitalism is based upon freedom.

It is easy to see what Friedman has done, but it is less easy to excuse it (particularly as it is so commonplace in capitalist apologetics). He moved from the simple economy of exchange between independent producers to the capitalist economy without mentioning the most important thing that distinguishes them - namely the separation of labour from the means of production. In the society of independent producers, the worker had the choice of working for themselves - under capitalism this is not the case. Capitalism is based upon the existence of a labour force without its own sufficient capital, and therefore without a choice as to whether to put its labour in the market or not. Milton Friedman would agree that where there is no choice there is coercion. His attempted demonstration that capitalism co-ordinates without coercion therefore fails.

Capitalist apologists are able to convince some people that capitalism is "based on freedom" only because the system has certain superficial **appearances** of freedom.

On closer analysis these appearances turn out to be deceptions. For example, it is claimed that the employees of capitalist firms have freedom because they can always quit. But, as noted earlier, *"Some people giving orders and others obeying them: this is the essence of servitude. Of course, as [right-Libertarians] smugly [observe], 'one can at least change jobs,' but you can't avoid having a job -- just as under statism one can at least change nationalities but you can't avoid subjection to one nation-state or another. But freedom means more than the right to change masters"* [Bob Black, **The Libertarian as Conservative**]. Under capitalism, workers have only the Hobson's choice of being governed/exploited or living on the street.

Anarchists point out that for choice to be real, free agreements and associations must be based on the

social equality of those who enter into them, and both sides must receive roughly equivalent benefit. But social relations between capitalists and employees can never be equal, because private ownership of the means of production gives rise to social hierarchy and relations of coercive authority and subordination, as was recognised even by Adam Smith (see [below](#)).

The picture painted by Walter Reuther of working life in America before the Wagner act is a commentary on class inequality : *"Injustice was as common as streetcars. When men walked into their jobs, they left their dignity, their citizenship and their humanity outside. They were required to report for duty whether there was work or not. While they waited on the convenience of supervisors and foremen they were unpaid. They could be fired without a pretext. They were subjected to arbitrary, senseless rules. . . .Men were tortured by regulations that made difficult even going to the toilet. Despite grandiloquent statements from the presidents of huge corporations that their door was open to any worker with a complaint, there was no one and no agency to which a worker could appeal if he were wronged. The very idea that a worker could be wronged seemed absurd to the employer."* Much of this indignity remains, and with the globalisation of capital, the bargaining position of workers is further deteriorating, so that the gains of a century of class struggle are in danger of being lost.

A quick look at the enormous disparity of power and wealth between the capitalist class and the working class shows that the benefits of the "agreements" entered into between the two sides are far from equal. Walter Block, a leading Fraser Institute ideologue, makes clear the differences in power and benefits when discussing sexual harassment in the workplace:

*"Consider the sexual harassment which continually occurs between a secretary and a boss. . . while objectionable to many women, [it] is not a coercive action. It is rather part of a package deal in which the secretary agrees to **all** aspects of the job when she agrees to accept the job, and especially when she agrees to **keep** the job. The office is, after all, private property. The secretary does not have to remain if the 'coercion' is objectionable."* [quoted by Engler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 101]

The primary goal of the Fraser Institute is to convince people that all other rights must be subordinated to the right to enjoy wealth. In this case, Block makes clear that under private property, only bosses have "freedom to," and most also desire to ensure they have "freedom from" interference with this right.

So, when capitalists gush about the "liberty" available under capitalism, what they are really thinking of is their state-protected freedom to exploit and oppress workers through the ownership of property, a freedom that allows them to continue amassing huge disparities of wealth, which in turn insures their continued power and privileges. That the capitalist class in liberal-democratic states **gives** workers the right to change masters (though this is not true under state capitalism) is far from showing that capitalism is based on freedom, For as Peter Kropotkin rightly points out, *"freedoms are not given, they are taken"* [Peter Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 43]. In capitalism, you are "free" to do anything you are permitted to do by your masters, which amounts to "freedom" with a collar and leash.

## B.4.2 Is capitalism based on self-ownership?

Murray Rothbard, a leading "libertarian" capitalist, claims that capitalism is based on the "*basic axiom*" of "*the right to self-ownership.*" This "*axiom*" is defined as "*the absolute right of each man [sic]. . .to control [his or her] body free of coercive interference. Since each individual must think, learn, value, and choose his or her ends and means in order to survive and flourish, the right to self-ownership gives man [sic] the right to perform these vital activities without being hampered by coercive molestation.*" [**For a New Liberty**, pp. 26-27]

So far, so good. However, we reach a problem once we consider private property. As Ayn Rand, another ideologue for "free market" capitalism argued, "*there can be no such thing as the right to unrestricted freedom of speech (or of action) on someone else's property*" [**Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal**, p. 258]. Or, as is commonly said by capitalist owners, "I don't pay you to **think.**"

Similarly, capitalists don't pay their employees to perform the other "*vital activities*" listed by Rothbard (learning, valuing, choosing ends and means) -- unless, of course, the firm requires that workers undertake such activities in the interests of company profits. Otherwise, workers can rest assured that any efforts to engage in such "*vital activities*" on company time **will** be "*hampered*" by "*coercive molestation.*" Therefore wage labour (the basis of capitalism) in practice **denies** the rights associated with "self-ownership," thus alienating the individual from his or her basic rights. Or as Michael Bakunin expresses it, "*the worker sells his person and his liberty for a given time*" under capitalism.

In a society of relative equals, "private property" would not be a source of power. For example, you would still be able to fling a drunk out of your home. But in a system based on wage labour (i.e. capitalism), private property is a different thing altogether, becoming a source of **institutionalised** power and coercive authority through hierarchy. As Noam Chomsky writes, capitalism is based on "*a particular form of authoritarian control. Namely, the kind that comes through private ownership and control, which is an extremely rigid system of domination.*" When "property" is purely what you, as an individual, use (i.e. **possession**) it is not a source of power. In capitalism, however, "property" rights no longer coincide with **use** rights, and so they become a **denial** of freedom and a source of authority and power over the individual. Little wonder that Proudhon labelled property as "*theft*" and "*despotism*".

As we've seen in the discussion of hierarchy (section [A.2.8](#) and [B.1](#)), all forms of authoritarian control depend on "*coercive molestation*" -- i.e. the use or threat of sanctions. This is definitely the case in company hierarchies under capitalism. Bob Black describes the authoritarian nature of capitalism as follows:

*"[T]he place where [adults] pass the most time and submit to the closest control is at work. Thus . . . it's apparent that the source of the greatest direct duress experienced by the ordinary adult is **not** the state but rather the business that employs him. Your foreman or supervisor gives you more or-else orders in a week than the police do in a decade."*

We have already noted the objection that people can leave their jobs, which just amounts to saying "love it or leave it!" and does not address the issue at hand. Needless to say, the vast majority of the population cannot avoid wage labour. Far from being based on the "right to self-ownership," then, capitalism denies it, alienating the individual from such basic rights as free speech, independent thought, and self-management of one's own activity, which individuals have to **give up** when they are employed. But since these rights, according to Rothbard, are the products of humans **as** humans, wage labour alienates them from themselves, exactly as it does the individual's labour power and creativity.

To quote Chomsky again, "*people can survive, [only] by renting themselves to it [capitalist authority], and basically in no other way. . . .*" You do not sell your skills, as these skills are **part** of you. Instead, what you have to sell is your **time**, your labour power, and so **yourself**. Thus under wage labour, rights of "self-ownership" are always placed below property rights, the only "right" being left to you is that of finding another job (although even this right is denied in some countries if the employee owes the company money).

So, contrary to Rothbard's claim, capitalism actually alienates the right to self-ownership because of the authoritarian structure of the workplace, which derives from private property. If we desire real self-ownership, we cannot renounce it for most of our adult lives by becoming wage slaves. Only workers' self-management of production, not capitalism, can make self-ownership a reality.

### **B.4.3 But no one forces you to work for them!**

Of course it is claimed that entering wage labour is a "voluntary" undertaking, from which both sides allegedly benefit. However, due to **past** initiations of force (e.g. the seizure of land by conquest) plus the tendency for capital to concentrate, a relative handful of people now control vast wealth, depriving all others access to the means of life. As Immanuel Wallerstein points out in **The Capitalist World System** (vol. 1), capitalism evolved from feudalism, with the first capitalists using inherited family wealth derived from large land holdings to start factories. That "inherited family wealth" can be traced back originally to conquest and forcible seizure. Thus denial of free access to the means of life is based ultimately on the principle of "might makes right." And as Murray Bookchin so rightly points out, "*the means of life must be taken for what they literally are: the means without which life is impossible. To deny them to people is more than 'theft'... it is outright homicide.*" [Murray Bookchin, **Remaking Society**, p. 187]

David Ellerman has also noted that the past use of force has resulted in the majority being limited to those options allowed to them by the powers that be:

*"It is a veritable mainstay of capitalist thought... that the moral flaws of chattel slavery have not survived in capitalism since the workers, unlike the slaves, are free people making voluntary wage contracts. But it is only that, in the case of capitalism, the denial of natural rights is less complete so that the worker has a residual legal personality as a free 'commodity owner.' He is thus allowed to voluntarily put his own working life to*



*traffic. When a robber denies another person's right to make an infinite number of other choices besides losing his money or his life and the denial is backed up by a gun, then this is clearly robbery even though it might be said that the victim making a 'voluntary choice' between his remaining options. When the legal system itself denies the natural rights of working people in the name of the prerogatives of capital, and this denial is sanctioned by the legal violence of the state, then the theorists of 'libertarian' capitalism do not proclaim institutional robbery, but rather they celebrate the 'natural liberty' of working people to choose between the remaining options of selling their labour as a commodity and being unemployed." [quoted by Noam Chomsky, **The Chomsky Reader**, p. 186]*

Therefore the existence of the labour market depends on the worker being separated from the means of production. The natural basis of capitalism is wage labour, wherein the majority have little option but to sell their skills, labour and time to those who **do** own the means of production. In advanced capitalist countries, less than 10% of the working population are self-employed (in 1990, 7.6% in the UK, 8% in the USA and Canada - however, this figure includes **employers** as well, meaning that the number of self-employed **workers** is even smaller!). Hence for the vast majority, the labour market is their only option.

Michael Bakunin notes that these facts put the worker in the position of a serf with regard to the capitalist, even though the worker is formally "free" and "equal" under the law:

*"Juridically they are both equal; but economically the worker is the serf of the capitalist . . . thereby the worker sells his person and his liberty for a given time. The worker is in the position of a serf because this terrible threat of starvation which daily hangs over his head and over his family, will force him to accept any conditions imposed by the gainful calculations of the capitalist, the industrialist, the employer. . . . The worker always has the **right** to leave his employer, but has he the means to do so? No, he does it in order to sell himself to another employer. He is driven to it by the same hunger which forces him to sell himself to the first employer. Thus the worker's liberty . . . is only a theoretical freedom, lacking any means for its possible realisation, and consequently it is only a fictitious liberty, an utter falsehood. The truth is that the whole life of the worker is simply a continuous and dismaying succession of terms of serfdom -- voluntary from the juridical point of view but compulsory from an economic sense -- broken up by momentarily brief interludes of freedom accompanied by starvation; in other words, it is real slavery." [The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, pp. 187-8]*

Obviously, a company cannot **force** you to work for them but, in general, you have to work for **someone**. This is because of **past** "initiation of force" by the capitalist class and the state which have created the objective conditions within which we make our employment decisions. Before any **specific** labour market contract occurs, the separation of workers from the means of production is an established fact (and the resulting "labour" market usually gives the advantage to the capitalists as a class). So while we can usually pick which capitalist to work for, we, in general, cannot choose to work for ourselves (the self-employed sector of the economy is tiny, which indicates well how spurious capitalist liberty actually is). Of course, the ability to leave employment and seek it elsewhere is an important freedom.

However, this freedom, like most freedoms under capitalism, is of limited use and hides a deeper anti-individual reality.

As Karl Polanyi puts it:

*"In human terms such a postulate [of a labour market] implied for the worker extreme instability of earnings, utter absence of professional standards, abject readiness to be shoved and pushed about indiscriminately, complete dependence on the whims of the market. [Ludwig Von] Mises justly argued that if workers 'did not act as trade unionists, but reduced their demands and changed their locations and occupations according to the labour market, they would eventually find work.' This sums up the position under a system based on the postulate of the commodity character of labour. It is not for the commodity to decide where it should be offered for sale, to what purpose it should be used, at what price it should be allowed to change hands, and in what manner it should be consumed or destroyed."* [The Great Transformation, p. 176]

(Although we should point out that von Mises argument that workers will "eventually" find work as well as being nice and vague -- how long is "eventually"?, for example -- is contradicted by actual experience. As the Keynesian economist Michael Stewart notes, in the nineteenth century workers *"who lost their jobs had to redeploy fast or starve (and even this feature of the nineteenth century economy. . . did not prevent prolonged recessions)"* [Keynes in the 1990s, p. 31] Workers "reducing their demands" may actually worsen an economic slump, causing more unemployment in the short run and lengthening the length of the crisis. We address the issue of unemployment and workers "reducing their demands" in more detail in [section C.9](#)).

It is sometimes argued that capital needs labour, so both have an equal say in the terms offered, and hence the labour market is based on "liberty." But for capitalism to be based on real freedom or on true free agreement, both sides of the capital/labour divide must be equal in bargaining power, otherwise any agreement would favour the most powerful at the expense of the other party. However, due to the existence of private property and the states needed to protect it, this equality is de facto impossible, regardless of the theory. This is because, in general, capitalists have three advantages on the "free" labour market-- the law and state placing the rights of property above those of labour, the existence of unemployment over most of the business cycle and capitalists having more resources to fall back on. We will discuss each in turn.

The first advantage, namely property owners having the backing of the law and state, ensures that when workers go on strike or use other forms of direct action (or even when they try to form a union) the capitalist has the full backing of the state to employ scabs, break picket lines or fire "the ring-leaders." This obviously gives employers greater power in their bargaining position, placing workers in a weak position (a position that may make them, the workers, think twice before standing up for their rights).

The existence of unemployment over most of the business cycle ensures that *"employers have a*

*structural advantage in the labour market, because there are typically more candidates. . . than jobs for them to fill."* This means that "[c]ompetition in labour markets is typically skewed in favour of employers: it is a buyers market. And in a buyer's market, it is the sellers who compromise. Competition for labour is not strong enough to ensure that workers' desires are always satisfied." [Juliet B. Schor, **The Overworked American**, p. 71, p. 129] If the labour market generally favours the employer, then this obviously places working people at a disadvantage as the threat of unemployment and the hardships associated with encourages workers to take any job and submit to their bosses demands and power while employed. Unemployment, in other words, serves to discipline labour. The higher the prevailing unemployment rate, the harder it is to find a new job, which raises the cost of job loss and makes it less likely for workers to strike, join unions, or to resist employer demands, and so on.

As Bakunin argued, *"the property owners... are likewise forced to seek out and purchase labour... but not in the same measure . . . [there is no] equality between those who offer their labour and those who purchase it."* [Op. Cit., p. 183] This ensures that any "free agreements" made benefit the capitalists more than the workers (see the [next section](#) on periods of full employment, when conditions tilt in favour of working people).

Lastly, there is the issue of inequalities in wealth and so resources. The capitalist generally has more resources to fall back on during strikes and while waiting to find employees (for example, large companies with many factories can swap production to their other factories if one goes on strike). And by having more resources to fall back on, the capitalist can hold out longer than the worker, so placing the employer in a stronger bargaining position and so ensuring labour contracts favour them. This was recognised by Adam Smith:

*"It is not difficult to foresee which of the two parties [workers and capitalists] must, upon all ordinary occasions... force the other into a compliance with their terms... In all such disputes the masters can hold out much longer... though they did not employ a single workman [the masters] could generally live a year or two upon the stocks which they already acquired. Many workmen could not subsist a week, few could subsist a month, and scarce any a year without employment. In the long-run the workman may be as necessary to his master as his master is to him; but the necessity is not so immediate. . . [I]n disputes with their workmen, masters must generally have the advantage."* [**Wealth of Nations**, pp. 59-60]

How little things have changed.

So, while it is definitely the case that no one forces you to work for them, the capitalist system is such that you have little choice but to sell your liberty and labour on the "free market." Not only this, but the labour market (which is what makes capitalism capitalism) is (usually) skewed in favour of the employer, so ensuring that any "free agreements" made on it favour the boss and result in the workers submitting to domination and exploitation. This is why anarchists support collective organisation (such as unions) and resistance (such as strikes), direct action and solidarity to make us as, if not more,

powerful than our exploiters and win important reforms and improvements (and, ultimately, change society), even when faced with the disadvantages on the labour market we have indicated. The despotism associated with property (to use Proudhon's expression) is resisted by those subject to it and, needless to say, the boss does not always win.

## B.4.4 But what about periods of high demand for labour?

Of course there are periods when the demand for labour exceeds supply, but these periods hold the seeds of depression for capitalism, as workers are in an excellent position to challenge, both individually and collectively, their allotted role as commodities. This point is discussed in more detail in section C.7 ([What causes the capitalist business cycle?](#)) and so we will not do so here. For now it's enough to point out that during normal times (i.e. over most of the business cycle), capitalists often enjoy extensive authority over workers, an authority deriving from the unequal bargaining power between capital and labour, as noted by Adam Smith and many others.

However, this changes during times of high demand for labour. To illustrate, let us assume that supply and demand approximate each other. It is clear that such a situation is only good for the worker. Bosses cannot easily fire a worker as there is no one to replace them and the workers, either collectively by solidarity or individually by "exit" (i.e. quitting and moving to a new job), can ensure a boss respects their interests and, indeed, can push these interests to the full. The boss finds it hard to keep their authority intact or from stopping wages rising and causing a profits squeeze. In other words, as unemployment drops, workers power increases.

Looking at it another way, giving someone the right to hire and fire an input into a production process vests that individual with considerable power over that input unless it is costless for that input to move; that is unless the input is perfectly mobile. This is only approximated in real life for labour during periods of full employment, and so perfect mobility of **labour** costs problems for a capitalist firm because under such conditions workers are not dependent on a particular capitalist and so the level of worker effort is determined far more by the decisions of workers (either collectively or individually) than by managerial authority. The threat of firing cannot be used as a threat to increase effort, and hence production, and so full employment increases workers power.

With the capitalist firm being a fixed commitment of resources, this situation is intolerable. Such times are bad for business and so occur rarely with free market capitalism (we must point out that in neo-classical economics, it is assumed that all inputs - including capital - are perfectly mobile and so the theory ignores reality and assumes away **capitalist production** itself!).

During the last period of capitalist boom, the post-war period, we can see the breakdown of capitalist authority and the fear this held for the ruling elite. The Trilateral Commission's 1975 report, which attempted to "understand" the growing discontent among the general population, makes our point well. In periods of full employment, according to the report, there is "*an excess of democracy.*" In other words, due to the increased bargaining power workers gained during a period of high demand for labour,

people started thinking about and acting upon their needs as **humans**, not as commodities embodying labour power. This naturally had devastating effects on capitalist and statist authority: *"People no longer felt the same compulsion to obey those whom they had previously considered superior to themselves in age, rank, status, expertise, character, or talent"*.

This loosening of the bonds of compulsion and obedience led to *"previously passive or unorganised groups in the population, blacks, Indians, Chicanos, white ethnic groups, students and women... embark [ing] on concerted efforts to establish their claims to opportunities, rewards, and privileges, which they had not considered themselves entitled to before."*

Such an *"excess"* of participation in politics of course posed a serious threat to the status quo, since for the elites who authored the report, it was considered axiomatic that *"the effective operation of a democratic political system usually requires some measure of apathy and non-involvement on the part of some individuals and groups. . . . In itself, this marginality on the part of some groups is inherently undemocratic, but it is also one of the factors which has enabled democracy to function effectively."* Such a statement reveals the hollowness of the establishment's concept of 'democracy,' which in order to function effectively (i.e. to serve elite interests) must be *"inherently undemocratic."*

Any period where people feel empowered allows them to communicate with their fellows, identify their needs and desires, and resist those forces that deny their freedom to manage their own lives. Such resistance strikes a deadly blow at the capitalist need to treat people as commodities, since (to re-quote Polanyi) people no longer feel that it *"is not for the commodity to decide where it should be offered for sale, to what purpose it should be used, at what price it should be allowed to change hands, and in what manner it should be consumed or destroyed."* Instead, as thinking and feeling people, they act to reclaim their freedom and humanity.

As noted at the beginning of this section, the economic effects of such periods of empowerment and revolt are discussed in section [C.7](#). We will end by quoting the Polish economist Michal Kalecki, who noted that a continuous capitalist boom would **not** be in the interests of the ruling class. In 1943, in response to the more optimistic Keynesians, he noted that *"to maintain the high level of employment. . . in the subsequent boom, a strong opposition of 'business leaders' is likely to be encountered. . . lasting full employment is not at all to their liking. The workers would 'get out of hand' and the 'captains of industry' would be anxious 'to teach them a lesson'"* because *"under a regime of permanent full employment, 'the sack' would cease to play its role as a disciplinary measure. The social position of the boss would be undermined and the self assurance and class consciousness of the working class would grow. Strikes for wage increases and improvements in conditions of work would create political tension. . . 'discipline in the factories' and 'political stability' are more appreciated by business leaders than profits. Their class interest tells them that lasting full employment is unsound from their point of view and that unemployment is an integral part of the normal capitalist system."* [cited by Malcolm C. Sawyer, **The Economics of Michal Kalecki** p. 139, p. 138]

Therefore, periods when the demand for labour outstrips supply are not healthy for capitalism, as they

allow people to assert their freedom and humanity -- both fatal to the system. This is why news of large numbers of new jobs sends the stock market plunging and why capitalists are so keen these days to maintain a "natural" rate of unemployment (that it has to be maintained indicates that it is **not** "natural"). Kalecki, we must point out, also correctly predicted the rise of "*a powerful bloc*" between "*big business and the rentier interests*" against full employment and that "*they would probably find more than one economist to declare that the situation was manifestly unsound.*" The resulting "*pressure of all these forces, and in particular big business*" would "*induce the Government to return to. . . orthodox policy.*" [Kalecki, cited **Op. Cit.**, p. 140] This is exactly what happened in the 1970s, with the monetarists and other sections of the "free market" right providing the ideological support for the business lead class war, and whose "theories" (when applied) promptly generated massive unemployment, thus teaching the working class the required lesson.

So, although detrimental to profit-making, periods of recession and high unemployment are not only unavoidable but are necessary to capitalism in order to "*discipline*" workers and "*teach them a lesson.*" And in all, it is little wonder that capitalism rarely produces periods approximating full employment -- they are **not** in its interests (see also section [C.9](#)). The dynamics of capitalism makes recession and unemployment inevitable, just as it makes class struggle (which creates these dynamics) inevitable.

## B.4.5 But I want to be "left alone"!

It is ironic that supporters of laissez-faire capitalism, such as "Libertarians" and "anarcho"-capitalists, should claim that they want to be "left alone," since capitalism **never** allows this. As Max Stirner expressed it:

*"Restless acquisition does not let us take breath, take a calm enjoyment. We do not get the comfort of our possessions. . ."* [Max Stirner **The Ego and Its Own**, p. 268]

Capitalism cannot let us "*take breath*" simply because it needs to grow or die, which puts constant pressure on both workers and capitalists (see [section D.4.1](#)). Workers can never relax or be free of anxiety about losing their jobs, because if they do not work, they do not eat, nor can they ensure that their children will get a better life. Within the workplace, they are not "left alone" by their bosses in order to manage their own activities. Instead, they are told what to do, when to do it and how to do it. Indeed, the history of experiments in workers' control and self-management within capitalist companies confirms our claims that, for the worker, capitalism is incompatible with the desire to be "left alone." As an illustration we will use the "**Pilot Program**" conducted by General Electric between 1968 and 1972.

General Electric proposed the "Pilot Program" as a means of overcoming the problems they faced with introducing Numeric Control (N/C) machinery into its plant at Lynn River Works, Massachusetts. Faced with rising tensions on the shop floor, bottle-necks in production and low-quantity products, GE management tried a scheme of "*job enrichment*" based on workers' control of production in one area of the plant. By June 1970 the workers' involved were "*on their own*" (as one manager put it) and "*[i]n terms of group job enlargement this was when the Pilot Project really began, with immediate results in*

*increased output and machine utilisation, and a reduction on manufacturing losses. As one union official remarked two years later, 'The fact that we broke down a traditional policy of GE [that the union could never have a hand in managing the business] was in itself satisfying, especially when we could throw success up to them to boot.'*" [David Noble, **Forces of Production**, p. 295]

The project, after some initial scepticism, proved to be a great success with the workers involved. Indeed, other workers in the factory desired to be included and the union soon tried to get it spread throughout the plant and into other GE locations. The success of the scheme was that it was based on workers' managing their own affairs rather than being told what to do by their bosses -- "*We are human beings,*" said one worker, "*and want to be treated as such.*" [quoted by Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 292] To be fully human means to be free to govern oneself in all aspects of life, including production.

However, just after a year of the workers being given control over their working lives, management stopped the project. Why? "*In the eyes of some management supporters of the 'experiment,' the Pilot Program was terminated because management as a whole refused to give up any of its traditional authority . . . [t]he Pilot Program foundered on the basic contradiction of capitalist production: Who's running the shop?*" [Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 318]

Noble goes on to argue that to GE's top management, "*the union's desire to extend the program appeared as a step toward greater workers control over production and, as such, a threat to the traditional authority rooted in private ownership of the means of production. Thus the decision to terminate represented a defence not only of the prerogatives of production supervisors and plant managers but also of the power vested in property ownership.*" [**Ibid.**] Noble notes that this result was not an isolated case and that the "*demise of the GE Pilot Program followed the typical pattern for such 'job enrichment experiments'*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 320] Even though "*[s]everal dozen well-documented experiments show that productivity increases and social problems decrease when workers participant in the work decisions affecting their lives*" [Department of Health, Education and Welfare study quoted by Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 322] such schemes are ended by bosses seeking to preserve their own power, the power that flows from private property.

As one worker in the GE Pilot Program stated, "*[w]e just want to be left alone.*" They were not -- capitalist social relations prohibit such a possibility (as Noble correctly notes, "*the 'way of life' for the management meant controlling the lives of others*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 294 and p. 300]). In spite of improved productivity, projects in workers' control are scrapped because they undermined both the power of the capitalists -- and by undermining their power, you potentially undermine their profits too ("*If we're all one, for manufacturing reasons, we must share in the fruits equitably, just like a co-op business.*" [GE Pilot Program worker, quoted by Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 295]).

As we argue in more detail in [section J.5.12](#), profit maximisation can work against efficiency, meaning that capitalism can harm the overall economy by promoting less efficient production techniques (i.e. hierarchical ones against egalitarian ones) because it is in the interests of capitalists to do so and the capitalist market rewards that behaviour. This is because, ultimately, profits are unpaid labour. If you

empower labour, give workers' control over their work then they will increase efficiency and productivity (they know how to do their job the best) but you also erode authority structures within the workplace. Workers' will seek more and more control (freedom naturally tries to grow) and this, as the Pilot Program worker clearly saw, implies a co-operative workplace in which workers', **not** managers, decide what to do with the surplus produced. By threatening power, you threaten profits (or, more correctly, who controls the profit and where it goes). With the control over production **and** who gets to control any surplus in danger, it is unsurprising that companies soon abandon such schemes and return to the old, less efficient, hierarchical schemes based on "*Do what you are told, for as long as you are told.*" Such a regime is hardly fit for free people and, as Noble notes, the regime that replaced the GE Pilot Program was "*designed to 'break' the pilots of their new found 'habits' of self-reliance, self-discipline, and self-respect.*" [Op. Cit., p. 307]

Thus the experience of workers' control project within capitalist firms indicates well that capitalism cannot "*leave you alone*" if you are a wage slave.

Moreover, capitalists themselves cannot relax because they must ensure their workers' productivity rises faster than their workers' wages, otherwise their business will fail (see sections [C.2](#) and [C.3](#)). This means that every company has to innovate or be left behind, to be put out of business or work. Hence the boss is not "left alone" -- their decisions are made under the duress of market forces, of the necessities imposed by competition on individual capitalists. Restless acquisition -- in this context, the necessity to accumulate capital in order to survive in the market -- always haunts the capitalist. And since unpaid labour is the key to capitalist expansion, work must continue to exist and grow -- necessitating the boss to control the working hours of the worker to ensure that they produce more goods than they receive in wages. The boss is not "left alone" nor do they leave the worker alone.

These facts, based upon the authority relations associated with private property and relentless competition, ensure that the desire to be "left alone" cannot be satisfied under capitalism.

As Murray Bookchin observes:

*"Despite their assertions of autonomy and distrust of state authority . . . classical liberal thinkers did not in the last instance hold to the notion that the individual is completely free from lawful guidance. Indeed, their interpretation of autonomy actually presupposed quite definite arrangements beyond the individual -- notably, the laws of the marketplace. Individual autonomy to the contrary, these laws constitute a social organising system in which all 'collections of individuals' are held under the sway of the famous 'invisible hand' of competition. Paradoxically, the laws of the marketplace override the exercise of 'free will' by the same sovereign individuals who otherwise constitute the "collection of individuals." ["Communalism: The Democratic Dimension of Anarchism", p. 4, **Democracy and Nature** no. 8, pp. 1-17]*

Human interaction is an essential part of life. Anarchism proposes to eliminate only undesired social



interactions and authoritarian impositions, which are inherent in capitalism and indeed in any hierarchical form of socio-economic organisation (e.g. state socialism). Hermits soon become less than human, as social interaction enriches and develops individuality. Capitalism may attempt to reduce us to hermits, only "connected" by the market, but such a denial of our humanity and individuality inevitably feeds the spirit of revolt. In practice the "laws" of the market and the hierarchy of capital will never "leave one alone," but instead, crush one's individuality and freedom. Yet this aspect of capitalism conflicts with the human "instinct for freedom," as Noam Chomsky describes it, and hence there arises a counter-tendency toward radicalisation and rebellion among any oppressed people (see [section J](#)).

One last point. The desire to "be left alone" often expresses two drastically different ideas -- the wish to be your own master and manage your own affairs and the desire by bosses and landlords to have more power over their property. However, the authority exercised by such owners over their property is also exercised over **those who use that property**. Therefore, the notion of "being left alone" contains two contradictory aspects within a class ridden and hierarchical society. Obviously anarchists are sympathetic to the first, inherently libertarian, aspect -- the desire to manage your own life, in your own way -- but we reject the second aspect and any implication that it is in the interests of the governed to leave those in power alone. Rather, it is in the interest of the governed to subject those with authority over them to as much control as possible -- for obvious reasons.

Therefore, working people are more or less free to the extent that they **restrict** the ability of their bosses to be "left alone." One of the aims of anarchists within a capitalist society is **ensure** that those in power are **not** "left alone" to exercise their authority over those subject to it. We see solidarity, direct action and workplace and community organisation as a means of interfering with the authority of the state, capitalists and property owners until such time as we can destroy such authoritarian social relationships once and for all.

Hence anarchist dislike of the term "laissez-faire" -- within a class society it can only mean protecting the powerful against the working class (under the banner of "neutrally" enforcing property rights and so **the power derived from them**). However, we are well aware of the other, libertarian, vision expressed in the desire to be "left alone." That is the reason we have discussed why capitalist society can never actually achieve that desire -- it is handicapped by its hierarchical and competitive nature -- and how such a desire can be twisted into a means of enhancing the power of the few over the many.

## A.2 What does anarchism stand for?

These words by Percy Bysshe Shelley gives an idea of what anarchism stands for in practice and what ideals drive it:

*The man  
Of virtuous soul commands not, nor obeys:  
Power, like a desolating pestilence,  
Pollutes whate'er it touches, and obedience,  
Bane of all genius, virtue, freedom, truth,  
Makes slaves of men, and, of the human frame,  
A mechanised automaton.*

As Shelley's lines suggest, anarchists place a high priority on liberty, desiring it both for themselves and others. They also consider individuality -- that which makes one a unique person -- to be a most important aspect of humanity. They recognise, however, that individuality does not exist in a vacuum but is a **social** phenomenon. Outside of society, individuality is impossible, since one needs other people in order to develop, expand, and grow.

Moreover, between individual and social development there is a reciprocal effect: individuals grow within and are shaped by a particular society, while at the same time they help shape and change aspects of that society (as well as themselves and other individuals) by their actions and thoughts. A society not based on free individuals, their hopes, dreams and ideas would be hollow and dead. Thus, *"the making of a human being. . . is a collective process, a process in which both community and the individual participate."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Modern Crisis**, p. 79] Consequently, any political theory which bases itself purely on the social or the individual is false.

In order for individuality to develop to the fullest possible extent, anarchists consider it essential to create a society based on three principles: **liberty**, **equality** and **solidarity**. These principles are shared by all anarchists. Thus we find, the communist-anarchist Peter Kropotkin talking about a revolution inspired by *"the beautiful words, Liberty, Equality and Solidarity."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 128] Individualist-anarchist Benjamin Tucker wrote of a similar vision, arguing that anarchism *"insists on Socialism . . . on true Socialism, Anarchistic Socialism: the prevalance on earth of Liberty, Equality, and Solidarity."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 363] All three principles are interdependent.

Liberty is essential for the full flowering of human intelligence, creativity, and dignity. To be dominated by another is to be denied the chance to think and act for oneself, which is the only way to grow and develop one's individuality. Domination also stifles innovation and personal responsibility, leading to conformity and mediocrity. Thus the society that maximises the growth of individuality will necessarily be based on voluntary association, not coercion and authority. To quote Proudhon, *"All associated and*

*all free.*" Or, as Luigi Galleani puts it, anarchism is *"the autonomy of the individual within the freedom of association"* [**The End of Anarchism?**, p. 35] (See further section A.2.2 -- [Why do anarchists emphasise liberty?](#)).

If liberty is essential for the fullest development of individuality, then equality is essential for genuine liberty to exist. There can be no real freedom in a class-stratified, hierarchical society riddled with gross inequalities of power, wealth, and privilege. For in such a society only a few -- those at the top of the hierarchy -- are relatively free, while the rest are semi-slaves. Hence without equality, liberty becomes a mockery -- at best the "freedom" to choose one's master (boss), as under capitalism. Moreover, even the elite under such conditions are not really free, because they must live in a stunted society made ugly and barren by the tyranny and alienation of the majority. And since individuality develops to the fullest only with the widest contact with other free individuals, members of the elite are restricted in the possibilities for their own development by the scarcity of free individuals with whom to interact. (See also section A.2.5 -- [Why are anarchists in favour of equality?](#))

Finally, solidarity means mutual aid: working voluntarily and co-operatively with others who share the same goals and interests. But without liberty and equality, society becomes a pyramid of competing classes based on the domination of the lower by the higher strata. In such a society, as we know from our own, it's "dominate or be dominated," "dog eat dog," and "everyone for themselves." Thus "rugged individualism" is promoted at the expense of community feeling, with those on the bottom resenting those above them and those on the top fearing those below them. Under such conditions, there can be no society-wide solidarity, but only a partial form of solidarity within classes whose interests are opposed, which weakens society as a whole. (See also section A.2.6 -- [Why is solidarity important to anarchists?](#))

It should be noted that solidarity does not imply self-sacrifice or self-negation. As Errico Malatesta makes clear:

*"we are all egoists, we all seek our own satisfaction. But the anarchist finds his greatest satisfaction in struggling for the good of all, for the achievement of a society in which he [sic] can be a brother among brothers, and among healthy, intelligent, educated, and happy people. But he who is adaptable, who is satisfied to live among slaves and draw profit from the labour of slaves, is not, and cannot be, an anarchist."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 23]

For anarchists, **real** wealth is other people and the planet on which we live. Or, in the words of Emma Goldman, it *"consists in things of utility and beauty, in things which help to create strong, beautiful bodies and surroundings inspiring to live in . . . [Our] goal is the freest possible expression of all the latent powers of the individual . . . Such free display of human energy being possible only under complete individual and social freedom,"* in other words *"social equality."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 67-8]

Also, honouring individuality does not mean that anarchists are idealists, thinking that people or ideas

develop outside of society. Individuality and ideas grow and develop within society, in response to material and intellectual interactions and experiences, which people actively analyse and interpret. Anarchism, therefore, is a **materialist** theory, recognising that ideas develop and grow from social interaction and individuals' mental activity (see Michael Bakunin's **God and the State** for the classic discussion of materialism versus idealism).

This means that an anarchist society will be the creation of human beings, not some deity or other transcendental principle, since "*[n]othing ever arranges itself, least of all in human relations. It is men [sic] who do the arranging, and they do it according to their attitudes and understanding of things.*" [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 185]

Therefore, anarchism bases itself upon the power of ideas and the ability of people to act and transform their lives based on what they consider to be right. In other words, liberty.

## A.2.1 What is the essence of anarchism?

As we have seen, "*an-archy*" implies "*without rulers*" or "*without (hierarchical) authority*." Anarchists are not against "authorities" in the sense of experts who are particularly knowledgeable, skillful, or wise, though they believe that such authorities should have no power to force others to follow their recommendations (see [section B.1](#) for more on this distinction). In a nutshell, then, anarchism is anti-authoritarianism.

Anarchists are anti-authoritarians because they believe that no human being should dominate another. Anarchists, in L. Susan Brown's words, "*believe in the inherent dignity and worth of the human individual.*" [**The Politics of Individualism**, p. 107] Domination is inherently degrading and demeaning, since it submerges the will and judgement of the dominated to the will and judgement of the dominators, thus destroying the dignity and self-respect that comes only from personal autonomy. Moreover, domination makes possible and generally leads to exploitation, which is the root of inequality, poverty, and social breakdown.

In other words, then, the essence of anarchism (to express it positively) is free co-operation between equals to maximise their liberty and individuality.

Co-operation between equals is the key to anti-authoritarianism. By co-operation we can develop and protect our own intrinsic value as unique individuals as well as enriching our lives and liberty for "*[n]o individual can recognise his own humanity, and consequently realise it in his lifetime, if not by recognising it in others and co-operating in its realisation for others . . . My freedom is the freedom of all since I am not truly free in thought and in fact, except when my freedom and my rights are confirmed and approved in the freedom and rights of all men [and women] who are my equals.*" [Michael Bakunin, quoted by Errico Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 30]

While being anti-authoritarians, anarchists recognise that human beings have a social nature and that

they mutually influence each other. We cannot escape the "authority" of this mutual influence, because, as Bakunin reminds us:

*"The abolition of this mutual influence would be death. And when we advocate the freedom of the masses, we are by no means suggesting the abolition of any of the natural influences that individuals or groups of individuals exert on them. What we want is the abolition of influences which are artificial, privileged, legal, official."* [quoted by Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 51]

In other words, those influences which stem from hierarchical authority.

## A.2.2 Why do anarchists emphasise liberty?

An anarchist can be regarded, in Bakunin's words, as a *"fanatic lover of freedom, considering it as the unique environment within which the intelligence, dignity and happiness of mankind can develop and increase."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 196] Because human beings are thinking creatures, to deny them liberty is to deny them the opportunity to think for themselves, which is to deny their very existence as humans. For anarchists, freedom is a product of our humanity, because:

*"The very fact. . . that a person has a consciousness of self, of being different from others, creates a desire to act freely. The craving for liberty and self-expression is a very fundamental and dominant trait."* [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, p. 439]

For this reason, anarchism *"proposes to rescue the self-respect and independence of the individual from all restraint and invasion by authority. Only in freedom can man [sic!] grow to his full stature. Only in freedom will he learn to think and move, and give the very best of himself. Only in freedom will he realise the true force of the social bonds which tie men together, and which are the true foundations of a normal social life."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 72-3]

Thus, for anarchists, freedom is basically individuals pursuing their own good in their own way. Doing so calls forth the activity and power of individuals as they make decisions for and about themselves and their lives. Only liberty can ensure individual development and diversity. This is because when individuals govern themselves and make their own decisions they have to exercise their minds and this can have no other effect than expanding and stimulating the individuals involved. As Malatesta put it, *"[f]or people to become educated to freedom and the management of their own interests, they must be left to act for themselves, to feel responsibility for their own actions in the good or bad that comes from them. They'd make mistakes, but they'd understand from the consequences where they'd gone wrong and try out new ways."* [**Fra Contadini**, p. 26]

So, liberty is the precondition for the maximum development of one's individual potential, which is also a social product and can be achieved only in and through community. A healthy, free community will produce free individuals, who in turn will shape the community and enrich the social relationships

between the people of whom it is composed. Liberties, being socially produced, *"do not exist because they have been legally set down on a piece of paper, but only when they have become the ingrown habit of a people, and when any attempt to impair them will meet with the violent resistance of the populace . . . One compels respect from others when one knows how to defend one's dignity as a human being. This is not only true in private life; it has always been the same in political life as well."* In fact, we *"owe all the political rights and privileges which we enjoy today in greater or lesser measures, not to the good will of their governments, but to their own strength."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-syndicalism**, p. 75]

It is for this reason anarchists support the tactic of **"Direct Action"** (see [section J.2](#)) for, as Emma Goldman argued, we have *"as much liberty as [we are] willing to take. Anarchism therefore stands for direct action, the open defiance of, and resistance to, all laws and restrictions, economic, social, and moral."* It requires *"integrity, self-reliance, and courage. In short, it calls for free, independent spirits"* and *"only persistent resistance"* can *"finally set [us] free. Direct action against the authority in the shop, direct action against the authority of the law, direct action against the invasive, meddling authority of our moral code, is the logical, consistent method of Anarchism."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 76-7]

Direct action is, in other words, the application of liberty, used to resist oppression in the here and now as well as the means of creating a free society. It creates the necessary individual mentality and social conditions in which liberty flourishes. Both are essential as liberty develops only within society, not in opposition to it. Thus Murray Bookchin writes:

*"What freedom, independence, and autonomy people have in a given historical period is the product of long social traditions and . . . a **collective** development -- which is not to deny that individuals play an important role in that development, indeed are ultimately obliged to do so if they wish to be free."* [**Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism**, p. 15]

But freedom requires the right **kind** of social environment in which to grow and develop. Such an environment **must** be decentralised and based on the direct management of work by those who do it. For centralisation means coercive authority (hierarchy), whereas self-management is the essence of freedom. Self-management ensures that the individuals involved use (and so develop) all their abilities -- particularly their mental ones. Hierarchy, in contrast, substitutes the activities and thoughts of a few for the activities and thoughts of all the individuals involved. Thus, rather than developing their abilities to the full, hierarchy marginalises the many and ensures that their development is blunted (see also [section B.1](#)).

It is for this reason that anarchists oppose both capitalism and statism. As the French anarchist Sebastien Faure noted, authority *"dresses itself in two principal forms: the political form, that is the State; and the economic form, that is private property."* [cited by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 43] Capitalism, like the state, is based on centralised authority (i.e. of the boss over the worker), the very purpose of which is to keep the management of work out of the hands of those who do it. This means

*"that the serious, final, complete liberation of the workers is possible only upon one condition: that of the appropriation of capital, that is, of raw material and all the tools of labour, including land, by the whole body of the workers."* [Michael Bakunin, quoted by Rudolf Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 50]

Hence, as Noam Chomsky argues, a *"consistent anarchist must oppose private ownership of the means of production and the wage slavery which is a component of this system, as incompatible with the principle that labour must be freely undertaken and under the control of the producer."* ["Notes on Anarchism", **For Reasons of State**, p. 158]

Thus, liberty for anarchists means a non-authoritarian society in which individuals and groups practice self-management, i.e. they govern themselves. The implications of this are important. First, it implies that an anarchist society will be non-coercive, that is, one in which violence or the threat of violence will not be used to "convince" individuals to do anything. Second, it implies that anarchists are firm supporters of individual sovereignty, and that, because of this support, they also oppose institutions based on coercive authority, i.e. hierarchy. And finally, it implies that anarchists' opposition to "government" means only that they oppose centralised, hierarchical, bureaucratic organisations or government. They do not oppose self-government through confederations of decentralised, grassroots organisations, so long as these are based on direct democracy rather than the delegation of power to "representatives" (see [section A.2.9](#) for more on anarchist organisation). For authority is the opposite of liberty, and hence any form of organisation based on the delegation of power is a threat to the liberty and dignity of the people subjected to that power.

Anarchists consider freedom to be the only social environment within which human dignity and diversity can flower. Under capitalism and statism, however, there is no freedom for the majority, as private property and hierarchy ensure that the inclination and judgement of most individuals will be subordinated to the will of a master, severely restricting their liberty and making impossible the *"full development of all the material, intellectual and moral capacities that are latent in every one of us."* [Michael Bakunin, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 261]

(See [section B](#) for further discussion of the hierarchical and authoritarian nature of capitalism and statism).

### A.2.3 Are anarchists in favour of organisation?

Yes. Without association, a truly human life is impossible. Liberty **cannot** exist without society and organisation. As George Barrett pointed out:

*"To get the full meaning out of life we must co-operate, and to co-operate we must make agreements with our fellow-men. But to suppose that such agreements mean a limitation of freedom is surely an absurdity; on the contrary, they are the exercise of our freedom."*

*"If we are going to invent a dogma that to make agreements is to damage freedom, then at once freedom becomes tyrannical, for it forbids men to take the most ordinary everyday pleasures. For example, I cannot go for a walk with my friend because it is against the principle of Liberty that I should agree to be at a certain place at a certain time to meet him. I cannot in the least extend my own power beyond myself, because to do so I must co-operate with someone else, and co-operation implies an agreement, and that is against Liberty. It will be seen at once that this argument is absurd. I do not limit my liberty, but simply exercise it, when I agree with my friend to go for a walk.*

*"If, on the other hand, I decide from my superior knowledge that it is good for my friend to take exercise, and therefore I attempt to compel him to go for a walk, then I begin to limit freedom. This is the difference between free agreement and government."* [**Objections to Anarchism**, pp. 348-9]

As far as organisation goes, anarchists think that *"far from creating authority, [it] is the only cure for it and the only means whereby each of us will get used to taking an active and conscious part in collective work, and cease being passive instruments in the hands of leaders."* [Errico Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 86] Thus anarchists are well aware of the need to organise in a structured and open manner. As Carole Ehrlich points out, while anarchists *"aren't opposed to structure"* and simply *"want to abolish **hierarchical** structure"* they are *"almost always stereotyped as wanting no structure at all."* This is not the case, for *"organisations that would build in accountability, diffusion of power among the maximum number of persons, task rotation, skill-sharing, and the spread of information and resources"* are based on *"good social anarchist principles of organisation!"* [*"Socialism, Anarchism and Feminism"*, **Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader**, p. 47 and p. 46]

The fact that anarchists are in favour of organisation may seem strange at first, but it is understandable. *"For those with experience only of authoritarian organisation,"* argue two British anarchists, *"it appears that organisation can only be totalitarian or democratic, and that those who disbelieve in government must by that token disbelieve in organisation at all. That is not so."* [Stuart Christie and Albert Meltzer, **The Floodgates of Anarchy**, p. 122] In other words, because we live in a society in which virtually all forms of organisation are authoritarian, this makes them appear to be the only kind possible. What is usually not recognised is that this mode of organisation is historically conditioned, arising within a specific kind of society -- one whose motive principles are domination and exploitation. According to archaeologists and anthropologists, this kind of society has only existed for about 5,000 years, having appeared with the first primitive states based on conquest and slavery, in which the labour of slaves created a surplus which supported a ruling class.

Prior to that time, for hundreds of thousands of years, human and proto-human societies were what Murray Bookchin calls *"organic,"* that is, based on co-operative forms of economic activity involving mutual aid, free access to productive resources, and a sharing of the products of communal labour according to need. Although such societies probably had status rankings based on age, there were no hierarchies in the sense of institutionalised dominance-subordination relations enforced by coercive



sanctions and resulting in class-stratification involving the economic exploitation of one class by another (see Murray Bookchin, **The Ecology of Freedom**).

It must be emphasised, however, that anarchists do **not** advocate going "back to the Stone Age." We merely note that since the hierarchical-authoritarian mode of organisation is a relatively recent development in the course of human social evolution, there is no reason to suppose that it is somehow "fated" to be permanent. We do not think that human beings are genetically "programmed" for authoritarian, competitive, and aggressive behaviour, as there is no credible evidence to support this claim. On the contrary, such behaviour is socially conditioned, or **learned**, and as such, can be **unlearned** (see Ashley Montagu, **The Nature of Human Aggression**). We are not fatalists or genetic determinists, but believe in free will, which means that people can change the way they do things, including the way they organise society.

And there is no doubt that society needs to be better organised, because presently most of its wealth -- which is produced by the majority -- and power gets distributed to a small, elite minority at the top of the social pyramid, causing deprivation and suffering for the rest, particularly for those at the bottom. Yet because this elite controls the means of coercion through its control of the state (see [section B.2.3](#)), it is able to suppress the majority and ignore its suffering -- a phenomenon that occurs on a smaller scale within all hierarchies. Little wonder, then, that people within authoritarian and centralised structures come to hate them as a denial of their freedom. As Alexander Berkman puts it:

*"Any one who tells you that Anarchists don't believe in organisation is talking nonsense. Organisation is everything, and everything is organisation. The whole of life is organisation, conscious or unconscious . . . But there is organisation and organisation. Capitalist society is so badly organised that its various members suffer: just as when you have a pain in some part of you, your whole body aches and you are ill. . . , not a single member of the organisation or union may with impunity be discriminated against, suppressed or ignored. To do so would be the same as to ignore an aching tooth: you would be sick all over."* [Op. Cit., p. 198]

Yet this is precisely what happens in capitalist society, with the result that it is, indeed, "*sick all over*."

For these reasons, anarchists reject authoritarian forms of organisation and instead support associations based on free agreement. Free agreement is important because, in Berkman's words, "[o]nly when each is a free and independent unit, co-operating with others from his own choice because of mutual interests, can the world work successfully and become powerful." [Op. Cit., p. 199] As we discuss in [section A.2.14](#), anarchists stress that free agreement has to be complemented by direct democracy (or, as it is usually called by anarchists, self-management) within the association itself otherwise "freedom" become little more than picking masters.

Anarchist organisation is based on a massive decentralisation of power back into the hands of the people, i.e. those who are directly affected by the decisions being made. To quote Proudhon:

*"Unless democracy is a fraud and the sovereignty of the People a joke, it must be admitted that each citizen in the sphere of his [or her] industry, each municipal, district or provincial council within its own territory . . . should act directly and by itself in administering the interests which it includes, and should exercise full sovereignty in relation to them."* [The General Idea of the Revolution, p. 276]

It also implies a need for federalism to co-ordinate joint interests. For anarchism, federalism is the natural complement to self-management. With the abolition of the State, society *"can, and must, organise itself in a different fashion, but not from top to bottom . . . The future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal. Then alone will be realised the true and life-giving order of freedom and the common good, that order which, far from denying, on the contrary affirms and brings into harmony the interests of individuals and of society."* [Bakunin, **Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 205-6] Because a *"truly popular organisation begins . . . from below"* and so *"federalism becomes a political institution of Socialism, the free and spontaneous organisation of popular life."* Thus libertarian socialism *"is federalistic in character."* [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 273-4 and p. 272]

Therefore, anarchist organisation is based on direct democracy (or self-management) and federalism (or confederation). These are the expression and environment of liberty. Direct (or participatory) democracy is essential because liberty and equality imply the need for forums within which people can discuss and debate as equals and which allow for the free exercise of what Murray Bookchin calls *"the creative role of dissent."* Federalism is necessary to ensure that common interests are discussed and joint activity organised in a way which reflects the wishes of all those affected by them. To ensure that decisions flow from the bottom up rather than being imposed from the top down by a few rulers.

Anarchist ideas on libertarian organisation and the need for direct democracy and confederation will be discussed further in sections [A.2.9](#) and [A.2.11](#).

## A.2.4 Are anarchists in favour of "absolute" liberty?

No. Anarchists do not believe that everyone should be able to *"do whatever they like,"* because some actions invariably involve the denial of the liberty of others.

For example, anarchists do not support the "freedom" to rape, to exploit, or to coerce others. Neither do we tolerate authority. On the contrary, since authority is a threat to liberty, equality, and solidarity (not to mention human dignity), anarchists recognise the need to resist and overthrow it.

The exercise of authority is not freedom. No one has a "right" to rule others. As Malatesta points out, anarchism supports *"freedom for everybody . . . with the only limit of the equal freedom for others; which does **not** mean . . . that we recognise, and wish to respect, the 'freedom' to exploit, to oppress, to*

*command, which is oppression and certainly not freedom.*" [Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas, p. 53]

In a capitalist society, resistance to all forms of hierarchical authority is the mark of a free person -- be it private (the boss) or public (the state). As Henry David Thoreau pointed out in his essay on "**Civil Disobedience**" (1847)

*"Disobedience is the true foundation of liberty. The obedient must be slaves."*

## A.2.5 Why are anarchists in favour of equality?

As mentioned in [above](#), anarchists are dedicated to social equality because it is the only context in which individual liberty can flourish. However, there has been much nonsense written about "equality," and much of what is commonly believed about it is very strange indeed. Before discussing what anarchist **do** mean by equality, we have to indicate what we **do not** mean by it.

Anarchists do **not** believe in "*equality of endowment*," which is not only non-existent but would be **very** undesirable if it could be brought about. Everyone is unique. Biologically determined human differences not only exist but are "*a cause for joy, not fear or regret.*" Why? Because "*life among clones would not be worth living, and a sane person will only rejoice that others have abilities that they do not share.*" [Noam Chomsky, **Marxism, Anarchism, and Alternative Futures**, p. 782]

That some people **seriously** suggest that anarchists means by "equality" that everyone should be **identical** is a sad reflection on the state of present-day intellectual culture and the corruption of words -- a corruption used to divert attention from an unjust and authoritarian system and side-track people into discussions of biology. "*The uniqueness of the self in no way contradicts the principle of equality,*" noted Erich Fromm, "*The thesis that men are born equal implies that they all share the same fundamental human qualities, that they share the same basic fate of human beings, that they all have the same inalienable claim on freedom and happiness. It furthermore means that their relationship is one of solidarity, not one of domination-submission. What the concept of equality does not mean is that all men are alike.*" [**The Fear of Freedom**, p. 228] Thus it would be fairer to say that anarchists seek equality **because** we recognise that everyone is different and, consequently, seek the full affirmation and development of that uniqueness.

Nor are anarchists in favour of so-called "*equality of outcome.*" We have **no** desire to live in a society where everyone gets the same goods, lives in the same kind of house, wears the same uniform, etc. Part of the reason for the anarchist revolt against capitalism and statism is that they standardise so much of life (see George Reitzer's **The McDonaldisation of Society** on why capitalism is driven towards standardisation and conformity). In the words of Alexander Berkman:

*"The spirit of authority, law, written and unwritten, tradition and custom force us into a common grove and make a man [or woman] a will-less automation without independence*

*or individuality. . . All of us are its victims, and only the exceptionally strong succeed in breaking its chains, and that only partly.*" [What is Anarchism?, p. 165]

Anarchists, therefore, have little to desire to make this "common grove" even deeper. Rather, we desire to destroy it and every social relationship and institution that creates it in the first place.

"Equality of outcome" can only be introduced and maintained by force, which would **not** be equality anyway, as some would have more power than others! "Equality of outcome" is particularly hated by anarchists, as we recognise that every individual has different needs, abilities, desires and interests. To make all consume the same would be tyranny. Obviously, if one person needs medical treatment and another does not, they do not receive an "equal" amount of medical care. The same is true of other human needs. As Alexander Berkman put it:

*"equality does not mean an equal amount but equal **opportunity**. . . Do not make the mistake of identifying equality in liberty with the forced equality of the convict camp. True anarchist equality implies freedom, not quantity. It does not mean that every one must eat, drink, or wear the same things, do the same work, or live in the same manner. Far from it: the very reverse in fact."*

*"Individual needs and tastes differ, as appetites differ. It is **equal opportunity to satisfy them that constitutes true equality.***

*"Far from levelling, such equality opens the door for the greatest possible variety of activity and development. For human character is diverse . . . Free opportunity of expressing and acting out your individuality means development of natural dissimilarities and variations."* [Op. Cit., pp. 164-5]

For anarchists, the "concepts" of "equality" as "equality of outcome" or "equality of endowment" are meaningless. However, in a hierarchical society, "equality of opportunity" and "equality of outcome" **are** related. Under capitalism, for example, the opportunities each generation face are dependent on the outcomes of the previous ones. This means that under capitalism "equality of opportunity" without a rough "equality of outcome" (in the sense of income and resources) becomes meaningless, as there is no real equality of opportunity for the off-spring of a millionaire and that of a road sweeper. Those who argue for "equality of opportunity" while ignoring the barriers created by previous outcomes indicate that they do not know what they are talking about -- opportunity in a hierarchical society depends not only on an open road but also upon an equal start. From this obvious fact springs the misconception that anarchists desire "equality of outcome" -- but this applies to a hierarchical system, in a free society this would not be the case (as we will see).

Equality, in anarchist theory, does not mean denying individual diversity or uniqueness. As Bakunin observes:

*"once equality has triumphed and is well established, will various individuals' abilities and their levels of energy cease to differ? Some will exist, perhaps not so many as now, but certainly some will always exist. It is proverbial that the same tree never bears two identical leaves, and this will probably be always be true. And it is even more truer with regard to human beings, who are much more complex than leaves. But this diversity is hardly an evil. On the contrary. . . it is a resource of the human race. Thanks to this diversity, humanity is a collective whole in which the one individual complements all the others and needs them. As a result, this infinite diversity of human individuals is the fundamental cause and the very basis of their solidarity. It is all-powerful argument for equality." ["All-Round Education", **The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 117-8]*

Equality for anarchists means **social** equality, or, to use Murray Bookchin's term, the *"equality of unequals"* (some like Malatesta used the term *"equality of conditions"* to express the same idea). By this he means that an anarchist society recognises the differences in ability and need of individuals but does not allow these differences to be turned into power. Individual differences, in other words, *"would be of no consequence, because inequality in fact is lost in the collectivity when it cannot cling to some legal fiction or institution."* [Michael Bakunin, **God and the State**, p. 53]

If hierarchical social relationships, and the forces that create them, are abolished in favour of ones that encourage participation and are based on the principle of "one person, one vote" then natural differences would not be able to be turned into hierarchical power. For example, without capitalist property rights there would not be means by which a minority could monopolise the means of life (machinery and land) and enrich themselves by the work of others via the wages system and usury (profits, rent and interest). Similarly, if workers manage their own work, there is no class of capitalists to grow rich off their labour. Thus Proudhon:

*"Now, what can be the origin of this inequality?"*

*"As we see it, . . . that origin is the realisation within society of this triple abstraction: capital, labour and talent."*

*"It is because society has divided itself into three categories of citizen corresponding to the three terms of the formula. . . that caste distinctions have always been arrived at, and one half of the human race enslaved to the other. . . socialism thus consists of reducing the aristocratic formula of capital-labour-talent into the simpler formula of labour!. . . in order to make every citizen simultaneously, equally and to the same extent capitalist, labourer and expert or artist." [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, pp. 57-8]*

Like all anarchists, Proudhon saw this integration of functions as the key to equality and freedom and proposed self-management as the means to achieve it. Thus self-management is the key to social equality. Social equality in the workplace, for example, means that everyone has an equal say in the policy decisions on how the workplace develops and changes. Anarchists are strong believers in the

maxim "that which touches all, is decided by all."

This does not mean, of course, that expertise will be ignored or that everyone will decide everything. As far as expertise goes, different people have different interests, talents, and abilities, so obviously they will want to study different things and do different kinds of work. It is also obvious that when people are ill they consult a doctor -- an expert -- who manages his or her own work rather than being directed by a committee. We are sorry to have to bring these points up, but once the topics of social equality and workers' self-management come up, some people start to talk nonsense. It is common sense that a hospital managed in a socially equal way will **not** involve non-medical staff voting on how doctors should perform an operation!

In fact, social equality and individual liberty are inseparable. Without the collective self-management of decisions that affect a group (equality) to complement the individual self-management of decisions that affect the individual (liberty), a free society is impossible. For without both, some will have power over others, making decisions **for** them (i.e. governing them), and thus some will be more free than others. Which implies, just to state the obvious, anarchists seek equality in **all** aspects of life, not just in terms of wealth. Anarchists *"demand for every person not just his [or her] entire measure of the wealth of society but also his [or her] portion of social power."* [Malatesta and Hamon, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 20] Thus self-management is needed to ensure both liberty **and** equality.

Social equality is required for individuals to both govern and express themselves, for the self-management it implies means *"people working in face-to-face relations with their fellows in order to bring the uniqueness of their own perspective to the business of solving common problems and achieving common goals."* [George Benello, **From the Ground Up**, p. 160] Thus equality allows the expression of individuality and so is a necessary base for individual liberty.

Section F.3 (["Why do 'anarcho'-capitalists place little or no value on equality?"](#)) discusses anarchist ideas on equality further. Noam Chomsky's essay *"Equality"* (contained in **The Chomsky Reader**) is a good summary of libertarian ideas on the subject.

## A.2.6 Why is solidarity important to anarchists?

Solidarity, or mutual aid, is a key idea of anarchism. It is the link between the individual and society, the means by which individuals can work together to meet their common interests in an environment that supports and nurtures both liberty and equality. For anarchists, mutual aid is a fundamental feature of human life, a source of both strength and happiness and a fundamental requirement for a fully human existence.

Erich Fromm, noted psychologist and socialist humanist, points out that the *"human desire to experience union with others is rooted in the specific conditions of existence that characterise the human species and is one of the strongest motivations of human behaviour."* [**To Be or To Have**, p.107]

Therefore anarchists consider the desire to form "unions" (to use Max Stirner's term) with other people to be a natural need. These unions, or associations, must be based on equality and individuality in order to be fully satisfying to those who join them -- i.e. they must be organised in an anarchist manner, i.e. voluntary, decentralised, and non-hierarchical.

Solidarity -- co-operation between individuals -- is necessary for life and is far from a denial of liberty. Solidarity, observed Errico Malatesta, *"is the only environment in which Man can express his personality and achieve his optimum development and enjoy the greatest possible wellbeing."* This *"coming together of individuals for the wellbeing of all, and of all for the wellbeing of each,"* results in *"the freedom of each not being limited by, but complemented -- indeed finding the necessary **raison d'etre** in -- the freedom of others."* [**Annarchy**, p. 29] In other words, solidarity and co-operation means treating each other as equals, refusing to treat others as means to an end and creating relationships which support freedom for all rather than a few dominating the many. Emma Goldman reiterated this theme, noting *"what wonderful results this unique force of man's individuality has achieved when strengthened by co-operation with other individualities . . . co-operation -- as opposed to internecine strife and struggle -- has worked for the survival and evolution of the species. . . . only mutual aid and voluntary co-operation . . . can create the basis for a free individual and associational life."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 118]

Solidarity means associating together as equals in order to satisfy our common interests and needs. Forms of association not based on solidarity (i.e. those based on inequality) will crush the individuality of those subjected to them. As Ret Marut points out, liberty needs solidarity, the recognition of common interests:

*"The most noble, pure and true love of mankind is the love of oneself. **I** want to be free! **I** hope to be happy! **I** want to appreciate all the beauties of the world. But my freedom is secured **only** when all other people around me are free. I can only be happy when all other people around me are happy. I can only be joyful when all the people I see and meet look at the world with joy-filled eyes. And **only** then can I eat my fill with pure enjoyment when I have the secure knowledge that other people, too, can eat their fill as I do. And for that reason it is a question of **my own contentment**, only of **my own self**, when I rebel against every danger which threatens my freedom and my happiness. . ."* [Ret Marut (a.k. a. B. Traven), **The BrickBurner** magazine quoted by Karl S. Guthke, **B. Traven: The life behind the legends**, pp. 133-4]

To practice solidarity means that we recognise, as in the slogan of **Industrial Workers of the World**, that *"an injury to one is an injury to all."* Solidarity, therefore, is the means to protect individuality and liberty and so is an expression of self-interest. As Alfie Kohn points out:

*"when we think about co-operation. . . we tend to associate the concept with fuzzy-minded idealism. . . This may result from confusing co-operation with altruism. . . Structural co-operation defies the usual egoism/altruism dichotomy. It sets things up so that by helping*

*you I am helping myself at the same time. Even if my motive initially may have been selfish, our fates now are linked. We sink or swim together. Co-operation is a shrewd and highly successful strategy - a pragmatic choice that gets things done at work and at school even more effectively than competition does. . . There is also good evidence that co-operation is more conducive to psychological health and to liking one another."* [**No Contest: The Case Against Competition**, p. 7]

And, within a hierarchical society, solidarity is important not only because of the satisfaction it gives us, but also because it is necessary to resist those in power. Malatesta's words are relevant here:

*"the oppressed masses who have never completely resigned themselves to oppress and poverty, and who . . . show themselves thirsting for justice, freedom and wellbeing, are beginning to understand that they will not be able to achieve their emancipation except by union and solidarity with all the oppressed, with the exploited everywhere in the world."* [**Anarchy**, p. 33]

By standing together, we can increase our strength and get what we want. Eventually, by organising into groups, we can start to manage our own collective affairs together and so replace the boss once and for all. "**Unions** will. . . multiply the individual's means and secure his assailed property." [Max Stirner, **The Ego and Its Own**, p. 258] By acting in solidarity, we can also replace the current system with one more to our liking: "*in union there is strength.*" [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 74]

Solidarity is thus the means by which we can obtain and ensure our own freedom. We agree to work together so that we will not have to work for **another**. By agreeing to share with each other we increase our options so that we may enjoy **more**, not less. Mutual aid is in my self-interest -- that is, I see that it is to my advantage to reach agreements with others based on mutual respect and social equality; for if I dominate someone, this means that the conditions exist which allow domination, and so in all probability I too will be dominated in turn.

As Max Stirner saw, solidarity is the means by which we ensure that our liberty is strengthened and defended from those in power who want to rule us: "*Do you yourself count for nothing then?*", he asks. "*Are you bound to let anyone do anything he wants to you? Defend yourself and no one will touch you. If millions of people are behind you, supporting you, then you are a formidable force and you will win without difficulty.*" [quoted in Luigi Galleani's **The End of Anarchism?**, p. 79 - different translation in **The Ego and Its Own**, p. 197]

Solidarity, therefore, is important to anarchists because it is the means by which liberty can be created and defended against power. Solidarity is strength and a product of our nature as social beings. However, solidarity should not be confused with "herdism," which implies passively following a leader. In order to be effective, solidarity must be created by free people, co-operating together as **equals**. The "big WE" is **not** solidarity, although the desire for "herdism" is a product of our need for solidarity and union. It is a "solidarity" corrupted by hierarchical society, in which people are conditioned to blindly



obey leaders.

## A.2.7 Why do anarchists argue for self-liberation?

Liberty, by its very nature, cannot be given. An individual cannot be freed by another, but must break his or her own chains through their own effort. Of course, self-effort can also be part of collective action, and in many cases it has to be in order to attain its ends. As Emma Goldman points out:

*"History tells us that every oppressed class [or group or individual] gained true liberation from its masters by its own efforts."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 167]

Anarchists have long argued that people can only free themselves by their own actions. The various methods anarchists suggest to aid this process will be discussed in section J (["What Do Anarchists Do?"](#)) and will not be discussed here. However, these methods all involve people organising themselves, setting their own agendas, and acting in ways that empower them and eliminate their dependence on leaders to do things for them. Anarchism is based on people *"acting for themselves"* (performing what anarchists call *"direct action"* -- see [section J.2](#) for details).

Direct action has an empowering and liberating effect on those involved in it. Self-activity is the means by which the creativity, initiative, imagination and critical thought of those subjected to authority can be developed. It is the means by which society can be changed. As Errico Malatesta pointed out:

*"Between man and his social environment there is a reciprocal action. Men make society what it is and society makes men what they are, and the result is therefore a kind of vicious circle. To transform society men [and women] must be changed, and to transform men, society must be changed . . . Fortunately existing society has not been created by the inspired will of a dominating class, which has succeeded in reducing all its subjects to passive and unconscious instruments of its interests. It is the result of a thousand internecine struggles, of a thousand human and natural factors . . ."*

*"From this the possibility of progress . . . We must take advantage of all the means, all the possibilities and the opportunities that the present environment allows us to act on our fellow men [and women] and to develop their consciences and their demands . . . to claim and to impose those major social transformations which are possible and which effectively serve to open the way to further advances later . . . We must seek to get all the people . . . to make demands, and impose itself and take for itself all the improvements and freedoms it desires as and when it reaches the state of wanting them, and the power to demand them . . . we must push the people to want always more and to increase its pressures [on the ruling elite], until it has achieved complete emancipation."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 188-9]

Society, while shaping all individuals, is also created by them, through their actions, thoughts, and ideals. Challenging institutions that limit one's freedom is mentally liberating, as it sets in motion the process of questioning authoritarian relationships in general. This process gives us insight into how society works, changing our ideas and creating new ideals. To quote Emma Goldman again: "*True emancipation begins. . . in woman's soul.*" And in a man's too, we might add. It is only here that we can "*begin [our] inner regeneration, [cutting] loose from the weight of prejudices, traditions and customs.*" [Op. Cit., p. 167] But this process must be self-directed, for as Max Stirner notes, "*the man who is set free is nothing but a freed man. . . a dog dragging a piece of chain with him.*" [The Ego and Its Own, p. 168] By changing the world, even in a small way, we change ourselves.

In an interview during the Spanish Revolution, the Spanish anarchist militant Durutti said, "*we have a new world in our hearts.*" Only self-activity and self-liberation allows us to create such a vision and gives us the confidence to try to actualise it in the real world.

Anarchists, however, do not think that self-liberation must wait for the future, after the "glorious revolution." The personal is political, and given the nature of society, how we act in the here and now will influence the future of our society and our lives. Therefore, even in pre-anarchist society anarchists try to create, as Bakunin puts it, "*not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself.*" We can do so by creating alternative social relationships and organisations, acting as free people in a non-free society. Only by our actions in the here and now can we lay the foundation for a free society. Moreover, this process of self-liberation goes on all the time:

*"Subordinates of all kinds exercise their capacity for critical self-reflection every day -- that is why masters are thwarted, frustrated and, sometimes, overthrown. But unless masters are overthrown, unless subordinates engage in political activity, no amount of critical reflection will end their subjection and bring them freedom."* [Carole Pateman, **The Sexual Contract**, p. 205]

Anarchists aim to encourage these tendencies in everyday life to reject, resist and thwart authority and bring them to their logical conclusion -- a society of free individuals, co-operating as equals in free, self-managed associations. Without this process of critical self-reflection, resistance and self-liberation a free society is impossible. Thus, for anarchists, anarchism comes from the natural resistance of subordinated people striving to act as free individuals within a hierarchical world. This process of resistance is called by many anarchists the "*class struggle*" (as it is working class people who are generally the most subordinated group within society) or, more generally, "*social struggle.*" It is this everyday resistance to authority (in all its forms) and the desire for freedom which is the key to the anarchist revolution. It is for this reason that "*anarchists emphasise over and over that the class struggle provides the only means for the workers [and other oppressed groups] to achieve control over their destiny.*" [Marie-Louise Berneri, **Neither East Nor West**, p. 32]

Revolution is a process, not an event, and every "*spontaneous revolutionary action*" usually results from and is based upon the patient work of many years of organisation and education by people with

"utopian" ideas. The process of "creating the new world in the shell of the old" (to use another **I.W.W.** expression), by building alternative institutions and relationships, is but one component of what must be a long tradition of revolutionary commitment and militancy.

As Malatesta made clear, *"to encourage popular organisations of all kinds is the logical consequence of our basic ideas, and should therefore be an integral part of our programme. . . anarchists do not want to emancipate the people; we want the people to emancipate themselves. . . , we want the new way of life to emerge from the body of the people and correspond to the state of their development and advance as they advance."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 90]

Unless a process of self-emancipation occurs, a free society is impossible. Only when individuals free themselves, both materially (by abolishing the state and capitalism) and intellectually (by freeing themselves of submissive attitudes towards authority), can a free society be possible. We should not forget that capitalist and state power, to a great extent, is power over the minds of those subject to them (backed up, of course, with sizeable force if the mental domination fails and people start rebelling and resisting). In effect, a spiritual power as the ideas of the ruling class dominate society and permeate the minds of the oppressed. As long as this holds, the working class will acquiesce to authority, oppression and exploitation as the normal condition of life. Minds submissive to the doctrines and positions of their masters cannot hope to win freedom, to revolt and fight. Thus the oppressed must overcome the mental domination of the existing system before they can throw off its yoke (and, anarchists argue, direct action is the means of doing both -- see sections [J.2](#) and [J.4](#)). Capitalism and statism must be beaten spiritually and theoretically before it is beaten materially (many anarchists call this mental liberation "**class consciousness**" -- see [section B.7.3](#)). And self-liberation through struggle against oppression is the only way this can be done. Thus anarchists encourage (to use Kropotkin's term) "**the spirit of revolt.**"

Self-liberation is a product of struggle, of self-organisation, solidarity and direct action. Direct action is the means of creating anarchists, free people, and so *"Anarchists have always advised taking an active part in those workers' organisations which carry on the **direct** struggle of Labour against Capital and its protector, -- the State."* This is because "[s]uch a struggle . . . better than any indirect means, permits the worker to obtain some temporary improvements in the present conditions of work, while it opens his [or her] eyes to the evil that is done by Capitalism and the State that supports it, and wakes up his [or her] thoughts concerning the possibility of organising consumption, production and exchange without the intervention of the capitalist and the state," that is, see the possibility of a free society. Kropotkin, like many anarchists, pointed to the Syndicalist and Trade Union movements as a means of developing libertarian ideas within existing society (although he, like most anarchists, did not limit anarchist activity exclusively to them). Indeed, any movement which *"permit[s] the working men [and women] to realise their solidarity and to feel the community of their interests . . . prepare[s] the way for these conceptions"* of communist-anarchism, i.e. the overcoming the spiritual domination of existing society within the minds of the oppressed. [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 83 and p. 85]

For anarchists, in the words of a Scottish Anarchist militant, the *"history of human progress [is] seen as the history of rebellion and disobedience, with the individual debased by subservience to authority in its*

*many forms and able to retain his/her dignity only through rebellion and disobedience.*" [Robert Lynn, **Not a Life Story, Just a Leaf from It**, p. 77] This is why anarchists stress self-liberation (and self-organisation, self-management and self-activity). Little wonder Bakunin considered "*rebellion*" as one of the "*three fundamental principles [which] constitute the essential conditions of all human development, collective or individual, in history.*" [**God and the State**, p. 12] This is simply because individuals and groups cannot be freed by others, only by themselves. Such rebellion (self-liberation) is the **only** means by which existing society becomes more libertarian and an anarchist society a possibility.

## **A.2.8 Is it possible to be an anarchist without opposing hierarchy?**

No. We have seen that anarchists abhor authoritarianism. But if one is an anti-authoritarian, one must oppose all hierarchical institutions, since they embody the principle of authority. For, as Emma Goldman argued, "*it is not only government in the sense of the state which is destructive of every individual value and quality. It is the whole complex authority and institutional domination which strangles life. It is the superstition, myth, pretence, evasions, and subservience which support authority and institutional domination.*" [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 435] This means that "*there is and will always be a need to discover and overcome structures of hierarchy, authority and domination and constraints on freedom: slavery, wage-slavery [i.e. capitalism], racism, sexism, authoritarian schools, etc.*" [Noam Chomsky, **Language and Politics**, p. 364]

Thus the consistent anarchist must oppose hierarchical relationships as well as the state. Whether economic, social or political, to be an anarchist means to oppose hierarchy. The argument for this (if anybody needs one) is as follows:

A hierarchy is a pyramidally-structured organisation composed of a series of grades, ranks, or offices of increasing power, prestige, and (usually) remuneration. Scholars who have investigated the hierarchical form have found that the two primary principles it embodies are domination and exploitation. For example, in his classic article "*What Do Bosses Do?*" (**Review of Radical Political Economy**, Vol. 6, No. 2), a study of the modern factory, Steven Marglin found that the main function of the corporate hierarchy is not greater productive efficiency (as capitalists claim), but greater control over workers, the purpose of such control being more effective exploitation.

Control in a hierarchy is maintained by coercion, that is, by the threat of negative sanctions of one kind or another: physical, economic, psychological, social, etc. Such control, including the repression of dissent and rebellion, therefore necessitates centralisation: a set of power relations in which the greatest control is exercised by the few at the top (particularly the head of the organisation), while those in the middle ranks have much less control and the many at the bottom have virtually none.

Since domination, coercion, and centralisation are essential features of authoritarianism, and as those features are embodied in hierarchies, all hierarchical institutions are authoritarian. Moreover, for

anarchists, any organisation marked by hierarchy, centralism and authoritarianism is state-like, or "statist." And as anarchists oppose both the state and authoritarian relations, anyone who does not seek to dismantle **all** forms of hierarchy cannot be called an anarchist. This applies to capitalist firms. As Noam Chomsky points out, the structure of the capitalist firm is extremely hierarchical, indeed fascist, in nature:

*"a fascist system. . . [is] absolutist - power goes from top down . . . the ideal state is top down control with the public essentially following orders.*

*"Let's take a look at a corporation. . . [I]f you look at what they are, power goes strictly top down, from the board of directors to managers to lower managers to ultimately the people on the shop floor, typing messages, and so on. There's no flow of power or planning from the bottom up. People can disrupt and make suggestions, but the same is true of a slave society. The structure of power is linear, from the top down." [Keeping the Rabble in Line, p. 237]*

David DeLeon indicates these similarities between the company and the state well when he writes:

*"Most factories are like military dictatorships. Those at the bottom are privates, the supervisors are sergeants, and on up through the hierarchy. The organisation can dictate everything from our clothing and hair style to how we spend a large portion of our lives, during work. It can compel overtime; it can require us to see a company doctor if we have a medical complaint; it can forbid us free time to engage in political activity; it can suppress freedom of speech, press and assembly -- it can use ID cards and armed security police, along with closed-circuit TVs to watch us; it can punish dissenters with 'disciplinary layoffs' (as GM calls them), or it can fire us. We are forced, by circumstances, to accept much of this, or join the millions of unemployed. . . In almost every job, we have only the 'right' to quit. Major decisions are made at the top and we are expected to obey, whether we work in an ivory tower or a mine shaft." ["For Democracy Where We Work: A rationale for social self-management", Reinventing Anarchy, Again, Howard J. Ehrlich (ed.), pp. 193-4]*

Thus the consistent anarchist must oppose hierarchy in all its forms, including the capitalist firm. Not to do so is to support **archy** -- which an anarchist, by definition, cannot do. In other words, for anarchists, "[p]romises to obey, contracts of (wage) slavery, agreements requiring the acceptance of a subordinate status, are all illegitimate because they do restrict and restrain individual autonomy." [Robert Graham, "The Anarchist Contract, Reinventing Anarchy, Again, Howard J. Ehrlich (ed.), p. 77] Hierarchy, therefore, is against the basic principles which drive anarchism. It denies what makes us human and "divest[s] the personality of its most integral traits; it denies the very notion that the individual is **competent** to deal not only with the management of his or her personal life but with its most important context: the **social** context." [Murray Bookchin, **The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 129]

Some argue that as long as an association is voluntary, whether it has an hierarchical structure is irrelevant. Anarchists disagree. This is for two reasons. Firstly, under capitalism workers are driven by economic necessity to sell their labour (and so liberty) to those who own the means of life. This process re-enforces the economic conditions workers face by creating *"massive disparities in wealth . . . [as] workers. . . sell their labour to the capitalist at a price which does not reflect its real value."* Therefore:

*"To portray the parties to an employment contract, for example, as free and equal to each other is to ignore the serious inequality of bargaining power which exists between the worker and the employer. To then go on to portray the relationship of subordination and exploitation which naturally results as the epitome of freedom is to make a mockery of both individual liberty and social justice."* [Robert Graham, **Op. Cit.**, p. 70]

It is for this reason that anarchists support collective action and organisation: it increases the bargaining power of working people and allows them to assert their autonomy (see [section J](#)).

Secondly, if we take the key element as being whether an association is voluntary or not we would have to argue that the current state system must be considered as "anarchy." In a modern democracy no one forces an individual to live in a specific state. We are free to leave and go somewhere else. By ignoring the hierarchical nature of an association, you can end up supporting organisations based upon the denial of freedom (including capitalist companies, the armed forces, states even) all because they are "voluntary." As Bob Black argues, *"[t]o demonise state authoritarianism while ignoring identical albeit contract-consecrated subservient arrangements in the large-scale corporations which control the world economy is fetishism at its worst."* [*The Libertarian as Conservative*, **The Abolition of Work and other essays**, p. 142] Anarchy is more than being free to pick a master.

Therefore opposition to hierarchy is a key anarchist position, otherwise you just become a "voluntary anarchist" - which is hardly anarchistic. For more on this see section A.2.14 ( [Why is voluntarism not enough?](#)).

Anarchists argue that organisations do not need to be hierarchical, they can be based upon co-operation between equals who manage their own affairs directly. In this way we can do without without hierarchical structures (i.e. the delegation of power in the hands of a few). Only when an association is self-managed by its members can it be considered truly anarchistic.

We are sorry to belabour this point, but some capitalist apologists, apparently wanting to appropriate the "anarchist" name because of its association with freedom, have recently claimed that one can be both a capitalist and an anarchist at the same time (as in so-called "anarcho" capitalism). It should now be clear that since capitalism is based on hierarchy (not to mention statism and exploitation), "anarcho"-capitalism is a contradiction in terms. (For more on this, see [Section F](#))

## A.2.9 What sort of society do anarchists want?

Anarchists desire a decentralised society, based on free association. We consider this form of society the best one for maximising the values we have outlined above -- liberty, equality and solidarity. Only by a rational decentralisation of power, both structurally and territorially, can individual liberty be fostered and encouraged. The delegation of power into the hands of a minority is an obvious denial of individual liberty and dignity. Rather than taking the management of their own affairs away from people and putting it in the hands of others, anarchists favour organisations which minimise authority, keeping power at the base, in the hands of those who are affected by any decisions reached.

Free association is the cornerstone of an anarchist society. Individuals must be free to join together as they see fit, for this is the basis of freedom and human dignity. However, any such free agreement must be based on decentralisation of power; otherwise it will be a sham (as in capitalism), as only equality provides the necessary social context for freedom to grow and development. Therefore anarchists support directly democratic collectives, based on "one person one vote" (for the rationale of direct democracy as the political counterpart of free agreement, see section A.2.11 -- [Why do most anarchists support direct democracy?](#)).

We should point out here that an anarchist society does not imply some sort of idyllic state of harmony within which everyone agrees. Far from it! As Luigi Galleani points out, "*[d]isagreements and friction will always exist. In fact they are an essential condition of unlimited progress. But once the bloody area of sheer animal competition - the struggle for food - has been eliminated, problems of disagreement could be solved without the slightest threat to the social order and individual liberty.*" [**The End of Anarchism?**, p. 28] Anarchism aims to "*rouse the spirit of initiative in individuals and in groups.*" These will "*create in their mutual relations a movement and a life based on the principles of free understanding*" and recognise that "*variety, conflict even, is life and that uniformity is death.*" [Peter Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, p. 143]

Therefore, an anarchist society will be based upon co-operative conflict as "*[c]onflict, per se, is not harmful. . . disagreements exist [and should not be hidden] . . . What makes disagreement destructive is not the fact of conflict itself but the addition of competition.*" Indeed, "*a rigid demand for agreement means that people will effectively be prevented from contributing their wisdom to a group effort.*" [Alfie Kohn, **No Contest: The Case Against Competition**, p. 156] It is for this reason that most anarchists reject consensus decision making in large groups (see section [A.2.12](#)).

So, in an anarchist society associations would be run by mass assemblies of all involved, based upon extensive discussion, debate and co-operative conflict between equals, with purely administrative tasks being handled by elected committees. These committees would be made up of mandated, recallable and temporary delegates who carry out their tasks under the watchful eyes of the assembly which elected them. Thus in an anarchist society, "*we'll look after our affairs ourselves and decide what to do about them. And when, to put our ideas into action, there is a need to put someone in charge of a project, we'll tell them to do [it] in such and such a way and no other . . . nothing would be done without our decision. So our delegates, instead of people being individuals whom we've given the right to order us about, would be people . . . [with] no authority, only the duty to carry out what everyone involved*

wanted." [Errico Malatesta, **Fra Contadini**, p. 34] If the delegates act against their mandate or try to extend their influence or work beyond that already decided by the assembly (i.e. if they start to make policy decisions), they can be instantly recalled and their decisions abolished. In this way, the organisation remains in the hands of the union of individuals who created it.

This self-management by the members of a group at the base and the power of recall are essential tenets of any anarchist organisation. The **key** difference between a statist or hierarchical system and an anarchist community is who wields power. In a parliamentary system, for example, people give power to a group of representatives to make decisions for them for a fixed period of time. Whether they carry out their promises is irrelevant as people cannot recall them till the next election. Power lies at the top and those at the base are expected to obey. Similarly, in the capitalist workplace, power is held by an unelected minority of bosses and managers at the top and the workers are expected to obey.

In an anarchist society this relationship is reversed. No one individual or group (elected or unelected) holds power in an anarchist community. Instead decisions are made using direct democratic principles and, when required, the community can elect or appoint delegates to carry out these decisions. There is a clear distinction between policy making (which lies with everyone who is affected) and the co-ordination and administration of any adopted policy (which is the job for delegates).

These egalitarian communities, founded by free agreement, also freely associate together in confederations. Such a free confederation would be run from the bottom up, with decisions following from the elemental assemblies upwards. The confederations would be run in the same manner as the collectives. There would be regular local regional, "national" and international conferences in which all important issues and problems affecting the collectives involved would be discussed. In addition, the fundamental, guiding principles and ideas of society would be debated and policy decisions made, put into practice, reviewed, and co-ordinated. The delegates would simply *"take their given mandates to the relative meetings and try to harmonise their various needs and desires. The deliberations would always be subject to the control and approval of those who delegated them"* and so *"there would be no danger than the interest of the people [would] be forgotten."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 36]

Action committees would be formed, if required, to co-ordinate and administer the decisions of the assemblies and their congresses, under strict control from below as discussed above. Delegates to such bodies would have a limited tenure and, like the delegates to the congresses, have a fixed mandate -- they are not able to make decisions on behalf of the people they are delegates for. In addition, like the delegates to conferences and congresses, they would be subject to instant recall by the assemblies and congresses from which they emerged in the first place. In this way any committees required to co-ordinate joint activities would be, to quote Malatesta's words, *"always under the direct control of the population"* and so express the *"decisions taken at popular assemblies."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 175 and p. 129]

Most importantly, the basic community assemblies can overturn any decisions reached by the conferences and withdraw from any confederation. Any compromises that are made by a delegate during



negotiations have to go back to a general assembly for ratification. Without that ratification any compromises that are made by a delegate are not binding on the community that has delegated a particular task to a particular individual or committee. In addition, they can call confederal conferences to discuss new developments and to inform action committees about changing wishes and to instruct them on what to do about any developments and ideas.

In other words, any delegates required within an anarchist organisation or society are **not** representatives (as they are in a democratic government). Kropotkin makes the difference clear:

*"The question of true delegation versus representation can be better understood if one imagines a hundred or two hundred men [and women], who meet each day in their work and share common concerns . . . who have discussed every aspect of the question that concerns them and have reached a decision. They then choose someone and send him [or her] to reach an agreement with other delegates of the same kind. . . The delegate is not authorised to do more than explain to other delegates the considerations that have led his [or her] colleagues to their conclusion. Not being able to impose anything, he [or she] will seek an understanding and will return with a simple proposition which his mandatories can accept or refuse. This is what happens when true delegation comes into being."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 132]

Unlike in a representative system, **power** is not delegated into the hands of the few. Rather, any delegate is simply a mouthpiece for the association that elected (or otherwise selected) them in the first place. All delegates and action committees would be mandated and subject to instant recall to ensure they express the wishes of the assemblies they came from rather than their own. In this way government is replaced by anarchy, a network of free associations and communities co-operating as equals based on a system of mandated delegates, instant recall, free agreement and free federation from the bottom up.

Only this system would ensure the *"free organisation of the people, an organisation from below upwards."* This *"free federation from below upward"* would start with the basic *"association"* and their federation *"first into a commune, then a federation of communes into regions, of regions into nations, and of nations into an international fraternal association."* [Michael Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 298] This network of anarchist communities would work on three levels. There would be *"independent Communes for the territorial organisation, and of federations of Trade Unions [i.e. workplace associations] for the organisation of men [and women] in accordance with their different functions. . . [and] free combines and societies . . . for the satisfaction of all possible and imaginable needs, economic, sanitary, and educational; for mutual protection, for the propaganda of ideas, for arts, for amusement, and so on."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Evolution and Environment**, p. 79] All would be based on self-management, free association, free federation and self-organisation from the bottom up.

By organising in this manner, hierarchy is abolished in all aspects of life, because the people at the base of the organisation are in control, **not** their delegates. Only this form of organisation can replace government (the initiative and empowerment of the few) with anarchy (the initiative and empowerment

of all). This form of organisation would exist in all activities which required group work and the co-ordination of many people. It would be, as Bakunin said, the means "*to integrate individuals into structures which they could understand and control.*" [quoted by Cornelius Castoriadis, **Political and Social Writings**, vol. 2, p. 97] For individual initiatives, the individual involved would manage them.

As can be seen, anarchists wish to create a society based upon structures that ensure that no individual or group is able to wield power over others. Free agreement, confederation and the power of recall, fixed mandates and limited tenure are mechanisms by which power is removed from the hands of governments and placed in the hands of those directly affected by the decisions.

For a fuller discussion on what an anarchist society would look like see [section I](#). Anarchy, however, is not some distant goal but rather an aspect of current struggles against oppression and exploitation. Means and ends are linked, with direct action generating mass participatory organisations and preparing people to directly manage their own personal and collective interests. This is because anarchists, as we discuss in [section I.2.3](#), see the framework of a free society being based on the organisations created by the oppressed in their struggle against capitalism in the here and now. In this sense, collective struggle creates the organisations as well as the individual attitudes anarchism needs to work. The struggle against oppression is the school of anarchy. It teaches us not only how to be anarchists but also gives us a glimpse of what an anarchist society would be like, what its initial organisational framework could be and the experience of managing our own activities which is required for such a society to work. As such, anarchists try to create the kind of world we want in our current struggles and do not think our ideas are only applicable "after the revolution." Indeed, by applying our principles today we bring anarchy that much nearer.

## A.2.10 What will abolishing hierarchy mean and achieve?

The creation of a new society based upon libertarian organisations will have an incalculable effect on everyday life. The empowerment of millions of people will transform society in ways we can only guess at now.

However, many consider these forms of organisation as impractical and doomed to failure. To those who say that such confederal, non-authoritarian organisations would produce confusion and disunity, anarchists maintain that the statist, centralised and hierarchical form of organisation produces indifference instead of involvement, heartlessness instead of solidarity, uniformity instead of unity, and privileged elites instead of equality. More importantly, such organisations destroy individual initiative and crush independent action and critical thinking. (For more on hierarchy, see section B.1 -- "[Why are anarchists against authority and hierarchy?](#)").

That libertarian organisation can work and is based upon (and promotes) liberty was demonstrated in the Spanish Anarchist movement. Fenner Brockway, Secretary of the British Independent Labour Party, when visiting Barcelona during the 1936 revolution, noted that "*the great solidarity that existed among*

*the Anarchists was due to each individual relying on his [sic] own strength and not depending upon leadership. . . . The organisations must, to be successful, be combined with free-thinking people; not a mass, but free individuals" [quoted by Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-syndicalism**, p. 67f]*

As sufficiently indicated already, hierarchical, centralised structures restrict freedom. As Proudhon noted: *"the centralist system is all very well as regards size, simplicity and construction: it lacks but one thing -- the individual no longer belongs to himself in such a system, he cannot feel his worth, his life, and no account is taken of him at all."* [quoted in **Paths in Utopia**, Martin Buber, p. 33]

The effects of hierarchy can be seen all around us. It does not work. Hierarchy and authority exist everywhere, in the workplace, at home, in the street. As Bob Black puts it, *"[i]f you spend most of your waking life taking orders or kissing ass, if you get habituated to hierarchy, you will become passive-aggressive, sado-masochistic, servile and stupefied, and you will carry that load into every aspect of the balance of your life."* [*The Libertarian as Conservative*, **The Abolition of Work and other essays**, pp. 147-8]

This means that the end of hierarchy will mean a **massive** transformation in everyday life. It will involve the creation of individual-centred organisations within which all can exercise, and so develop, their abilities to the fullest. By involving themselves and participating in the decisions that affect them, their workplace, their community and society, they can ensure the full development of their individual capacities.

With the free participation of all in social life, we would quickly see the end of inequality and injustice. Rather than people existing to make ends meet and being used to increase the wealth and power of the few as under capitalism, the end of hierarchy would see (to quote Kropotkin) *"the well-being of all"* and it is *"high time for the worker to assert his [or her] right to the common inheritance, and to enter into possession of it."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 35 and p. 44] For only taking possession of the means of life (workplaces, housing, the land, etc.) can ensure *"liberty and justice, for liberty and justice are not decreed but are the result of economic independence. They spring from the fact that the individual is able to live without depending on a master, and to enjoy . . . the product of his [or her] toil."* [Ricardo Flores Magon, **Land and Liberty**, p. 62] Therefore liberty requires the abolition of capitalist private property rights in favour of *"use rights."* (see [section B.3](#) for more details). Ironically, the *"abolition of property will free the people from homelessness and nonpossession."* [Max Baginski, *"Without Government,"* **Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth**, p. 11] Thus anarchism promises *"both requisites of happiness -- liberty and wealth."* In anarchy, *"mankind will live in freedom and in comfort."* [Benjamin Tucker, **Why I am an Anarchist**, p. 135 and p. 136]

Only self-determination and free agreement on every level of society can develop the responsibility, initiative, intellect and solidarity of individuals and society as a whole. Only anarchist organisation allows the vast talent which exists within humanity to be accessed and used, enriching society by the very process of enriching and developing the individual. Only by involving everyone in the process of thinking, planning, co-ordinating and implementing the decisions that affect them can freedom blossom

and individuality be fully developed and protected. Anarchy will release the creativity and talent of the mass of people enslaved by hierarchy.

Anarchy will even be of benefit for those who are said to benefit from capitalism and its authority relations. Anarchists *"maintain that both rulers and ruled are spoiled by authority; both exploiters and exploited are spoiled by exploitation."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Act for Yourselves**, p. 83] This is because *"[i]n any hierarchical relationship the dominator as well as the submissive pays his dues. The price paid for the 'glory of command' is indeed heavy. Every tyrant resents his duties. He is relegated to drag the dead weight of the dormant creative potential of the submissive all along the road of his hierarchical excursion."* [For Ourselves, **The Right to Be Greedy**, Thesis 95]

## A.2.11 Why are most anarchists in favour of direct democracy?

For most anarchists, direct democratic voting on policy decisions within free associations is the political counterpart of free agreement (this is also known as *"self-management"*). The reason is that *"many forms of domination can be carried out in a 'free.' non-coercive, contractual manner. . . and it is naive. . . to think that mere opposition to political control will in itself lead to an end of oppression."* [John P. Clark, **Max Stirner's Egoism**, p. 93] Thus the relationships we create **within** an organisation is as important in determining its libertarian nature as its voluntary nature (see [section A.2.14](#) for more discussion).

It is obvious that individuals must work together in order to lead a fully human life. And so, *"[h]aving to join with others humans"* the individual has three options: *"he [or she] must submit to the will of others (be enslaved) or subject others to his will (be in authority) or live with others in fraternal agreement in the interests of the greatest good of all (be an associate). Nobody can escape from this necessity."* [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 85]

Anarchists obviously pick the last option, association, as the only means by which individuals can work together as free and equal human beings, respecting the uniqueness and liberty of one another. Only within direct democracy can individuals express themselves, practice critical thought and self-government, so developing their intellectual and ethical capacities to the full. In terms of increasing an individual's freedom and their intellectual, ethical and social faculties, it is far better to be sometimes in a minority than be subject to the will of a boss all the time. So what is the theory behind anarchist direct democracy?

As Bertrand Russell noted, the anarchist *"does not wish to abolish government in the sense of collective decisions: what he does wish to abolish is the system by which a decision is enforced upon those who oppose it."* [**Roads to Freedom**, p. 85] Anarchists see self-management as the means to achieve this. Once an individual joins a community or workplace, he or she becomes a "citizen" (for want of a better word) of that association. The association is organised around an assembly of all its members (in the case of large workplaces and towns, this may be a functional sub-group such as a specific office or neighbourhood). In this assembly, in concert with others, the content of his or her political obligations

are defined. In acting within the association, people must exercise critical judgement and choice, i.e. manage their own activity. Rather than promising to obey (as in hierarchical organisations like the state or capitalist firm), individuals participate in making their own collective decisions, their own commitments to their fellows. This means that political obligation is not owed to a separate entity above the group or society, such as the state or company, but to one's fellow "citizens."

Although the assembled people collectively legislate the rules governing their association, and are bound by them as individuals, they are also superior to them in the sense that these rules can always be modified or repealed. Collectively, the associated "citizens" constitute a political "authority", but as this "authority" is based on horizontal relationships between themselves rather than vertical ones between themselves and an elite, the "authority" is non-hierarchical ("rational" or "natural," see section B.1 - ["Why are anarchists against authority and hierarchy?"](#) - for more on this). Thus Proudhon:

*"In place of laws, we will put contracts [i.e. free agreement]. - No more laws voted by a majority, nor even unanimously; each citizen, each town, each industrial union, makes its own laws."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, pp. 245-6]

Such a system does not mean, of course, that everyone participates in every decision needed, no matter how trivial. While any decision can be put to the assembly (if the assembly so decides, perhaps prompted by some of its members), in practice certain activities (and so purely functional decisions) will be handled by the association's elected administration. This is because, to quote a Spanish anarchist activist, *"a collectivity as such cannot write a letter or add up a list of figures or do hundreds of chores which only an individual can perform."* Thus the need *"to **organise the administration.**"* Supposing an association is *"organised without any directive council or any hierarchical offices"* which *"meets in general assembly once a week or more often, when it settles all matters needful for its progress"* it still *"nominates a commission with **strictly administrative functions.**"* However, the assembly *"prescribes a definite line of conduct for this commission or gives it an **imperative mandate**"* and so *"would be **perfectly anarchist.**"* As it *"follows that **delegating** these tasks to qualified individuals, who are **instructed in advance how to proceed**, . . . does not mean an abdication of that collectivity's own liberty."* [Jose Lluas Pujols, quoted by Max Nettlau, **A Short History of Anarchism**, p. 187] This, it should be noted, follows Proudhon's ideas that within the workers' associations *"all positions are elective, and the by-laws subject to the approval of the members."* [Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 222]

Instead of capitalist or statist hierarchy, self-management (i.e. direct democracy) would be the guiding principle of the freely joined associations that make up a free society. This would apply to the federations of associations an anarchist society would need to function. *"All the commissions or delegations nominated in an anarchist society,"* correctly argued Jose Lluas Pujols, *"must be subject to replacement and recall at any time by the permanent suffrage of the section or sections that elected them."* Combined with the *"imperative mandate"* and *"purely administrative functions,"* this *"make[s] it thereby impossible for anyone to arrogate to himself [or herself] a scintilla of authority."* [quoted by Max Nettlau, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 188-9] Again, Pujols follows Proudhon who demanded twenty years previously the *"implementation of the binding mandate"* to ensure the people do not *"adjure their*

*sovereignty.*" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 63]

By means of a federalism based on mandates and elections, anarchists ensure that decisions flow from the bottom-up. By making our own decisions, by looking after our joint interests ourselves, we exclude others ruling over us. Self-management, for anarchists, is essential to ensure freedom within the organisations so needed for any decent human existence.

Of course it could be argued that if you are in a minority, you are governed by others ("*Democratic rule is still rule*" [L. Susan Brown, **The Politics of Individualism**, p. 53]). Now, the concept of direct democracy as we have described it is not necessarily tied to the concept of majority rule. If someone finds themselves in a minority on a particular vote, he or she is confronted with the choice of either consenting or refusing to recognise it as binding. To deny the minority the opportunity to exercise its judgement and choice is to infringe its autonomy and to impose obligation upon it which it has not freely accepted. The coercive imposition of the majority will is contrary to the ideal of self-assumed obligation, and so is contrary to direct democracy and free association. Therefore, far from being a denial of freedom, direct democracy within the context of free association and self-assumed obligation is the only means by which liberty can be nurtured ("*Individual autonomy limited by the obligation to hold given promises.*" [Malatesta, quoted by Max Nettlau, **Errico Malatesta: The Biography of an Anarchist**]). Needless to say, a minority, if it remains in the association, can argue its case and try to convince the majority of the error of its ways.

And we must point out here that anarchist support for direct democracy does not suggest we think that the majority is always right. Far from it! The case for democratic participation is not that the majority is always right, but that no minority can be trusted not to prefer its own advantage to the good of the whole. History proves what common-sense predicts, namely that anyone with dictatorial powers (by they a head of state, a boss, a husband, whatever) will use their power to enrich and empower themselves at the expense of those subject to their decisions.

Anarchists recognise that majorities can and do make mistakes and that is why our theories on association place great importance on minority rights. This can be seen from our theory of self-assumed obligation, which bases itself on the right of minorities to protest against majority decisions and makes dissent a key factor in decision making. Thus Carole Pateman:

*"If the majority have acted in bad faith. . . [then the] minority will have to take political action, including politically disobedient action if appropriate, to defend their citizenship and independence, and the political association itself. . . Political disobedience is merely one possible expression of the active citizenship on which a self-managing democracy is based. . . . The social practice of promising involves the right to refuse or change commitments; similarly, the practice of self-assumed political obligation is meaningless without the practical recognition of the right of minorities to refuse or withdraw consent, or where necessary, to disobey."* [The Problem of Political Obligation, p. 162]

Moving beyond relationships within associations, we must highlight how different associations work together. As would be imagined, the links between associations follow the same outlines as for the associations themselves. Instead of individuals joining an association, we have associations joining confederations. The links between associations in the confederation are of the same horizontal and voluntary nature as within associations, with the same rights of "voice and exit" for members and the same rights for minorities. In this way society becomes an association of associations, a community of communities, a commune of communes, based upon maximising individual freedom by maximising participation and self-management.

The workings of such a confederation are outlined in section A.2.9 ([What sort of society do anarchists want?](#)) and discussed in greater detail in section I ([What would an anarchist society look like?](#)).

This system of direct democracy fits nicely into anarchist theory. Malatesta speaks for all anarchists when he argued that *"anarchists deny the right of the majority to govern human society in general."* As can be seen, the majority has no right to enforce itself on a minority -- the minority can leave the association at any time and so, to use Malatesta's words, do not have to *"submit to the decisions of the majority before they have even heard what these might be."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 100 and p. 101] Hence, direct democracy within voluntary association does not create "majority rule" nor assume that the minority must submit to the majority no matter what. In effect, anarchist supporters of direct democracy argue that it fits Malatesta's argument that:

*"Certainly anarchists recognise that where life is lived in common it is often necessary for the minority to come to accept the opinion of the majority. When there is an obvious need or usefulness in doing something and, to do it requires the agreement of all, the few should feel the need to adapt to the wishes of the many . . . But such adaptation on the one hand by one group must be on the other be reciprocal, voluntary and must stem from an awareness of need and of goodwill to prevent the running of social affairs from being paralysed by obstinacy. It cannot be imposed as a principle and statutory norm. . ."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 100]

As the minority has the right to secede from the association as well as having extensive rights of action, protest and appeal, majority rule is not imposed as a principle. Rather, it is purely a decision making tool which allows minority dissent and opinion to be expressed (and acted upon) while ensuring that no minority forces its will on the majority. In other words, majority decisions are not binding on the minority. After all, as Malatesta argued:

*"one cannot expect, or even wish, that someone who is firmly convinced that the course taken by the majority leads to disaster, should sacrifice his [or her] own convictions and passively look on, or even worse, should support a policy he [or she] considers wrong."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 132]

Even the Individual Anarchist Lysander Spooner acknowledged that direct democracy has its uses when

he noted that "[a]ll, or nearly all, voluntary associations give a majority, or some other portion of the members less than the whole, the right to use some **limited** discretion as to the **means** to be used to accomplish the ends in view." However, only the unanimous decision of a jury (which would "judge the law, and the justice of the law") could determine individual rights as this "tribunal fairly represent[s] the whole people" as "no law can rightfully be enforced by the association in its corporate capacity, against the goods, rights, or person of any individual, except it be such as **all** members of the association agree that it may enforce" (his support of juries results from Spooner acknowledging that it "would be impossible in practice" for **all** members of an association to agree) [**Trial by Jury**, p. 130-1f, p. 134, p. 214, p. 152 and p. 132]

Thus direct democracy and individual/minority rights need not clash. In practice, we can imagine direct democracy would be used to make most decisions within most associations (perhaps with super-majorities required for fundamental decisions) plus some combination of a jury system and minority protest/direct action and evaluate/protect minority claims/rights in an anarchist society. The actual forms of freedom can only be created through practical experience by the people directly involved.

Lastly, we must stress that anarchist support for direct democracy does not mean that this solution is to be favoured in all circumstances. For example, many small associations may favour consensus decision making (see the [next section](#) on consensus and why most anarchists do not think that it is a viable alternative to direct democracy). However, most anarchists think that direct democracy within free association is the best (and most realistic) form of organisation which is consistent with anarchist principles of individual freedom, dignity and equality.

## A.2.12 Is consensus an alternative to direct democracy?

The few anarchists who reject direct democracy within free associations generally support consensus in decision making. Consensus is based upon everyone on a group agreeing to a decision before it can be put into action. Thus, it is argued, consensus stops the majority ruling the minority and is more consistent with anarchist principles.

Consensus, although the "best" option in decision making, as all agree, has its problems. As Murray Bookchin points out in describing his experience of consensus, it can have authoritarian implications:

*"In order. . . to create full consensus on a decision, minority dissenters were often subtly urged or psychologically coerced to decline to vote on a troubling issue, inasmuch as their dissent would essentially amount to a one-person veto. This practice, called 'standing aside' in American consensus processes, all too often involved intimidation of the dissenters, to the point that they completely withdrew from the decision-making process, rather than make an honourable and continuing expression of their dissent by voting, even as a minority, in accordance with their views. Having withdrawn, they ceased to be political beings--so that a 'decision' could be made. . . . 'consensus' was ultimately achieved only after dissenting members nullified themselves as participants in the process.*



*"On a more theoretical level, consensus silenced that most vital aspect of all dialogue, **dissensus**. The ongoing dissent, the passionate dialogue that still persists even after a minority accedes temporarily to a majority decision,. . . [can be] replaced. . . by dull monologues -- and the uncontroverted and deadening tone of consensus. In majority decision-making, the defeated minority can resolve to overturn a decision on which they have been defeated -- they are free to openly and persistently articulate reasoned and potentially persuasive disagreements. Consensus, for its part, honours no minorities, but mutes them in favour of the metaphysical 'one' of the 'consensus' group." ["Communalism: The Democratic Dimension of Anarchism", **Democracy and Nature**, no. 8, p. 8]*

Bookchin does not *"deny that consensus may be an appropriate form of decision-making in small groups of people who are thoroughly familiar with one another."* But he notes that, in practical terms, his own experience has shown him that *"when larger groups try to make decisions by consensus, it usually obliges them to arrive at the lowest common intellectual denominator in their decision-making: the least controversial or even the most mediocre decision that a sizeable assembly of people can attain is adopted-- precisely because everyone must agree with it or else withdraw from voting on that issue"* [Op. Cit., p.7]

Therefore, due to its potentially authoritarian nature, most anarchists disagree that consensus is the political aspect of free association. While it is advantageous to try to reach consensus, it is usually impractical to do so -- especially in large groups -- regardless of its other, negative effects. Often it demeans a free society or association by tending to subvert individuality in the name of community and dissent in the name of solidarity. Neither true community nor solidarity are fostered when the individual's development and self-expression are aborted by public disapproval and pressure. Since individuals are all unique, they will have unique viewpoints which they should be encouraged to express, as society evolves and is enriched by the actions and ideas of individuals.

In other words, anarchist supporters of direct democracy stress the *"creative role of dissent"* which, they fear, *"tends to fade away in the gray uniformity required by consensus."* [Op. Cit., p. 8]

We must stress that anarchists are **not** in favour of a mechanical decision making process in which the majority just vote the minority away and ignore them. Far from it! Anarchists who support direct democracy see it as a dynamic debating process in which majority and minority listen to and respect each other as far possible and create a decision which all can live with (if possible). They see the process of participation within directly democratic associations as the means of creating common interests, as a process which will encourage diversity, individual and minority expression and reduce any tendency for majorities to marginalise or oppress minorities by ensuring discussion and debate occurs on important issues.

## **A.2.13 Are anarchists individualists or collectivists?**

The short answer is: neither. This can be seen from the fact that liberal scholars denounce anarchists like Bakunin for being "collectivists" while Marxists attack Bakunin and anarchists in general for being "individualists."

This is hardly surprising, as anarchists reject both ideologies as nonsense. Whether they like it or not, non-anarchist individualists and collectivists are two sides of the same capitalist coin. This can best be shown by considering modern capitalism, in which "individualist" and "collectivist" tendencies continually interact, often with the political and economic structure swinging from one pole to the other. Capitalist collectivism and individualism are both one-sided aspects of human existence, and like all manifestations of imbalance, deeply flawed.

For anarchists, the idea that individuals should sacrifice themselves for the "group" or "greater good" is nonsensical. Groups are made up of individuals, and if people think only of what's best for the group, the group will be a lifeless shell. It is only the dynamics of human interaction within groups which give them life. "Groups" cannot think, only individuals can. This fact, ironically, leads authoritarian "collectivists" to a most particular kind of "individualism," namely the *"cult of the personality"* and leader worship. This is to be expected, since such collectivism lumps individuals into abstract groups, denies their individuality, and ends up with the need for someone with enough individuality to make decisions -- a problem that is "solved" by the leader principle. Stalinism and Nazism are excellent examples of this phenomenon.

Therefore, anarchists recognise that individuals are the basic unit of society and that only individuals have interests and feelings. This means they oppose "collectivism" and the glorification of the group. In anarchist theory the group exists only to aid and develop the individuals involved in them. This is why we place so much stress on groups structured in a libertarian manner -- only a libertarian organisation allows the individuals within a group to fully express themselves, manage their own interests directly and to create social relationships which encourage individuality and individual freedom. So while society and the groups they join shapes the individual, the individual is the true basis of society. Hence Malatesta:

*"Much has been said about the respective roles of individual initiative and social action in the life and progress of human societies . . . [E]verything is maintained and kept going in the human world thanks to individual initiative . . . The real being is man, the individual. Society or the collectivity - and the **State** or government which claims to represent it - if it is not a hollow abstraction, must be made up of individuals. And it is in the organism of every individual that all thoughts and human actions inevitably have their origin, and from being individual they become collective thoughts and acts when they are or become accepted by many individuals. Social action, therefore, is neither the negation nor the complement of individual initiatives, but is the resultant of initiatives, thoughts and actions of all individuals who make up society . . . [T]he question is not really changing the relationship between society and the individual . . . [I]t is a question of preventing some individuals from oppressing others; of giving all individuals the same rights and the same means of action; and of replacing the initiative to the few [which Malatesta defines*

*as a key aspect of government/hierarchy], which inevitably results in the oppression of everyone else . . . " [Anarchy, pp. 38-38]*

These considerations do not mean that "individualism" finds favour with anarchists. As Emma Goldman pointed out, *"'rugged individualism'. . . is only a masked attempt to repress and defeat the individual and his individuality. So-called Individualism is the social and economic laissez-faire: the exploitation of the masses by the [ruling] classes by means of legal trickery, spiritual debasement and systematic indoctrination of the servile spirit . . . That corrupt and perverse 'individualism' is the straitjacket of individuality . . . [It] has inevitably resulted in the greatest modern slavery, the crassest class distinctions driving millions to the breadline. 'Rugged individualism' has meant all the 'individualism' for the masters, while the people are regimented into a slave caste to serve a handful of self-seeking 'supermen.'"* [Red Emma Speaks, p. 112]

While groups cannot think, individuals cannot live or discuss by themselves. Groups and associations are an essential aspect of individual life. Indeed, as groups generate social relationships by their very nature, they help **shape** individuals. In other words, groups structured in an authoritarian way will have a negative impact on the freedom and individuality of those within them. However, due to the abstract nature of their "individualism," capitalist individualists fail to see any difference between groups structured in a libertarian manner rather than in an authoritarian one -- they are both "groups". Because of their one-sided perspective on this issue, "individualists" ironically end up supporting some of the most "collectivist" institutions in existence -- capitalist companies -- and, moreover, always find a need for the state despite their frequent denunciations of it. These contradictions stem from capitalist individualism's dependence on individual contracts in an unequal society, i.e. **abstract** individualism.

In contrast, anarchists stress **social** "individualism" (another, perhaps better, term for this concept could be *"communal individuality"*). Anarchism *"insists that the centre of gravity in society is the individual -- that he [sic] must think for himself, act freely, and live fully. . . . If he is to develop freely and fully, he must be relieved from the interference and oppression of others. . . . [T]his has nothing in common with. . . 'rugged individualism.'* Such predatory individualism is really flabby, not rugged. At the least danger to its safety, it runs to cover of the state and wails for protection. . . . Their 'rugged individualism' is simply one of the many pretences the ruling class makes to mask unbridled business and political extortion." [Emma Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 442-3]

Anarchism rejects the **abstract** individualism of capitalism, with its ideas of "absolute" freedom of the individual which is constrained by others. This theory ignores the social context in which freedom exists and grows. *"The freedom we want,"* Malatesta argued, *"for ourselves and for others, is not an absolute metaphysical, abstract freedom which in practice is inevitably translated into the oppression of the weak; but it is a real freedom, possible freedom, which is the conscious community of interests, voluntary solidarity."* [Anarchy, p. 43]

A society based on abstract individualism results in an inequality of power between the contracting individuals and so entails the need for an authority based on laws above them and organised coercion to

enforce the contracts between them. This consequence is evident from capitalism and, most notably, in the "social contract" theory of how the state developed. In this theory it is assumed that individuals are "free" when they are isolated from each other, as they allegedly were originally in the "state of nature." Once they join society, they supposedly create a "contract" and a state to administer it. However, besides being a fantasy with no basis in reality (human beings have **always** been social animals), this "theory" is actually a justification for the state's having extensive powers over society; and this in turn is a justification of the capitalist system, which requires a strong state. It also mimics the results of the capitalist economic relations upon which this theory is built. Within capitalism, individuals "freely" contract together, but in practice the owner rules the worker for as long as the contract is in place. (See sections [A.2.14](#) and [B.4](#) for further details).

Thus anarchists reject capitalist "individualism" as being, to quote Kropotkin, *"a narrow and selfish individualism"* which, moreover, is *"a foolish egoism which belittles the individual"* and is *"not individualism at all. It will not lead to what was established as a goal; that is the complete broad and most perfectly attainable development of individuality."* The hierarchy of capitalism results in *"the impoverishment of individuality"* rather than its development. To this anarchists contrast *"the individuality which attains the greatest individual development possible through the highest communist sociability in what concerns both its primordial needs and its relationships with others in general."* [**Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution**, p. 295, p. 296 and p. 297] For anarchists, our freedom is enriched by those around us when we work with them as equals and not as master and servant.

In practice, both individualism and collectivism lead to a denial of both individual liberty and group autonomy and dynamics. In addition, each implies the other, with collectivism leading to a particular form of individualism and individualism leading to a particular form of collectivism.

Collectivism, with its implicit suppression of the individual, ultimately impoverishes the community, as groups are only given life by the individuals who comprise them. Individualism, with its explicit suppression of community (i.e. the people with whom you live), ultimately impoverishes the individual, since individuals do not exist apart from society but can only exist within it. In addition, individualism ends up denying the "select few" the insights and abilities of the individuals who make up the rest of society, and so is a source of self-denial. This is Individualism's fatal flaw (and contradiction), namely *"the impossibility for the individual to attain a really full development in the conditions of oppression of the mass by the 'beautiful aristocracies'. His [or her] development would remain uni-lateral."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, p. 293]

True liberty and community exist elsewhere.

## A.2.14 Why is voluntarism not enough?

Voluntarism means that association should be voluntary in order to maximise liberty. Anarchists are, obviously, voluntarists, thinking that only in free association, created by free agreement, can individuals

develop, grow, and express their liberty. However, it is evident that under capitalism voluntarism is not enough in itself to maximise liberty.

Voluntarism implies promising (i.e. the freedom to make agreements), and promising implies that individuals are capable of independent judgement and rational deliberation. In addition, it presupposes that they can evaluate and change their actions and relationships. Contracts under capitalism, however, contradict these implications of voluntarism. For, while technically "voluntary" (though as we show in [section B.4](#), this is not really the case), capitalist contracts result in a denial of liberty. This is because the social relationship of wage-labour involves promising to obey in return for payment. And as Carole Pateman points out, *"to promise to obey is to deny or to limit, to a greater or lesser degree, individuals' freedom and equality and their ability to exercise these capacities [of independent judgement and rational deliberation]. To promise to obey is to state, that in certain areas, the person making the promise is no longer free to exercise her capacities and decide upon her own actions, and is no longer equal, but subordinate."* [**The Problem of Political Obligation**, p. 19] This results in those obeying no longer making their own decisions. Thus the rationale for voluntarism (i.e. that individuals are capable of thinking for themselves and must be allowed to express their individuality and make their own decisions) is violated in a hierarchical relationship as some are in charge and the many obey (see also [section A.2.8](#)). Thus any voluntarism which generates relationships of subordination is, by its very nature, incomplete and violates its own justification.

This can be seen from capitalist society, in which workers sell their freedom to a boss in order to live. In effect, under capitalism you are only free to the extent that you can choose whom you will obey! Freedom, however, must mean more than the right to change masters. Voluntary servitude is still servitude. For if, as Rousseau argued, sovereignty, *"for the same reason as makes it inalienable, cannot be represented"* neither can it be sold nor temporarily nullified by a hiring contract. Rousseau famously argued that the *"people of England regards itself as free; but it is grossly mistaken; it is free only during the election of members of parliament. As soon as they are elected, slavery overtakes it, and it is nothing."* [**The Social Contract and Discourses**, p. 266] Anarchists expand on this analysis. To paraphrase Rousseau:

Under capitalism the worker regards herself as free; but she is grossly mistaken; she is free only when she signs her contract with her boss. As soon as it is signed, slavery overtakes her and she is nothing but an order taker.

To see why, to see the injustice, we need only quote Rousseau:

*"That a rich and powerful man, having acquired immense possessions in land, should impose laws on those who want to establish themselves there, and that he should only allow them to do so on condition that they accept his supreme authority and obey all his wishes; that, I can still conceive . . . Would not this tyrannical act contain a double usurpation: that on the ownership of the land and that on the liberty of the inhabitants?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 316]

Hence Proudhon's comment that "*Man may be made by property a slave or a despot by turns.*" [**What is Property?**, p. 371] Little wonder we discover Bakunin rejecting "*any contract with another individual on any footing but the utmost equality and reciprocity*" as this would "*alienate his [or her] freedom*" and so would be a "*a relationship of voluntary servitude with another individual.*" Anyone making such a contract in a free society (i.e. anarchist society) would be "*devoid of any sense of personal dignity.*" [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 68-9] Only self-managed associations can create relationships of equality rather than of subordination between its members.

Therefore anarchists stress the need for direct democracy in voluntary associations in order to ensure that the concept of "freedom" is not a sham and a justification for domination, as it is under capitalism. Only self-managed associations can create relationships of equality rather than of subordination between its members.

It is for this reason that anarchists have opposed capitalism and urged "*workers to form themselves into democratic societies, with equal conditions for all members, on pain of a relapse into feudalism.*" [Proudhon, **The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 277] For similar reasons, anarchists (with the notable exception of Proudhon) opposed marriage as it turned women into "*a bonded slave, who takes her master's name, her master's bread, her master's commands, and serves her master's passions . . . who can control no property, not even her own body, without his consent.*" [Voltaireine de Cleyre, quoted by Paul Avrich, **An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltairine de Cleyre**, p. 160] While marriage, due to feminist agitation, in many countries has been reformed towards the anarchist ideal of a free union of equals, it still is based on the patriarchal principles anarchists like Goldman and de Cleyre identified and condemned (see [section A.3.5](#) for more on feminism and anarchism).

Clearly, voluntary entry is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to defend an individual's liberty. This is to be expected as it ignores (or takes for granted) the social conditions in which agreements are made and, moreover, ignores the social relationships created by them ("*For the worker who **must sell his labour, it is impossible to remain free.***" [Kropotkin, **Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution**, p. 305]). Any social relationships based on abstract individualism are likely to be based upon force, power, and authority, **not** liberty. This of course assumes a definition of liberty according to which individuals exercise their capacities and decide their own actions. Therefore, voluntarism is **not** enough to create a society that maximises liberty. This is why anarchists think that voluntary association **must** be complemented by self-management (direct democracy) **within** these associations. For anarchists, the assumptions of voluntarism imply self-management. Or, to use Proudhon's words, "*as individualism is the primordial fact of humanity, so association is its complementary term.*" [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 430]

To answer the second objection first, in a society based on private property (and so statism), those with property have more power, which they can use to perpetuate their authority. "*Wealth is power, poverty is weakness,*" in the words of Albert Parsons. This means that under capitalism the much praised "freedom to choose" is extremely limited. It becomes, for the vast majority, the freedom to pick a master (under slavery, quipped Parsons, the master "*selected . . . his own slaves. Under the wage slavery system the*

*wage slave selects his master.*"). Under capitalism, Parsons stressed, *"those disinherited of their natural rights must hire out and serve and obey the oppressing class or starve. There is no other alternative. Some things are priceless, chief among which are life and liberty. A freeman [or woman] is not for sale or hire."* [**Anarchism**, p. 99 and p. 98] And why should we excuse servitude or tolerate those who desire to restrict the liberty of others? The "liberty" to command is the liberty to enslave, and so is actually a denial of liberty.

Regarding the first objection, anarchists plead guilty. We **are** prejudiced against the reduction of human beings to the status of robots. We are prejudiced in favour of human dignity and freedom. We are prejudiced, in fact, in favour of humanity and individuality.

( [Section A.2.11](#) discusses why direct democracy is the necessary social counterpart to voluntarism (i.e. free agreement). [Section B.4](#) discusses why capitalism cannot be based on equal bargaining power between property owners and the propertyless).

## A.2.15 What about "human nature"?

Anarchists, far from ignoring "human nature," have the only political theory that gives this concept deep thought and reflection. Too often, "human nature" is flung up as the last line of defence in an argument against anarchism, because it is thought to be beyond reply. This is not the case, however. First of all, human nature is a complex thing. If, by human nature, it is meant "what humans do," it is obvious that human nature is contradictory -- love and hate, compassion and heartlessness, peace and violence, and so on, have all been expressed by people and so are all products of "human nature." Of course, what is considered "human nature" can change with changing social circumstances. For example, slavery was considered part of "human nature" and "normal" for thousands of years. Homosexuality was considered perfectly normal by the ancient Greeks yet thousands of years later the Christian church denounced it as unnatural. War only become part of "human nature" once states developed. Hence Chomsky:

*"Individuals are certainly capable of evil . . . But individuals are capable of all sorts of things. Human nature has lots of ways of realising itself, humans have lots of capacities and options. Which ones reveal themselves depends to a large extent on the institutional structures. If we had institutions which permitted pathological killers free rein, they'd be running the place. The only way to survive would be to let those elements of your nature manifest themselves.*

*"If we have institutions which make greed the sole property of human beings and encourage pure greed at the expense of other human emotions and commitments, we're going to have a society based on greed, with all that follows. A different society might be organised in such a way that human feelings and emotions of other sorts, say, solidarity, support, sympathy become dominant. Then you'll have different aspects of human nature and personality revealing themselves."* [**Chronicles of Dissent**, pp. 158]

Therefore, environment plays an important part in defining what "human nature" is, how it develops and what aspects of it are expressed. Indeed, one of the greatest myths about anarchism is the idea that we think human nature is inherently good (rather, we think it is inherently sociable). How it develops and expresses itself is dependent on the kind of society we live in and create. A hierarchical society will shape people in certain (negative) ways and produce a "human nature" radically different from a libertarian one. So *"when we hear men [and women] saying that Anarchists imagine men [and women] much better than they really are, we merely wonder how intelligent people can repeat that nonsense. Do we not say continually that the only means of rendering men [and women] less rapacious and egotistic, less ambitious and less slavish at the same time, is to eliminate those conditions which favour the growth of egotism and rapacity, of slavishness and ambition?"* [Peter Kropotkin, **Act for Yourselves**, p. 83]

As such, the use of "human nature" as an argument against anarchism is simply superficial and, ultimately, an evasion. It is an excuse not to think. *"Every fool,"* as Emma Goldman put it, *"from king to policemen, from the flatheaded parson to the visionless dabbler in science, presumes to speak authoritatively of human nature. The greater the mental charlatan, the more definite his insistence on the wickedness and weakness of human nature. Yet how can any one speak of it to-day, with every soul in prison, with every heart fettered, wounded, and maimed?"* Change society, create a better social environment and then we can judge what is a product of our natures and what is the product of an authoritarian system. For this reason, anarchism *"stands for the liberation of the human mind from the dominion of religion; the liberation of the human body from the dominion of property; liberation from the shackles and restraint of government."* For *"[f]reedom, expansion, opportunity, and above all, peace and repose, alone can teach us the real dominant factors of human nature and all its wonderful possibilities."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 73]

This does not mean that human beings are infinitely plastic, with each individual born a **tabula rasa** (blank slate) waiting to be formed by "society" (which in practice means those who run it). As Noam Chomsky argues, *"I don't think its possible to give a rational account of the concept of alienated labour on that assumption [that human nature is nothing but a historical product], nor is it possible to produce something like a moral justification for the commitment to some kind of social change, except on the basis of assumptions about human nature and how modifications in the structure of society will be better able to conform to some of the fundamental needs that are part of our essential nature."* [**Language and Politics**, p. 215] We do not wish to enter the debate about what human characteristics are and are not "innate." All we will say is that human beings have an innate ability to think and learn -- that much is obvious, we feel -- and that humans are sociable creatures, needing the company of others to feel complete and to prosper. Moreover, they have the ability to recognise and oppose injustice and oppression (Bakunin rightly considered *"the power to think and the desire to rebel"* as *"precious faculties."*) [**God and the State**, p. 9]).

These three features, we think, suggest the viability of an anarchist society. The innate ability to think for oneself automatically makes all forms of hierarchy illegitimate, and our need for social relationships implies that we can organise without the state. The deep unhappiness and alienation afflicting modern society reveals that the centralisation and authoritarianism of capitalism and the state is denying some innate needs within us. In fact, as mentioned earlier, for the great majority of its existence the human



race **has** lived in anarchic communities, with little or no hierarchy. That modern society calls such people "savages" or "primitive" is pure arrogance. So who can tell whether anarchism is against "human nature"? Anarchists have accumulated much evidence to suggest that it may not be.

As for the charge the anarchists demand too much of "human nature," it is often **non** anarchists who make the greatest claims on it. For *"while our opponents seem to admit there is a kind of salt of the earth -- the rulers, the employers, the leaders -- who, happily enough, prevent those bad men -- the ruled, the exploited, the led -- from becoming still worse than they are"* we anarchists *"maintain that **both** rulers and ruled are spoiled by authority"* and *"**both** exploiters and exploited are spoiled by exploitation."* So *"there is [a] difference, and a very important one. **We** admit the imperfections of human nature, but we make no exception for the rulers. **They** make it, although sometimes unconsciously, and because we make no such exception, they say that we are dreamers."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Act for Yourselves**, p. 83] If human nature is so bad, then giving some people power over others and hoping this will lead to justice and freedom is hopelessly utopian.

Moreover, as noted, Anarchists argue that hierarchical organisations bring out the worse in human nature. Both the oppressor and the oppressed are negatively affected by the authoritarian relationships so produced. *"It is a characteristic of privilege and of every kind of privilege,"* argued Bakunin, *"to kill the mind and heart of man . . . That is a social law which admits no exceptions . . . It is the law of equality and humanity."* [**God and the State**, p. 31] And while the privileged become corrupted by power, the powerless (in general) become servile in heart and mind (luckily the human spirit is such that there will always be rebels no matter the oppression for where there is oppression, there is resistance and, consequently, hope). As such, it seems strange for anarchists to hear non-anarchists justify hierarchy in terms of the (distorted) "human nature" it produces.

Sadly, too many have done precisely this. It continues to this day. For example, with the rise of "sociobiology," some claim (with very little **real** evidence) that capitalism is a product of our "nature," which is determined by our genes. These claims are simply a new variation of the "human nature" argument and have, unsurprisingly, been leapt upon by the powers that be. Considering the dearth of evidence, their support for this "new" doctrine must be purely the result of its utility to those in power -- i.e. the fact that it is useful to have an "objective" and "scientific" basis to rationalise inequalities in wealth and power (for a discussion of this process see **Not in Our Genes: Biology, Ideology and Human Nature** by Steven Rose, R.C. Lewontin and Leon J. Kamin).

This is not to say that it does not hold a grain of truth. As scientist Stephen Jay Gould notes, *"the range of our potential behaviour is circumscribed by our biology"* and if this is what sociobiology means *"by genetic control, then we can scarcely disagree."* However, this is not what is meant. Rather, it is a form of *"biological determinism"* that sociobiology argues for. Saying that there are specific genes for specific human traits says little for while *"[v]iolence, sexism, and general nastiness **are** biological since they represent one subset of a possible range of behaviours"* so are *"peacefulness, equality, and kindness."* And so *"we may see their influence increase if we can create social structures that permit them to flourish."* That this may be the case can be seen from the works of sociobiologists themselves, who *"acknowledge diversity"* in human cultures while *"often dismiss[ing] the uncomfortable 'exceptions' as*

*temporary and unimportant aberrations.*" This is surprising, for if you believe that *"repeated, often genocidal warfare has shaped our genetic destiny, the existence of nonaggressive peoples is embarrassing."* [Ever Since Darwin, p. 252, p. 257 and p. 254]

Like the social Darwinism that preceded it, sociobiology proceeds by first projecting the dominant ideas of current society onto nature (often unconsciously, so that scientists mistakenly consider the ideas in question as both "normal" and "natural"). Then the theories of nature produced in this manner are transferred **back** onto society and history, being used to "prove" that the principles of capitalism (hierarchy, authority, competition, etc.) are eternal **laws**, which are then appealed to as a justification for the status quo! Amazingly, there are many supposedly intelligent people who take this sleight-of-hand seriously.

This can be seen when "hierarchies" in nature are used to explain, and so justify, hierarchies in human societies. Such analogies are misleading for they forget the institutional nature of human life. As Murray Bookchin notes in his critique of sociobiology, a *"weak, enfeebled, unnerved, and sick ape is hardly likely to become an 'alpha' male, much less retain this highly ephemeral 'status.'* By contrast, the most physically and mentally pathological human rulers have exercised authority with devastating effect in the course of history." This *"expresses a power of hierarchical **institutions** over persons that is completely reversed in so-called 'animal hierarchies' where the absence of institutions is precisely the only intelligible way of talking about 'alpha males' or 'queen bees.'"* ["Sociobiology or Social Ecology", **Which way for the Ecology Movement?**, p. 58] Thus what makes human society unique is conveniently ignored and the real sources of power in society are hidden under a genetic screen.

The sort of apologetics associated with appeals to "human nature" (or sociobiology at its worse) are natural, of course, because every ruling class needs to justify their right to rule. Hence they support doctrines that defined the latter in ways appearing to justify elite power -- be it sociobiology, divine right, original sin, etc. Obviously, such doctrines have always been wrong . . . until now, of course, as it is obvious our current society truly conforms to "human nature" and it has been scientifically proven by our current scientific priesthood!

The arrogance of this claim is truly amazing. History hasn't stopped. One thousand years from now, society will be completely different from what it is presently or from what anyone has imagined. No government in place at the moment will still be around, and the current economic system will not exist. The only thing that may remain the same is that people will still be claiming that their new society is the "One True System" that completely conforms to human nature, even though all past systems did not.

Of course, it does not cross the minds of supporters of capitalism that people from different cultures may draw different conclusions from the same facts -- conclusions that may be **more** valid. Nor does it occur to capitalist apologists that the theories of the "objective" scientists may be framed in the context of the dominant ideas of the society they live in. It comes as no surprise to anarchists, however, that scientists working in Tsarist Russia developed a theory of evolution based on **cooperation** within species, quite unlike their counterparts in capitalist Britain, who developed a theory based on **competitive struggle**

within and between species. That the latter theory reflected the dominant political and economic theories of British society (notably competitive individualism) is pure coincidence, of course.

Kropotkin's classic work **Mutual Aid**, for example, was written in response to the obvious inaccuracies that British representatives of Darwinism had projected onto nature and human life. Building upon the mainstream Russian criticism of the British Darwinism of the time, Kropotkin showed (with substantial empirical evidence) that "mutual aid" within a group or species played as important a role as "mutual struggle" between individuals within those groups or species (see Stephan Jay Gould's essay "*Kropotkin was no Crackpot*" in his book **Bully for Brontosaurus** for details and an evaluation). It was, he stressed, a "*factor*" in evolution along with competition, a factor which, in most circumstances, was far more important to survival. Thus co-operation is just as "natural" as competition so proving that "human nature" was not a barrier to anarchism as co-operation between members of a species can be the best pathway to advantage individuals.

To conclude. Anarchists argue that anarchy is not against "human nature" for two main reasons. Firstly, what is considered as being "human nature" is shaped by the society we live in and the relationships we create. This means a hierarchical society will encourage certain personality traits to dominate while an anarchist one would encourage others. As such, anarchists "*do not so much rely on the fact that human nature will change as they do upon the theory that the some nature will act differently under different circumstances.*" Secondly, change "*seems to be one of the fundamental laws of existence*" so "*who can say that man [sic!] has reached the limits of his possibilities.*" [George Barrett, **Objections to Anarchism**, pp. 360-1 and p. 360]

For useful discussions on anarchist ideas on human nature, both of which refute the idea that anarchists think human beings are naturally good, see Peter Marshall's "*Human nature and anarchism*" [David Goodway (ed.), **For Anarchism: History, Theory and Practice**, pp. 127-149] and David Hartley's "*Communitarian Anarchism and Human Nature*". [**Anarchist Studies**, vol. 3, no. 2, Autumn 1995, pp. 145-164]

## A.2.16 Does anarchism require "perfect" people to work?

No. Anarchy is not a utopia, a "perfect" society. It will be a *human* society, with all the problems, hopes, and fears associated with human beings. Anarchists do not think that human beings need to be "perfect" for anarchy to work. They only need to be free. Thus Christie and Meltzer:

*"[A] common fallacy [is] that revolutionary socialism [i.e. anarchism] is an 'idealisation' of the workers and [so] the mere recital of their present faults is a refutation of the class struggle . . . it seems morally unreasonable that a free society . . . could exist without moral or ethical perfection. But so far as the overthrow of [existing] society is concerned, we may ignore the fact of people's shortcomings and prejudices, so long as they do not become institutionalised. One may view without concern the fact . . . that the workers might achieve control of their places of work long before they had acquired the social*

*graces of the 'intellectual' or shed all the prejudices of the present society from family discipline to xenophobia. What does it matter, so long as they can run industry without masters? Prejudices wither in freedom and only flourish while the social climate is favourable to them . . . What we say is . . . that once life can continue without imposed authority from above, and imposed authority cannot survive the withdrawal of labour from its service, the prejudices of authoritarianism will disappear. There is no cure for them other than the free process of education."* [**The Floodgates of Anarchy**, pp. 36-7]

Obviously, though, we think that a free society will produce people who are more in tune with both their own and others individuality and needs, thus reducing individual conflict. Remaining disputes would be solved by reasonable methods, for example, the use of juries, mutual third parties, or community and workplace assemblies (see [section I.5.8](#) for a discussion of how could be done for anti-social activities as well as disputes).

Like the "anarchism-is-against-human-nature" argument (see [section A.2.15](#)), opponents of anarchism usually assume "perfect" people -- people who are not corrupted by power when placed in positions of authority, people who are strangely unaffected by the distorting effects of hierarchy, privilege, and so forth. However, anarchists make no such claims about human perfection. We simply recognise that vesting power in the hands of one person or an elite is never a good idea, as people are not perfect.

It should be noted that the idea that anarchism requires a "new" (perfect) man or woman is often raised by the opponents of anarchism to discredit it (and, usually, to justify the retention of hierarchical authority, particularly capitalist relations of production). After all, people are not perfect and are unlikely ever to be. As such, they pounce on every example of a government falling and the resulting chaos to dismiss anarchism as unrealistic. The media loves to proclaim a country to be falling into "anarchy" whenever there is a disruption in "law and order" and looting takes place.

Anarchists are not impressed by this argument. A moment's reflection shows why, for the detractors make the basic mistake of assuming an anarchist society without anarchists! (A variation of such claims is raised by the right-wing "anarcho"-capitalists to discredit real anarchism. However, their "objection" discredits their own claim to be anarchists for they implicitly assume an anarchist society without anarchists!). Needless to say, an "anarchy" made up of people who still saw the need for authority, property and statism would soon become authoritarian (i.e. non-anarchist) again. This is because even if the government disappeared tomorrow, the same system would soon grow up again, because *"the strength of the government rests not with itself, but with the people. A great tyrant may be a fool, and not a superman. His strength lies not in himself, but in the superstition of the people who think that it is right to obey him. So long as that superstition exists it is useless for some liberator to cut off the head of tyranny; the people will create another, for they have grown accustomed to rely on something outside themselves."* [George Barrett, **Objections to Anarchism**, p. 355]

Hence Alexander Berkman:

*"Our social institutions are founded on certain ideas; as long as the latter are generally believed, the institutions built on them are safe. Government remains strong because people think political authority and legal compulsion necessary. Capitalism will continue as long as such an economic system is considered adequate and just. The weakening of the ideas which support the evil and oppressive present day conditions means the ultimate breakdown of government and capitalism."* [What is Anarchism?, p. xii]

In other words, anarchy needs *anarchists* in order to be created and survive. But these anarchists need not be perfect, just people who have freed themselves, by their own efforts, of the superstition that command-and-obedience relations and capitalist property rights are necessary. The implicit assumption in the idea that anarchy needs "perfect" people is that freedom will be given, not taken; hence the obvious conclusion follows that an anarchy requiring "perfect" people will fail. But this argument ignores the need for self-activity and self-liberation in order to create a free society. For anarchists, *"history is nothing but a struggle between the rulers and the ruled, the oppressors and the oppressed."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Act for Yourselves**, p. 85] Ideas change through struggle and, consequently, in the struggle against oppression and exploitation, we not only change the world, we change ourselves at the same time. So it is the struggle for freedom which creates people capable of taking the responsibility for their own lives, communities and planet. People capable of living as equals in a free society, so making anarchy possible.

As such, the chaos which often results when a government disappears is not anarchy nor, in fact, a case against anarchism. It simply means that the necessary preconditions for creating an anarchist society do not exist. Anarchy would be the product of collective struggle at the heart of society, not the product of external shocks. Nor, we should note, do anarchists think that such a society will appear "overnight." Rather, we see the creation of an anarchist system as a process, not an event. The ins-and-outs of how it would function will evolve over time in the light of experience and objective circumstances, not appear in a perfect form immediately (see [section H.2.5](#) for a discussion of Marxist claims otherwise).

Therefore, anarchists do not conclude that "perfect" people are necessary for anarchism to work because the anarchist is *"no liberator with a divine mission to free humanity, but he is a part of that humanity struggling onwards towards liberty."* As such, *"[i]f, then, by some external means an Anarchist Revolution could be, so to speak, supplied ready-made and thrust upon the people, it is true that they would reject it and rebuild the old society. If, on the other hand, the people develop their ideas of freedom, and they themselves get rid of the last stronghold of tyranny --- the government -- then indeed the revolution will be permanently accomplished."* [George Barrett, **Op. Cit.**, p. 355]

This is not to suggest that an anarchist society must wait until *everyone* is an anarchist. Far from it. It is highly unlikely, for example, that the rich and powerful will suddenly see the errors of their ways and voluntarily renounce their privileges. Faced with a large and growing anarchist movement, the ruling elite has always used repression to defend its position in society. The use of fascism in Spain (see [section A.5.6](#)) and Italy (see [section A.5.5](#)) show the depths the capitalist class can sink to. Anarchism will be created in the face of opposition by the ruling minorities and, consequently, will need to defend

itself against attempts to recreate authority (see [section H.2.1](#) for a refutation of Marxist claims anarchists reject the need to defend an anarchist society against counter-revolution).

Instead anarchists argue that we should focus our activity on convincing those subject to oppression and exploitation that they have the power to resist both and, ultimately, can end both by destroying the social institutions that cause them. As Malatesta argued, "*we need the support of the masses to build a force of sufficient strength to achieve our specific task of radical change in the social organism by the direct action of the masses, we must get closer to them, accept them as they are, and from within their ranks seek to 'push' them forward as much as possible.*" [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 155-6] This would create the conditions that make possible a rapid evolution towards anarchism as what was initially accepted by a minority "*but increasingly finding popular expression, will make its way among the mass of the people*" and "*the minority will become the People, the great mass, and that mass rising up against property and the State, will march forward towards anarchist communism.*" [Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 75] Hence the importance anarchists attach to spreading our ideas and arguing the case for anarchism. This creates conscious anarchists from those questioning the injustices of capitalism and the state.

This process is helped by the nature of hierarchical society and the resistance it naturally developed in those subject to it. Anarchist ideas develop spontaneously through struggle. As we discuss in [section I.2.3](#), anarchistic organisations are often created as part of the resistance against oppression and exploitation which marks every hierarchical system and can., potentially, be the framework of a new society. As such, the creation of libertarian institutions is, therefore, always a possibility in any situation. A peoples' experiences may push them towards anarchist conclusions, namely the awareness that the state exists to protect the wealthy and powerful few and to disempower the many. That while it is needed to maintain class and hierarchical society, it is not needed to organise society nor can it do so in a just and fair way for all. This is possible. However, without a conscious anarchist presence any libertarian tendencies are likely to be used, abused and finally destroyed by parties or religious groups seeking political power over the masses (the Russian Revolution is the most famous example of this process). It is for that reason anarchists organise to influence the struggle and spread our ideas (see [section J.3](#) for details). For it is the case that only when anarchist ideas "*acquire a predominating influence*" and are "*accepted by a sufficiently large section of the population*" will we "*have achieved anarchy, or taken a step towards anarchy.*" For anarchy "*cannot be imposed against the wishes of the people.*" [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 159 and p. 163]

So, to conclude, the creation of an anarchist society is not dependent on people being perfect but it is dependent on a large majority being anarchists and wanting to reorganise society in a libertarian manner. This will not eliminate conflict between individuals nor create a fully formed anarchist humanity overnight but it will lay the ground for the gradual elimination of whatever prejudices and anti-social behaviour that remain after the struggle to change society has revolutionised those doing it.

## A.2.17 Aren't most people too stupid for a free society to work?

We are sorry to have to include this question in an anarchist FAQ, but we know that many political ideologies explicitly assume that ordinary people are too stupid to be able to manage their own lives and run society. All aspects of the capitalist political agenda, from Left to Right, contain people who make this claim. Be it Leninists, fascists, Fabians or Objectivists, it is assumed that only a select few are creative and intelligent and that these people should govern others. Usually, this elitism is masked by fine, flowing rhetoric about "freedom," "democracy" and other platitudes with which the ideologues attempt to dull people's critical thought by telling them what they want to hear.

It is, of course, also no surprise that those who believe in "natural" elites always class themselves at the top. We have yet to discover an "objectivist", for example, who considers themselves part of the great mass of "second-handers" (it is always amusing to hear people who simply parrot the ideas of Ayn Rand dismissing other people so!) or who will be a toilet cleaner in the unknown "ideal" of "real" capitalism. Everybody reading an elitist text will consider him or herself to be part of the "select few." It's "natural" in an elitist society to consider elites to be natural and yourself a potential member of one!

Examination of history shows that there is a basic elitist ideology which has been the essential rationalisation of all states and ruling classes since their emergence at the beginning of the Bronze Age. This ideology merely changes its outer garments, not its basic inner content.

During the Dark Ages, for example, it was coloured by Christianity, being adapted to the needs of the Church hierarchy. The most useful "divinely revealed" dogma to the priestly elite was "original sin": the notion that human beings are basically depraved and incompetent creatures who need "direction from above," with priests as the conveniently necessary mediators between ordinary humans and "God." The idea that average people are basically stupid and thus incapable of governing themselves is a carry over from this doctrine, a relic of the Dark Ages.

In reply to all those who claim that most people are "second-handers" or cannot develop anything more than "trade union consciousness," all we can say is that it is an absurdity that cannot withstand even a superficial look at history, particularly the labour movement. The creative powers of those struggling for freedom is often truly amazing, and if this intellectual power and inspiration is not seen in "normal" society, this is the clearest indictment possible of the deadening effects of hierarchy and the conformity produced by authority. (See also [section B.1](#) for more on the effects of hierarchy). As Bob Black points out:

*"You are what you do. If you do boring, stupid, monotonous work, chances are you'll end up boring, stupid, and monotonous. Work is a much better explanation for the creeping cretinisation all around us than even such significant moronising mechanisms as television and education. People who are regimented all their lives, handed to work from school and bracketed by the family in the beginning and the nursing home in the end, are habituated to hierarchy and psychologically enslaved. Their aptitude for autonomy is so atrophied that their fear of freedom is among their few rationally grounded phobias. Their obedience training at work carries over into the families **they** start, thus reproducing the*

*system in more ways than one, and into politics, culture and everything else. Once you drain the vitality from people at work, they'll likely submit to hierarchy and expertise in everything. They're used to it.*" [**The Abolition of Work and other essays**, pp. 21-2]

When elitists try to conceive of liberation, they can only think of it being **given** to the oppressed by kind (for Leninists) or stupid (for Objectivists) elites. It is hardly surprising, then, that it fails. Only self-liberation can produce a free society. The crushing and distorting effects of authority can only be overcome by self-activity. The few examples of such self-liberation prove that most people, once considered incapable of freedom by others, are more than up for the task.

Those who proclaim their "superiority" often do so out of fear that their authority and power will be destroyed once people free themselves from the debilitating hands of authority and come to realise that, in the words of Max Stirner, *"the great are great only because we are on our knees."*

As Emma Goldman remarks about women's equality, *"[t]he extraordinary achievements of women in every walk of life have silenced forever the loose talk of women's inferiority. Those who still cling to this fetish do so because they hate nothing so much as to see their authority challenged. This is the characteristic of all authority, whether the master over his economic slaves or man over women. However, everywhere woman is escaping her cage, everywhere she is going ahead with free, large strides."* [**Vision on Fire**, p. 256] The same comments are applicable, for example, to the very successful experiments in workers' self-management during the Spanish Revolution.

Then, of course, the notion that people are too stupid for anarchism to work also backfires on those who argue it. Take, for example, those who use this argument to advocate democratic government rather than anarchy. Democracy, as Luigi Galleani noted, means *"acknowledging the right and the competence of the people to select their rulers."* However, *"whoever has the political competence to choose his [or her] own rulers is, by implication, also competent to do without them, especially when the causes of economic enmity are uprooted."* [**The End of Anarchism?**, p. 37] Thus the argument for democracy against anarchism undermines itself, for *"if you consider these worthy electors as unable to look after their own interests themselves, how is it that they know how to choose for themselves the shepherds who must guide them? And how will they be able to solve this problem of social alchemy, of producing the election of a genius from the votes of a mass of fools?"* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, pp. 53-4]

As for those who consider dictatorship as the solution to human stupidity, the question arises why are these dictators immune to this apparently universal human trait? And, as Malatesta noted, *"who are the best? And who will recognise these qualities in them?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 53] If they impose themselves on the "stupid" masses, why assume they will not exploit and oppress the many for their own benefit? Or, for that matter, that they are any more intelligent than the masses? The history of dictatorial and monarchical government suggests a clear answer to those questions. A similar argument applies for other non-democratic systems, such as those based on limited suffrage. For example, the Lockean (i.e. classical liberal or right-wing libertarian) ideal of a state based on the rule of property owners is doomed to be little more than a regime which oppresses the majority to maintain the power and privilege of the



wealthy few. Equally, the idea of near universal stupidity bar an elite of capitalists (the "objectivist" vision) implies a system somewhat less ideal than the perfect system presented in the literature. This is because most people would tolerate oppressive bosses who treat them as means to an end rather than an end in themselves. For how can you expect people to recognise and pursue their own self-interest if you consider them fundamentally as the "*uncivilised hordes*"? You cannot have it both ways and the "*unknown ideal*" of pure capitalism would be as grubby, oppressive and alienating as "actually existing" capitalism.

As such, anarchists are firmly convinced that arguments against anarchy based on the lack of ability of the mass of people are inherently self-contradictory (when not blatantly self-servicing). If people are too stupid for anarchism then they are too stupid for any system you care to mention. Ultimately, anarchists argue that such a perspective simply reflects the servile mentality produced by a hierarchical society rather than a genuine analysis of humanity and our history as a species. To quote Rousseau:

*"when I see multitudes of entirely naked savages scorn European voluptuousness and endure hunger, fire, the sword, and death to preserve only their independence, I feel that it does not behove slaves to reason about freedom."* [quoted by Noam Chomsky, **Marxism, Anarchism, and Alternative Futures**, p. 780]

## A.2.18 Do anarchists support terrorism?

No. This is for three reasons.

Terrorism means either targeting or not worrying about killing innocent people. For anarchy to exist, it must be created by the mass of people. One does not convince people of one's ideas by blowing them up. Secondly, anarchism is about self-liberation. One cannot blow up a social relationship. Freedom cannot be created by the actions of an elite few destroying rulers **on behalf of** the majority. Simply put, a "*structure based on centuries of history cannot be destroyed with a few kilos of explosives.*" [Kropotkin, quoted by Martin A. Millar, **Kropotkin**, p. 174] For so long as people feel the need for rulers, hierarchy will exist (see [section A.2.16](#) for more on this). As we have stressed earlier, freedom cannot be given, only taken. Lastly, anarchism aims for freedom. Hence Bakunin's comment that "*when one is carrying out a revolution for the liberation of humanity, one should respect the life and liberty of men [and women].*" [quoted by K.J. Kenafick, **Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx**, p. 125] For anarchists, means determine the ends and terrorism by its very nature violates life and liberty of individuals and so cannot be used to create an anarchist society. The history of, say, the Russian Revolution, confirmed Kropotkin's insight that "*[v]ery sad would be the future revolution if it could only triumph by terror.*" [quoted by Millar, **Op. Cit.**, p. 175]

Moreover anarchists are **not** against individuals but the institutions and social relationships that cause certain individuals to have power over others and abuse (i.e. use) that power. Therefore the anarchist revolution is about destroying structures, not people. As Bakunin pointed out, "*we wish not to kill persons, but to abolish status and its perquisites*" and anarchism "*does not mean the death of the*

*individuals who make up the bourgeoisie, but the death of the bourgeoisie as a political and social entity economically distinct from the working class.*" [The **Basic Bakunin**, p. 71 and p. 70] In other words, "**You can't blow up a social relationship**" (to quote the title of an anarchist pamphlet which presents the anarchist case against terrorism).

How is it, then, that anarchism is associated with violence? Partly this is because the state and media insist on referring to terrorists who are **not** anarchists as anarchists. For example, the German Bader-Meinhoff gang were often called "anarchists" despite their self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninism. Smears, unfortunately, work. Similarly, as Emma Goldman pointed out, "*it is a known fact known to almost everyone familiar with the Anarchist movement that a great number of [violent] acts, for which Anarchists had to suffer, either originated with the capitalist press or were instigated, if not directly perpetrated, by the police.*" [Red Emma Speaks, p. 262]

An example of this process at work can be seen from the current anti-globalisation movement. In Seattle, for example, the media reported "violence" by protestors (particularly anarchist ones) yet this amounted to a few broken windows. The much greater **actual** violence of the police against protestors (which, incidentally, started **before** the breaking of a single window) was not considered worthy of comment. Subsequent media coverage of anti-globalisation demonstrations followed this pattern, firmly connecting anarchism with violence in spite of that the protestors have been the ones to suffer the greatest violence at the hands of the state. As anarchist activist Starhawk notes, "*if breaking windows and fighting back when the cops attack is 'violence,' then give me a new word, a word a thousand times stronger, to use when the cops are beating non-resisting people into comas.*" [Staying on the Streets, p. 130]

Similarly, at the Genoa protests in 2001 the mainstream media presented the protestors as violent even though it was the state who killed one of them and hospitalised many thousands more. The presence of police agent provocateurs in creating the violence was unmentioned by the media. As Starhawk noted afterwards, in Genoa "*we encountered a carefully orchestrated political campaign of state terrorism. The campaign included disinformation, the use of infiltrators and provocateurs, collusion with avowed Fascist groups . . . , the deliberate targeting of non-violent groups for tear gas and beating, endemic police brutality, the torture of prisoners, the political persecution of organisers . . . They did all those openly, in a way that indicates they had no fear of repercussions and expected political protection from the highest sources.*" [Op. Cit., pp. 128-9] This was, unsurprisingly, not reported by the media.

Subsequent protests have seen the media indulge in yet more anti-anarchist hype, inventing stories to present anarchists as hate-filled individuals planning mass violence. For example, in Ireland in 2004 the media reported that anarchists were planning to use poison gas during EU related celebrations in Dublin. Of course, evidence of such a plan was not forthcoming and no such action happened. Neither did the riot the media said anarchists were organising. A similar process of misinformation accompanied the anti-capitalist May Day demonstrations in London and the protests against the Republican National Congress in New York. In spite of being constantly proved wrong after the event, the media always prints the scare stories of anarchist violence (even inventing events at, say Seattle, to justify their articles and to demonise anarchism further). Thus the myth that anarchism equals violence is perpetrated.

Needless to say, the same papers that hyped the (non-existent) threat of anarchist violence remained silent on the actual violence of, and repression by, the police against demonstrators which occurred at these events. Neither did they run apologies after their (evidence-less) stories of doom were exposed as the nonsense they were by subsequent events.

This does not mean that Anarchists have not committed acts of violence. They have (as have members of other political and religious movements). The main reason for the association of terrorism with anarchism is because of the "*propaganda by the deed*" period in the anarchist movement.

This period -- roughly from 1880 to 1900 -- was marked by a small number of anarchists assassinating members of the ruling class (royalty, politicians and so forth). At its worse, this period saw theatres and shops frequented by members of the bourgeoisie targeted. These acts were termed "*propaganda by the deed*." Anarchist support for the tactic was galvanised by the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 by Russian Populists (this event prompted Johann Most's famous editorial in **Freiheit**, entitled "*At Last!*", celebrating regicide and the assassination of tyrants). However, there were deeper reasons for anarchist support of this tactic: firstly, in revenge for acts of repression directed towards working class people; and secondly, as a means to encourage people to revolt by showing that their oppressors could be defeated.

Considering these reasons it is no coincidence that propaganda by the deed began in France after the 20 000-plus deaths due to the French state's brutal suppression of the Paris Commune, in which many anarchists were killed. It is interesting to note that while the anarchist violence in revenge for the Commune is relatively well known, the state's mass murder of the Communards is relatively unknown. Similarly, it may be known that the Italian Anarchist Gaetano Bresci assassinated King Umberto of Italy in 1900 or that Alexander Berkman tried to kill Carnegie Steel Corporation manager Henry Clay Frick in 1892. What is often unknown is that Umberto's troops had fired upon and killed protesting peasants or that Frick's Pinkertons had also murdered locked-out workers at Homestead.

Such downplaying of statist and capitalist violence is hardly surprising. "*The State's behaviour is violence,*" points out Max Stirner, "*and it calls its violence 'law'; that of the individual, 'crime.'*" [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 197] Little wonder, then, that anarchist violence is condemned but the repression (and often worse violence) that provoked it ignored and forgotten. Anarchists point to the hypocrisy of the accusation that anarchists are "violent" given that such claims come from either supporters of government or the actual governments themselves, governments "*which came into being through violence, which maintain themselves in power through violence, and which use violence constantly to keep down rebellion and to bully other nations.*" [Howard Zinn, **The Zinn Reader**, p. 652]

We can get a feel of the hypocrisy surrounding condemnation of anarchist violence by non-anarchists by considering their response to state violence. For example, many capitalist papers and individuals in the 1920s and 1930s celebrated Fascism as well as Mussolini and Hitler. Anarchists, in contrast, fought Fascism to the death and tried to assassinate both Mussolini and Hitler. Obviously supporting murderous dictatorships is not "violence" and "terrorism" but resisting such regimes is! Similarly, non-anarchists

can support repressive and authoritarian states, war and the suppression of strikes and unrest by violence ("restoring law and order") and not be considered "violent." Anarchists, in contrast, are condemned as "violent" and "terrorist" because a few of them tried to revenge such acts of oppression and state/capitalist violence! Similarly, it seems the height of hypocrisy for someone to denounce the anarchist "violence" which produces a few broken windows in, say, Seattle while supporting the actual violence of the police in imposing the state's rule or, even worse, supporting the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. If anyone should be considered violent it is the supporter of state and its actions yet people do not see the obvious and *"deplore the type of violence that the state deplores, and applaud the violence that the state practises."* [Christie and Meltzer, **The Floodgates of Anarchy**, p. 132]

It must be noted that the majority of anarchists did not support this tactic. Of those who committed "propaganda by the deed" (sometimes called *"attentats"*), as Murray Bookchin points out, only a *"few . . . were members of Anarchist groups. The majority . . . were soloists."* [**The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 102] Needless to say, the state and media painted all anarchists with the same brush. They still do, sometimes inaccurately (such as blaming Bakunin for such acts even though he had been dead years before the tactic was even discussed in anarchist circles!).

All in all, the "propaganda by the deed" phase of anarchism was a failure, as the vast majority of anarchists soon came to see. Kropotkin can be considered typical. He *"never liked the slogan **propaganda by deed**, and did not use it to describe his own ideas of revolutionary action."* However, in 1879 while still *"urg[ing] the importance of collective action"* he started *"expressing considerable sympathy and interest in **attentats**"* (these *"collective forms of action"* were seen as acting *"at the trade union and communal level"*). In 1880 he *"became less preoccupied with collective action and this enthusiasm for acts of revolt by individuals and small groups increased."* This did not last and Kropotkin soon attached *"progressively less importance to isolated acts of revolt"* particularly once *"he saw greater opportunities for developing collective action in the new militant trade unionism."* [Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism**, p. 92, p. 115, p. 129, pp. 129-30, p. 205] By the late 1880s and early 1890s he came to disapprove of such acts of violence. This was partly due to simple revulsion at the worse of the acts (such as the Barcelona Theatre bombing in response to the state murder of anarchists involved in the Jerez uprising of 1892 and Emile Henry's bombing of a cafe in response to state repression) and partly due to the awareness that it was hindering the anarchist cause.

Kropotkin recognised that the *"spate of terrorist acts"* of the 1880s had caused *"the authorities into taking repressive action against the movement"* and were *"not in his view consistent with the anarchist ideal and did little or nothing to promote popular revolt."* In addition, he was *"anxious about the isolation of the movement from the masses"* which *"had increased rather than diminished as a result of the preoccupation with"* propaganda by deed. He *"saw the best possibility for popular revolution in the . . . development of the new militancy in the labour movement. From now on he focussed his attention increasingly on the importance of revolutionary minorities working among the masses to develop the spirit of revolt."* However, even during the early 1880s when his support for individual acts of revolt (if not for propaganda by the deed) was highest, he saw the need for collective class struggle and, therefore, *"Kropotkin always insisted on the importance of the labour movement in the struggles leading up to the revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 205-6, p. 208 and p. 280]

Kropotkin was not alone. More and more anarchists came to see "propaganda by the deed" as giving the state an excuse to clamp down on both the anarchist and labour movements. Moreover, it gave the media (and opponents of anarchism) a chance to associate anarchism with mindless violence, thus alienating much of the population from the movement. This false association is renewed at every opportunity, regardless of the facts (for example, even though Individualist Anarchists rejected "propaganda by the deed" totally, they were also smeared by the press as "violent" and "terrorists").

In addition, as Kropotkin pointed out, the assumption behind propaganda by the deed, i.e. that everyone was waiting for a chance to rebel, was false. In fact, people are products of the system in which they live; hence they accepted most of the myths used to keep that system going. With the failure of propaganda by deed, anarchists turned back to what most of the movement had been doing anyway: encouraging the class struggle and the process of self-liberation. This turn back to the roots of anarchism can be seen from the rise in anarcho-syndicalist unions after 1890 (see [section A.5.3](#)).

Despite most anarchists' tactical disagreement with propaganda by deed, few would consider it to be terrorism or rule out assassination under all circumstances. Bombing a village during a war because there **might** be an enemy in it is terrorism, whereas assassinating a murdering dictator or head of a repressive state is defence at best and revenge at worst. As anarchists have long pointed out, if by terrorism it is meant "killing innocent people" then the state is the greatest terrorist of them all (as well as having the biggest bombs and other weapons of destruction available on the planet). If the people committing "acts of terror" are really anarchists, they would do everything possible to avoid harming innocent people and never use the statist line that "collateral damage" is regrettable but inevitable. This is why the vast majority of "propaganda by the deed" acts were directed towards individuals of the ruling class, such as Presidents and Royalty, and were the result of previous acts of state and capitalist violence.

So "terrorist" acts have been committed by anarchists. This is a fact. However, it has nothing to do with anarchism as a socio-political theory. As Emma Goldman argued, it was "*not Anarchism, as such, but the brutal slaughter of the eleven steel workers [that] was the urge for Alexander Berkman's act.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 268] Equally, members of **other** political and religious groups have also committed such acts. As the Freedom Group of London argued:

*"There is a truism that the man [or woman] in the street seems always to forget, when he is abusing the Anarchists, or whatever party happens to be his **bete noire** for the moment, as the cause of some outrage just perpetrated. This indisputable fact is that homicidal outrages have, from time immemorial, been the reply of goaded and desperate classes, and goaded and desperate individuals, to wrongs from their fellowmen [and women], which they felt to be intolerable. Such acts are the violent recoil from violence, whether aggressive or repressive . . . their cause lies not in any special conviction, but in the depths of . . . human nature itself. The whole course of history, political and social, is strewn with evidence of this."* [quoted by Emma Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 259]

Terrorism has been used by many other political, social and religious groups and parties. For example, Christians, Marxists, Hindus, Nationalists, Republicans, Moslems, Sikhs, Fascists, Jews and Patriots have all committed acts of terrorism. Few of these movements or ideas have been labelled as "terrorist by nature" or continually associated with violence -- which shows anarchism's threat to the status quo. There is nothing more likely to discredit and marginalise an idea than for malicious and/or ill-informed persons to portray those who believe and practice it as "mad bombers" with no opinions or ideals at all, just an insane urge to destroy.

Of course, the vast majority of Christians and so on have opposed terrorism as morally repugnant and counter-productive. As have the vast majority of anarchists, at all times and places. However, it seems that in our case it is necessary to state our opposition to terrorism time and time again.

So, to summarise - only a small minority of terrorists have ever been anarchists, and only a small minority of anarchists have ever been terrorists. The anarchist movement as a whole has always recognised that social relationships cannot be assassinated or bombed out of existence. Compared to the violence of the state and capitalism, anarchist violence is a drop in the ocean. Unfortunately most people remember the acts of the few anarchists who have committed violence rather than the acts of violence and repression by the state and capital that prompted those acts.

## A.2.19 What ethical views do anarchists hold?

Anarchist viewpoints on ethics vary considerably, although all share a common belief in the need for an individual to develop within themselves their own sense of ethics. All anarchists agree with Max Stirner that an individual must free themselves from the confines of existing morality and question that morality -- *"I decide whether it is the **right thing** for me; there is no right **outside** me."* [The Ego and Its Own, p. 189]

Few anarchists, however, would go so far as Stirner and reject **any** concept of social ethics at all (saying that, Stirner does value some universal concepts although they are egoistic ones). Such extreme moral relativism is almost as bad as moral absolutism for most anarchists (moral relativism is the view that there is no right or wrong beyond what suits an individual while moral absolutism is that view that what is right and wrong is independent of what individuals think).

It is often claimed that modern society is breaking up because of excessive "egoism" or moral relativism. This is false. As far as moral relativism goes, this is a step forward from the moral absolutism urged upon society by various Moralists and true-believers because it bases itself, however slimly, upon the idea of individual reason. However, as it denies the existence (or desirability) of ethics it is but the mirror image of what it is rebelling against. Neither option empowers the individual or is liberating.

Consequently, both of these attitudes hold enormous attraction to authoritarians, as a populace that is either unable to form an opinion about things (and will tolerate anything) or who blindly follow the

commands of the ruling elite are of great value to those in power. Both are rejected by most anarchists in favour of an evolutionary approach to ethics based upon human reason to develop the ethical concepts and interpersonal empathy to generalise these concepts into ethical attitudes within society as well as within individuals. An anarchistic approach to ethics therefore shares the critical individual investigation implied in moral relativism but grounds itself into common feelings of right and wrong. As Proudhon argued:

*"All progress begins by abolishing something; every reform rests upon denunciation of some abuse; each new idea is based upon the proved insufficiency of the old idea."*

Most anarchists take the viewpoint that ethical standards, like life itself, are in a constant process of evolution. This leads them to reject the various notions of "God's Law," "Natural Law," and so on in favour of a theory of ethical development based upon the idea that individuals are entirely empowered to question and assess the world around them -- in fact, they require it in order to be truly free. You cannot be an anarchist and blindly accept **anything**! Michael Bakunin, one of the founding anarchist thinkers, expressed this radical scepticism as so:

*"No theory, no ready-made system, no book that has ever been written will save the world. I cleave to no system. I am a true seeker."*

Any system of ethics which is not based on individual questioning can only be authoritarian. Erich Fromm explains why:

*"Formally, authoritarian ethics denies man's capacity to know what is good or bad; the norm giver is always an authority transcending the individual. Such a system is based not on reason and knowledge but on awe of the authority and on the subject's feeling of weakness and dependence; the surrender of decision making to the authority results from the latter's magic power; its decisions can not and must not be questioned. **Materially**, or according to content, authoritarian ethics answers the question of what is good or bad primarily in terms of the interests of the authority, not the interests of the subject; it is exploitative, although the subject may derive considerable benefits, psychic or material, from it." [Man For Himself, p. 10]*

Therefore Anarchists take, essentially, a scientific approach to problems. Anarchists arrive at ethical judgements without relying on the mythology of spiritual aid, but on the merits of their own minds. This is done through logic and reason, and is a far better route to resolving moral questions than obsolete, authoritarian systems like orthodox religion and certainly better than the "there is no wrong or right" of moral relativism.

So, what are the source of ethical concepts? For Kropotkin, *"nature has thus to be recognised as the **first ethical teacher of man**. The social instinct, innate in men as well as in all the social animals, - this is the origin of all ethical conceptions and all subsequent development of morality."* [Ethics, p. 45]

Life, in other words, is the basis of anarchist ethics. This means that, essentially (according to anarchists), an individual's ethical viewpoints are derived from three basic sources:

1) from the society an individual lives in. As Kropotkin pointed out, "*Man's conceptions of morality are completely dependent upon the form that their social life assumed at a given time in a given locality . . . this [social life] is reflected in the moral conceptions of men and in the moral teachings of the given epoch.*" [Op. Cit., p. 315] In other words, experience of life and of living.

2) A critical evaluation by individuals of their society's ethical norms, as indicated above. This is the core of Erich Fromm's argument that "*Man must accept the responsibility for himself and the fact that only using his own powers can he give meaning to his life . . . there is no meaning to life except the meaning man gives his life by the unfolding of his powers, by living productively.*" [Man for Himself, p. 45] In other words, individual thought and development.

3) The feeling of empathy - "*the true origin of the moral sentiment . . . [is] simply in the feeling of sympathy.*" ["Anarchist Morality", **Anarchism**, p. 94] In other words, an individual's ability to feel and share experiences and concepts with others.

This last factor is very important for the development of a sense of ethics. As Kropotkin argued, "*[t]he more powerful your imagination, the better you can picture to yourself what any being feels when it is made to suffer, and the more intense and delicate will your moral sense be. . . And the more you are accustomed by circumstances, by those surrounding you, or by the intensity of your own thought and your imagination, to act as your own thought and imagination urge, the more will the moral sentiment grow in you, the more will it become habitual.*" [Op. Cit., p. 95]

So, anarchism is based (essentially) upon the ethical maxim "*treat others as you would like them to treat you under similar circumstances.*" Anarchists are neither egoists nor altruists when it comes to moral stands, they are simply **human**.

As Kropotkin noted, "*egoism*" and "*altruism*" both have their roots in the same motive -- "*however great the difference between the two actions in their result of humanity, the motive is the same. It is the quest for pleasure.*" [Op. Cit., p. 85]

For anarchists, a person's sense of ethics must be developed by themselves and requires the full use of an individual's mental abilities as part of a social grouping, as part of a community. As capitalism and other forms of authority weaken the individual's imagination and reduce the number of outlets for them to exercise their reason under the dead weight of hierarchy as well as disrupting community, little wonder that life under capitalism is marked by a stark disregard for others and lack of ethical behaviour.



Combined with these factors is the role played by inequality within society. Without equality, there can be no real ethics for *"Justice implies Equality. . . only those who consider **others** as their **equals** can obey the rule: 'Do not do to others what you do not wish them to do to you.'* A serf-owner and a slave merchant can evidently not recognise . . . the 'categorical imperative' [of treating people as ends in themselves and not as means] as regards serfs [or slaves] because they do not look upon them as equals." Hence the *"greatest obstacle to the maintenance of a certain moral level in our present societies lies in the absence of social equality. Without **real** equality, the sense of justice can never be universally developed, because **Justice implies the recognition of Equality.**"* [Peter Kropotkin, **Evolution and Environment**, p. 88 and p. 79]

Capitalism, like any society, gets the ethical behaviour it deserves..

In a society which moves between moral relativism and absolutism it is little wonder that egoism becomes confused with egotism. By disempowering individuals from developing their own ethical ideas and instead encouraging blind obedience to external authority (and so moral relativism once individuals think that they are without that authority's power), capitalist society ensures an impoverishment of individuality and ego. As Erich Fromm puts it:

*"The failure of modern culture lies not in its principle of individualism, not in the idea that moral virtue is the same as the pursuit of self-interest, but in the deterioration of the meaning of self-interest; not in the fact that people are **too much concerned with their self-interest**, but that they are **not concerned enough with the interest of their real self**; not in the fact that they are **too selfish**, but that they do not love themselves."* [Man for Himself, p. 139]

Therefore, strictly speaking, anarchism is based upon an egoistic frame of reference - ethical ideas must be an expression of what gives us pleasure as a whole individual (both rational and emotional, reason and empathy). This leads all anarchists to reject the false division between egoism and altruism and recognise that what many people (for example, capitalists) call "egoism" results in individual self-negation and a reduction of individual self-interest. As Kropotkin argues:

*"What was it that morality, evolving in animal and human societies, was striving for, if not for the opposition to the promptings of narrow egoism, and bringing up humanity in the spirit of the development of altruism? The very expressions 'egoism' and 'altruism' are incorrect, because there can be no pure altruism without an admixture of personal pleasure - and consequently, without egoism. It would therefore be more nearly correct to say that ethics aims at **the development of social habits and the weakening of the narrowly personal habits**. These last make the individual lose sight of society through his regard for his own person, and therefore they even fail to attain their object, i.e. the welfare of the individual, whereas the development of habits of work in common, and of mutual aid in general, leads to a series of beneficial consequences in the family as well as society."* [Ethics, pp. 307-8]

Therefore anarchism is based upon the rejection of moral absolutism (i.e. "*God's Law*," "*Natural Law*," "*Man's Nature*," "*A is A*") and the narrow egotism which moral relativism so easily lends itself to. Instead, anarchists recognise that there exists concepts of right and wrong which exist outside of an individual's evaluation of their own acts.

This is because of the social nature of humanity. The interactions between individuals do develop into a social maxim which, according to Kropotkin, can be summarised as "*[i]s it useful to society? Then it is good. Is it hurtful? Then it is bad.*" Which acts human beings think of as right or wrong is not, however, unchanging and the "*estimate of what is useful or harmful . . . changes, but the foundation remains the same.*" ["*Anarchist Morality*", **Op. Cit.**, p. 91 and p. 92]

This sense of empathy, based upon a critical mind, is the fundamental basis of social ethics - the 'what-should-be' can be seen as an ethical criterion for the truth or validity of an objective 'what-is.' So, while recognising the root of ethics in nature, anarchists consider ethics as fundamentally a **human** idea - the product of life, thought and evolution created by individuals and generalised by social living and community.

So what, for anarchists, is unethical behaviour? Essentially anything that denies the most precious achievement of history: the liberty, uniqueness and dignity of the individual.

Individuals can see what actions are unethical because, due to empathy, they can place themselves into the position of those suffering the behaviour. Acts which restrict individuality can be considered unethical for two (interrelated) reasons.

Firstly, the protection and development of individuality in all enriches the life of every individual and it gives pleasure to individuals because of the diversity it produces. This egoist basis of ethics reinforces the second (social) reason, namely that individuality is good for society for it enriches the community and social life, strengthening it and allowing it to grow and evolve. As Bakunin constantly argued, progress is marked by a movement from "*the simple to the complex*" or, in the words of Herbert Read, it "*is measured by the degree of differentiation within a society. If the individual is a unit in a corporate mass, his [or her] life will be limited, dull, and mechanical. If the individual is a unit on his [or her] own, with space and potentiality for separate action . . . he can develop - develop in the only real meaning of the word - develop in consciousness of strength, vitality, and joy.*" ["*The Philosophy of Anarchism*," **Anarchy and Order**, p. 37]

This defence of individuality is learned from nature. In an ecosystem, diversity is strength and so biodiversity becomes a source of basic ethical insight. In its most basic form, it provides a guide to "*help us distinguish which of our actions serve the thrust of natural evolution and which of them impede them.*" [Murray Bookchin, **The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 342]

So, the ethical concept "*lies in the feeling of sociality, inherent in the entire animal world and in the conceptions of equity, which constitutes one of the fundamental primary judgements of human reason.*"

Therefore anarchists embrace *"the permanent presence of a **double tendency** - towards greater development on the one side, of **sociality**, and, on the other side, of a consequent increase of the intensity of life which results in an increase of happiness for the **individuals**, and in progress - physical, intellectual, and moral."* [Kropotkin, **Ethics**, pp. 311-2 and pp. 19-20]

Anarchist attitudes to authority, the state, capitalism, private property and so on all come from our ethical belief that the liberty of individuals is of prime concern and that our ability to empathize with others, to see ourselves in others (our basic equality and common individuality, in other words).

Thus anarchism combines the subjective evaluation by individuals of a given set of circumstances and actions with the drawing of objective interpersonal conclusions of these evaluations based upon empathic bounds and discussion between equals. Anarchism is based on a humanistic approach to ethical ideas, one that evolves along with society and individual development. Hence an **ethical** society is one in which *"[d]ifference among people will be respected, indeed fostered, as elements that enrich the unity of experience and phenomenon . . . [the different] will be conceived of as individual parts of a whole all the richer because of its complexity."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 82]

## A.2.20 Why are most anarchists atheists?

It is a fact that most anarchists are atheists. They reject the idea of god and oppose all forms of religion, particularly organised religion. Today, in secularised western European countries, religion has lost its once dominant place in society. This often makes the militant atheism of anarchism seem strange. However, once the negative role of religion is understood the importance of libertarian atheism becomes obvious. It is because of the role of religion and its institutions that anarchists have spent some time refuting the idea of religion as well as propagandising against it.

So why do so many anarchists embrace atheism? The simplest answer is that most anarchists are atheists because it is a logical extension of anarchist ideas. If anarchism is the rejection of illegitimate authorities, then it follows that it is the rejection of the so-called Ultimate Authority, God. Anarchism is grounded in reason, logic, and scientific thinking, not religious thinking. Anarchists tend to be sceptics, and not believers. Most anarchists consider the Church to be steeped in hypocrisy and the Bible a work of fiction, riddled with contradictions, absurdities and horrors. It is notorious in its debasement of women and its sexism is infamous. Yet men are treated little better. Nowhere in the bible is there an acknowledgement that human beings have inherent rights to life, liberty, happiness, dignity, fairness, or self-government. In the bible, humans are sinners, worms, and slaves (figuratively and literally, as it condones slavery). God has all the rights, humanity is nothing.

This is unsurprisingly, given the nature of religion. Bakunin put it best:

*"The idea of God implies the abdication of human reason and justice; it is the most decisive negation of human liberty, and necessarily ends in the enslavement of mankind, both in theory and in practice."*

*"Unless, then, we desire the enslavement and degradation of mankind . . . we may not, must not make the slightest concession either to the God of theology or to the God of metaphysics. He who, in this mystical alphabet, begins with A will inevitably end with Z; he who desires to worship God must harbour no childish illusions about the matter, but bravely renounce his liberty and humanity.*

*"If God is, man is a slave; now, man can and must be free; then, God does not exist."* [**God and the State**, p. 25]

For most anarchists, then, atheism is required due to the nature of religion. *"To proclaim as divine all that is grand, just, noble, and beautiful in humanity,"* Bakunin argued, *"is to tacitly admit that humanity of itself would have been unable to produce it -- that is, that, abandoned to itself, its own nature is miserable, iniquitous, base, and ugly. Thus we come back to the essence of all religion -- in other words, to the disparagement of humanity for the greater glory of divinity."* As such, to do justice to our humanity and the potential it has, anarchists argue that we must do without the harmful myth of god and all it entails and so on behalf of *"human liberty, dignity, and prosperity, we believe it our duty to recover from heaven the goods which it has stolen and return them to earth."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 37 and p. 36]

As well as the theoretical degrading of humanity and its liberty, religion has other, more practical, problems with it from an anarchist point of view. Firstly, religions have been a source of inequality and oppression. Christianity (like Islam), for example, has always been a force for repression whenever it holds any political or social sway (believing you have a direct line to god is a sure way of creating an authoritarian society). The Church has been a force of social repression, genocide, and the justification for every tyrant for nearly two millennia. When given the chance it has ruled as cruelly as any monarch or dictator. This is unsurprising:

*"God being everything, the real world and man are nothing. God being truth, justice, goodness, beauty, power and life, man is falsehood, iniquity, evil, ugliness, impotence, and death. God being master, man is the slave. Incapable of finding justice, truth, and eternal life by his own effort, he can attain them only through a divine revelation. But whoever says revelation, says revealers, messiahs, prophets, priests, and legislators inspired by God himself; and these, as the holy instructors of humanity, chosen by God himself to direct it in the path of salvation, necessarily exercise absolute power. All men owe them passive and unlimited obedience; for against the divine reason there is no human reason, and against the justice of God no terrestrial justice holds."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 24]

Christianity has only turned tolerant and peace-loving when it is powerless and even then it has continued its role as apologist for the powerful. This is the second reason why anarchists oppose the church for when not being the source of oppression, the church has justified it and ensured its continuation. It has kept the working class in bondage for generations by sanctioning the rule of earthly

authorities and teaching working people that it is wrong to fight against those same authorities. Earthly rulers received their legitimisation from the heavenly lord, whether political (claiming that rulers are in power due to god's will) or economic (the rich having been rewarded by god). The bible praises obedience, raising it to a great virtue. More recent innovations like the Protestant work ethic also contribute to the subjugation of working people.

That religion is used to further the interests of the powerful can quickly be seen from most of history. It conditions the oppressed to humbly accept their place in life by urging the oppressed to be meek and await their reward in heaven. As Emma Goldman argued, Christianity (like religion in general) *"contains nothing dangerous to the regime of authority and wealth; it stands for self-denial and self-abnegation, for penance and regret, and is absolutely inert in the face of every [in]dignity, every outrage imposed upon mankind."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 234]

Thirdly, religion has always been a conservative force in society. This is unsurprising, as it bases itself not on investigation and analysis of the real world but rather in repeating the truths handed down from above and contained in a few holy books. Theism is then *"the theory of speculation"* while atheism is *"the science of demonstration."* The *"one hangs in the metaphysical clouds of the Beyond, while the other has its roots firmly in the soil. It is the earth, not heaven, which man must rescue if he is truly to be saved."* Atheism, then, *"expresses the expansion and growth of the human mind"* while theism *"is static and fixed."* It is *"the absolutism of theism, its pernicious influence upon humanity, its paralysing effect upon thought and action, which Atheism is fighting with all its power."* [Emma Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 243, p. 245 and pp. 246-7]

As the Bible says, *"By their fruits shall ye know them."* We anarchists agree but unlike the church we apply this truth to religion as well. That is why we are, in the main, atheists. We recognise the destructive role played by the Church, and the harmful effects of organised monotheism, particularly Christianity, on people. As Goldman summaries, religion *"is the conspiracy of ignorance against reason, of darkness against light, of submission and slavery against independence and freedom; of the denial of strength and beauty, against the affirmation of the joy and glory of life."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 240]

So, given the fruits of the Church, anarchists argue that it is time to uproot it and plant new trees, the trees of reason and liberty.

That said, anarchists do not deny that religions contain important ethical ideas or truths. Moreover, religions can be the base for strong and loving communities and groups. They can offer a sanctuary from the alienation and oppression of everyday life and offer a guide to action in a world where everything is for sale. Many aspects of, say, Jesus' or Buddha's life and teachings are inspiring and worth following. If this were not the case, if religions were simply a tool of the powerful, they would have long ago been rejected. Rather, they have a dual-nature in that contain both ideas necessary to live a good life as well as apologetics for power. If they did not, the oppressed would not believe and the powerful would suppress them as dangerous heresies.

And, indeed, repression has been the fate of any group that has preached a radical message. In the middle ages numerous revolutionary Christian movements and sects were crushed by the earthly powers that be with the firm support of the mainstream church. During the Spanish Civil War the Catholic church supported Franco's fascists, denouncing the killing of pro-Franco priests by supporters of the republic while remaining silent about Franco's murder of Basque priests who had supported the democratically elected government (Pope John Paul II is seeking to turn the dead pro-Franco priests into saints while the pro-Republican priests remain unmentioned). The Archbishop of El Salvador, Oscar Arnulfo Romero, started out as a conservative but after seeing the way in which the political and economic powers were exploiting the people became their outspoken champion. He was assassinated by right-wing paramilitaries in 1980 because of this, a fate which has befallen many other supporters of liberation theology, a radical interpretation of the Gospels which tries to reconcile socialist ideas and Christian social thinking.

Nor does the anarchist case against religion imply that religious people do not take part in social struggles to improve society. Far from it. Religious people, including members of the church hierarchy, played a key role in the US civil rights movement of the 1960s. The religious belief within Zapata's army of peasants during the Mexican revolution did not stop anarchists taking part in it (indeed, it had already been heavily influenced by the ideas of anarchist militant Ricardo Flores Magon). It is the dual-nature of religion which explains why many popular movements and revolts (particularly by peasants) have taken used the rhetoric of religion, seeking to keep the good aspects of their faith will fighting the earthly injustice. For anarchists, it is the willingness to fight against injustice which counts, not whether someone believes in god or not. We just think that the social role of religion is to dampen down revolt, not encourage it. The tiny number of radical priests compared to those in the mainstream or on the right suggests the validity of our analysis.

It should be stressed that anarchists, while overwhelmingly hostile to the idea of the Church and an established religion, do not object to people practising religious belief on their own or in groups, so long as that practice doesn't impinge on the liberties of others. For example, a cult that required human sacrifice or slavery would be antithetical to anarchist ideas, and would be opposed. But peaceful systems of belief could exist in harmony within in anarchist society. The anarchist view is that religion is a personal matter, above all else -- if people want to believe in something, that's their business, and nobody else's as long as they do not impose those ideas on others. All we can do is discuss their ideas and try and convince them of their errors.

To end, it should noted that we are not suggesting that atheism is somehow mandatory for an anarchist. Far from it. As we discuss in [section A.3.7](#), there are anarchists who do believe in god or some form of religion. For example, Tolstoy combined libertarian ideas with a devote Christian belief. His ideas, along with Proudhon's, influences the Catholic Worker organisation, founded by anarchists Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin in 1933 and still active today. The anarchist activist Starhawk, active in the current anti-globalisation movement, has no problems also being a leading Pagan. However, for most anarchists, their ideas lead them logically to atheism for, as Emma Goldman put it, *"in its negation of gods is at the same time the strongest affirmation of man, and through man, the eternal yea to life, purpose, and beauty."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 248]



## C.8 Is state control of money the cause of the business cycle?

As explained in the [last section](#), capitalism will suffer from a boom-and-bust cycle due to objective pressures on profit production, even if we ignore the subjective revolt against authority by working class people. It is this two-way pressure on profit rates, the subjective and objective, which causes the business cycle and such economic problems as "stagflation." However, for supporters of the free market, this conclusion is unacceptable and so they usually try to explain the business cycle in terms of **external** influences rather than those generated by the way capitalism works. Most pro-"free market" capitalists blame government intervention in the market, particularly state control over money, as the source of the business cycle. This analysis is defective, as will be shown below.

It should be noted that many supporters of capitalism ignore the "subjective" pressures on capitalism that we discussed in [section C.7.1](#). In addition, the problems associated with rising capital investment (as highlighted in [section C.7.3](#)) are also usually ignored, because they usually consider capital to be "productive" and so cannot see how its use could result in crises. This leaves them with the problems associated with the price mechanism, as discussed in [section C.7.2](#).

The idea behind the "state-control-of-money" theory of crises is that interest rates provide companies and individuals with information about how price changes will affect future trends in production. Specifically, the claim is that changes in interest rates (i.e. changes in the demand and supply of credit) indirectly inform companies of the responses of their competitors. For example, if the price of tin rises, this will lead to an expansion in investment in the tin industry, so leading to a rise in interest rates (as more credit is demanded). This rise in interest rates lowers anticipated profits and dampens the expansion. State control of money stops this process (by distorting the interest rate) and so results in the credit system being unable to perform its economic function. This results in overproduction as interest rates do not reflect **real** savings and so capitalists over-invest in new capital, capital which appears profitable only because the interest rate is artificially low. When the rate inevitably adjusts upwards towards its "real" value, the invested capital becomes unprofitable and so over-investment appears. Hence, according to the argument, by eliminating state control of money these negative effects of capitalism would disappear.

Before discussing whether state control of money **is** the cause of the business cycle, we must point out that the argument concerning the role of the interest rate does not, in fact, explain the occurrence of over-investment (and so the business cycle). In other words, the explanation of the business cycle as lying in the features of the credit system is flawed. This is because it is **not** clear that the **relevant** information is communicated by changes in interest rates. Interest rates reflect the general aggregate demand for credit in an economy. However, the information which a **specific** company requires is about the over-expansion in the production of the specific good they produce and so the level of demand for credit



amongst competitors, **not** the general demand for credit in the economy as a whole. An increase in the planned production of some good by a group of competitors will be reflected in a proportional change in interest rates only if it is assumed that the change in demand for credit by that industry is identical with that found in the economy as a whole.

There is no reason to suppose such an assumption is true, given the different production cycles of different industries and their differing needs for credit (in both terms of amount and of intensity). Therefore, assuming uneven changes in the demand for credit between industries reflecting uneven changes in their requirements, it is quite possible for over-investment (and so over-production) to occur, even if the credit system is working as it should in theory (i.e. the interest rate is, in fact, accurately reflecting the **real** savings available). The credit system, therefore, does not communicate the **relevant** information, and for this reason, it cannot be the case that the business cycle can be explained by departure from an "ideal system" (i.e. laissez-faire capitalism).

Therefore, it cannot be claimed that removing state-control of money will also remove the business-cycle. However, the arguments that the state control of money do have an element of truth in them. Expansion of credit above the "natural" level which equates it with savings can and does allow capital to expand further than it otherwise would and so encourages over-investment (i.e. it builds upon trends already present rather than **creating** them). While we have ignored the role of credit expansion in our comments above to stress that credit is not fundamental to the business cycle, it is useful to discuss this as it is an essential factor in real capitalist economies. Indeed, without it capitalist economies would not have grown as fast as they have. Credit is fundamental to capitalism, in other words.

There are two main approaches to the question of eliminating state control of money in "free market" capitalist economics -- **Monetarism** and what is often called "**free banking**." We will take each in turn (a third possible "solution" is to impose a 100% gold reserve limit for banks, but as this is highly interventionist, and so not laissez-faire, simply impossible as there is not enough gold to go round and has all the problems associated with inflexible money regimes we highlight below, we will not discuss it).

Monetarism was very popular in the 1970s and is associated with the works of Milton Friedman. It is far less radical than the "free banking" school and argues that rather than abolish state money, its issue should be controlled. Friedman stressed, like most capitalist economists, that monetary factors are the important feature in explaining such problems of capitalism as the business cycle, inflation and so on. This is unsurprising, as it has the useful ideological effect of acquitting the inner-workings of capitalism of any involvement in such problems. Slumps, for example, may occur, but they are the fault of the state interfering in the economy. This is how Friedman explains the Great Depression of the 1930s in the USA, for example (see his "*The Role of Monetary Policy*" in **American Economic Review**, March, 1968). He also explains inflation by arguing it was a purely monetary phenomenon caused by the state printing more money than required by the growth of economic activity (for example, if the economy grew by 2% but the money supply increased by 5%, inflation would rise by 3%). This analysis of inflation is deeply flawed, as we will see.

Thus Monetarists argued for controlling the money supply, of placing the state under a "*monetary constitution*" which ensured that the central banks be required by law to increase the quantity of money at a constant rate of 3-5% a year. This would ensure that inflation would be banished, the economy would adjust to its natural equilibrium, the business cycle would become mild (if not disappear) and capitalism would finally work as predicted in the economics textbooks. With the "*monetary constitution*" money would become "depoliticised" and state influence and control over money would be eliminated. Money would go back to being what it is in neo-classical theory, essentially neutral, a link between production and consumption and capable of no mischief on its own.

Unfortunately for Monetarism, its analysis was simply wrong. Even more unfortunately for both the theory and vast numbers of people, it was proven wrong not only theoretically but also empirically. Monetarism was imposed on both the USA and the UK in the early 1980s, with disastrous results. As the Thatcher government in 1979 applied Monetarist dogma the most whole-heartedly we will concentrate on that regime (the same basic things occurred under Reagan as well).

Firstly, the attempt to control the money supply failed, as predicted in 1970 by the radical Keynesian Nicholas Kaldor (see his essay "*The New Monetarism*" in **Further Essays on Applied Economics**, for example). This is because the money supply, rather than being set by the central bank or the state (as Friedman claimed), is a function of the demand for credit, which is itself a function of economic activity. To use economic terminology, Friedman had assumed that the money supply was "*exogenous*" and so determined outside the economy by the state when, in fact, it is "*endogenous*" in nature (i.e. comes from **within** the economy). This means that any attempt to control the money supply will fail. Charles P. Kindleburger comments:

*"As a historical generalisation, it can be said that every time the authorities stabilise or control some quantity of money. . . in moments of euphoria more will be produced. Or if the definition of money is fixed in terms of particular assets, and the euphoria happens to 'monetise' credit in new ways that are excluded from the definition, the amount of money defined in the old way will not grow, but its velocity will increase. . . fix any [definition of money] and the market will create new forms of money in periods of boom to get round the limit."* [**Manias, Panics and Crashes**, p. 48]

The experience of the Thatcher and Reagan regimes indicates this well. The Thatcher government could not meet the money controls it set -- the growth was 74%, 37% and 23% above the top of the ranges set in 1980 [Ian Gilmore, **Dancing With Dogma**, p. 22]. It took until 1986 before the Tory government stopped announcing monetary targets, persuaded no doubt by its inability to hit them. In addition, the variations in the money supply also showed that Milton Friedman's argument on what caused inflation was also wrong. According to his theory, inflation was caused by the money supply increasing faster than the economy, yet inflation **fell** as the money supply increased. As the moderate conservative Ian Gilmore points out, "[h]ad Friedmanite monetarism. . . been right, inflation would have been about 16 per cent in 1982-3, 11 per cent in 1983-4, and 8 per cent in 1984-5. In fact . . . in the relevant years it never approached the levels infallibly predicted by monetarist doctrine." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 52] From an

anarchist perspective, however, the fall in inflation was the result of the high unemployment of this period as it weakened labour, so allowing profits to be made in production rather than in circulation (see [section C.7.1](#)). With no need for capitalists to maintain their profits via price increases, inflation would naturally decrease as labour's bargaining position was weakened by massive unemployment. Rather than being a purely monetary phenomena as Friedman claimed, it is a product of the profit needs of capital and the state of the class struggle.

It is also of interest to note that even in Friedman's own test of his basic contention, the Great Depression of 1929-33, he got it wrong. Kaldor noted pointed out that "*[a]ccording to Friedman's own figures, the amount of 'high-powered money'. . . in the US increased, not decreased, throughout the Great Contraction: in July 1932, it was more than 10 per cent higher than in July, 1929. . . The Great Contraction of the money supply . . . occurred **despite** this increase in the monetary base.*" [Op. Cit., pp. 11-12] Other economists also investigated Friedman's claims, with similar result -- "*Peter Temin took issue with Friedman and Schwartz from a Keynesian point of view [in the book **Did Monetary Forces Cause the Great Depression?**]. He asked whether the decline in spending resulted from a decline in the money supply or the other way round. . . [He found that] the money supply not only did not decline but actually increased 5 percent between August 1929 and August 1931. . . Temin concluded that there is no evidence that money caused the depression between the stock market crash and. . . September 1931.*" [Charles P. Kindleburger, Op. Cit., p. 60]

In other words, causality runs from the real economy to money, not vice versa, and fluctuations in the money supply results from fluctuations in the economy. If the money supply is endogenous, and it is, this would be expected. Attempts to control the money supply would, of necessity, fail and the only tool available would take the form of raising interest rates. This would reduce inflation, for example, by depressing investment, generating unemployment, and so (eventually) slowing the growth in wages. Which is what happened in the 1980s. Trying to "control" the money supply actually meant increasing interest rates to extremely high levels, which helped produce the worse depression since the end of the war (a depression which Friedman notably failed to predict).

Given the absolute failure of Monetarism, in both theory and practice, it is little talked about now. However, in the 1970s it was the leading economic dogma of the right -- the right which usually likes to portray itself as being strong on the economy. It is useful to indicate that this is not the case. In addition, we discuss the failure of Monetarism in order to highlight the problems with the "*free banking*" solution to state control of money. This school of thought is associated with the "Austrian" school of economics and right-wing libertarians in general (we also discuss this theory in [section F.10.1](#)). It is based on totally privatising the banking system and creating a system in which banks and other private companies compete on the market to get their coins and notes accepted by the general population. This position is not the same as anarchist mutual banking as it is seen not as a way of reducing usury to zero but rather as a means of ensuring that interest rates work as they are claimed to do in capitalist theory.

The "free banking" school argues that under competitive pressures, banks would maintain a 100% ratio between the credit they provide and the money they issue with the reserves they actually have (i.e.

market forces would ensure the end of fractional reserve banking). They argue that under the present system, banks can create more credit than they have funds/reserves available. This pushes the rate of interest below its "natural rate" (i.e. the rate which equates savings with investment). Capitalists, misinformed by the artificially low interest rates invest in more capital intensive equipment and this, eventually, results in a crisis, a crisis caused by over-investment ("Austrian" economists term this "*malinvestment*"). If banks were subject to market forces, it is argued, then they would not generate credit money, interest rates would reflect the real rate and so over-investment, and so crisis, would be a thing of the past.

This analysis, however, is flawed. We have noted one flaw above, namely the problem that interest rates do not provide sufficient or correct information for investment decisions. Thus relative over-investment could still occur. Another problem follows on from our discussion of Monetarism, namely the endogenous nature of money and the pressures this puts on banks. The noted post-keynesian economist Hyman Minsky created an analysis which gives an insight into why it is doubtful that even a "free banking" system would resist the temptation to create credit money (i.e. loaning more money than available savings). This model is often called "*The Financial Instability Hypothesis*."

Let us assume that the economy is going into the recovery period after a crash. Initially firms would be conservative in their investment while banks would lend within their savings limit and to low-risk investments. In this way the banks do ensure that the interest rate reflects the natural rate. However, this combination of a growing economy and conservatively financed investment means that most projects succeed and this gradually becomes clear to managers/capitalists and bankers. As a result, both managers and bankers come to regard the present risk premium as excessive. New investment projects are evaluated using less conservative estimates of future cash flows. This is the foundation of the new boom and its eventual bust. In Minsky's words, "*stability is destabilising*."

As the economy starts to grow, companies increasingly turn to external finance and these funds are forthcoming because the banking sector shares the increased optimism of investors. Let us not forget that banks are private companies too and so seek profits as well. Providing credit is the key way of doing this and so banks start to accommodate their customers and they have to do this by credit expansion. If they did not, the boom would soon turn into slump as investors would have no funds available for them and interest rates would increase, thus forcing firms to pay more in debt repayment, an increase which many firms may not be able to do or find difficult. This in turn would suppress investment and so production, generating unemployment (as companies cannot "fire" investments as easily as they can fire workers), so reducing consumption demand along with investment demand, so deepening the slump.

However, due to the rising economy bankers accommodate their customers and generate credit rather than rise interest rates. In this way they accept liability structures both for themselves and for their customers "*that, in a more sober expectational climate, they would have rejected*." [Minsky, **Inflation, Recession and Economic Policy**, p. 123] The banks innovate their financial products, in other words, in line with demand. Firms increase their indebtedness and banks are more than willing to allow this due to the few signs of financial strain in the economy. The individual firms and banks increase their financial liability, and so the whole economy moves up the liability structure.

However, eventually interest rates rise (as the existing extension of credit appears too high) and this affects all firms, from the most conservative to the most speculative, and "pushes" them up even higher up the liability structure (conservative firms no longer can repay their debts easily, less conservative firms fail to pay them and so on). The margin of error narrows and firms and banks become more vulnerable to unexpected developments, such a new competitors, strikes, investments which do not generate the expected rate of return, credit becoming hard to get, interest rates increase and so on. In the end, the boom turns to slump and firms and banks fail.

The "free banking" school reject this claim and argue that private banks in competition would **not** do this as this would make them appear less competitive on the market and so customers would frequent other banks (this is the same process by which inflation would be solved by a "free banking" system). However, it is **because** the banks are competing that they innovate -- if they do not, another bank or company would in order to get more profits. This can be seen from the fact that "*[b]ank notes. . . and bills of exchange. . . were initially developed because of an inelastic supply of coin*" [Kindleburger, **Op. Cit.**, p. 51] and "*any shortage of commonly-used types [of money] is bound to lead to the emergence of new types; indeed, this is how, historically, first bank notes and the chequing account emerged*" [Kaldor, **Op. Cit.**, p. 10]

This process can be seen at work in Adam Smith's **The Wealth of Nations**. Scotland in Smith's time was based on a competitive banking system and, as Smith notes, they issued more money than was available in the banks coffers:

*"Though some of those notes [the banks issued] are continually coming back for payment, part of them continue to circulate for months and years together. Though he [the banker] has generally in circulation, therefore, notes to the extent of a hundred thousand pounds, twenty thousand pounds in gold and silver may frequently be a sufficient provision for answering occasional demands."* [**The Wealth of Nations**, pp. 257-8]

In other words, the competitive banking system did not, in fact, eliminate fractional reserve banking. Ironically enough, Smith noted that "*the Bank of England paid very dearly, not only for its own imprudence, but for the much greater imprudence of almost all of the Scotch [sic!] banks.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 269] Thus the central bank was more conservative in its credit generation than the banks under competitive pressures! Indeed, Smith argues that the banking companies did not, in fact, act in line with their interests as assumed by the "free banking" school:

*"had every particular banking company always understood and and attended to its own particular interest, the circulation never could have been overstocked with paper money. But every particular baking company has not always understood and attended to its own particular interest, and the circulation has frequently been overstocked with paper money."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 267]

Thus we have reserve banking plus bankers acting in ways opposed to their "*particular interest*" (i.e. what economics consider to be their actual self-interest rather than what the bankers actually thought was their self-interest!) in a system of competitive banking. Why could this be the case? Smith mentions, in passing, a possible reason. He notes that "*the high profits of trade afforded a great temptation to over-trading*" and that while a "*multiplication of banking companies. . . increases the security of the public*" by forcing them "*to be more circumspect in their conduct*" it also "*obliges all bankers to be more liberal in their dealings with their customers, lest their rivals should carry them away.*" [Op. Cit., p. 274, p. 294]

Thus "free banking" is pulled in two directions at once, to accommodate their customers while being circumspect in their activities. Which factor prevails would depend on the state of the economy, with up-swings provoking liberal lending (as described by Minsky). Moreover, given that the "free banking" school argues that credit generation produces the business cycle, it is clear from the case of Scotland that competitive banking does not, in fact, stop credit generation (and so the business cycle, according to "Austrian" theory). This also seemed the case with 19th century America, which did not have a central bank for most of that period -- "*the up cycles were also extraordinary [like the busts], powered by loose credit and kinky currencies (like privately issued banknotes).*" [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 94]

Most "free banking" supporters also argue that regulated systems of free banking were more unstable than unregulated. Perhaps this is the case, but that implies that the regulated systems could not freely accommodate their customers by generating credit and the resulting inflexible money regime created problems by increasing interest rates and reducing the amount of money available, which would result in a slump sooner rather than later. Thus the over supply of credit, rather than being the **cause** of the crisis is actually a symptom. Competitive investment also drives the business-cycle expansion, which is allowed and encouraged by the competition among banks in supplying credit. Such expansion complements -- and thus amplifies -- other objective tendencies towards crisis, such as over-investment and disproportionality.

In other words, a pure "free market" capitalist would still have a business cycle as this cycle is caused by the nature of capitalism, not by state intervention. In reality (i.e. in "actually existing" capitalism), state manipulation of money (via interest rates) is essential for the capitalist class as it is more related to indirect profit-generating activity, such as ensuring a "natural" level of unemployment to keep profits up, an acceptable level of inflation to ensure increased profits, and so forth, as well as providing a means of tempering the business cycle, organising bailouts and injecting money into the economy during panics. If state manipulation of money caused the problems of capitalism, we would not have seen the economic successes of the post-war Keynesian experiment or the business cycle in pre-Keynesian days and in countries which had a more free banking system (for example, nearly half of the late 19th century in the US was spent in periods of recession and depression, compared to a fifth since the end of World War II).

It is true that all crises have been preceded by a speculatively-enhanced expansion of production and credit. This does not mean, however, that crisis **results** from speculation and the expansion of credit. The connection is not causal in free market capitalism. The expansion and contraction of credit is a mere symptom of the periodic changes in the business cycle, as the decline of profitability contracts credit just

as an increase enlarges it.

Paul Mattick gives the correct analysis:

*"[M]oney and credit policies can themselves change nothing with regard to profitability or insufficient profits. Profits come only from production, from the surplus value produced by workers. . . The expansion of credit has always been taken as a sign of a coming crisis, in the sense that it reflected the attempt of individual capital entities to expand despite sharpening competition, and hence survive the crisis. . . Although the expansion of credit has staved off crisis for a short time, it has never prevented it, since ultimately it is the real relationship between total profits and the needs of social capital to expand in value which is the decisive factor, and that cannot be altered by credit."* [**Economics, Politics and the Age of Inflation**, pp. 17-18]

In short, the apologists of "free market" capitalism confuse the symptoms for the disease.

Where there is no profit to be had, credit will not be sought. While extension of the credit system *"can be a factor deferring crisis, the actual outbreak of crisis makes it into an aggravating factor because of the larger amount of capital that must be devalued."* [Paul Mattick, **Economic Crisis and Crisis Theory**, p. 138] But this is also a problem facing private companies using the gold standard, as advocated by right-wing Libertarians (who are supporters of "free market" capitalism and banking). The money supply reflects the economic activity within a country and if that supply cannot adjust, interest rates rise and provoke a crisis. Thus the need for a flexible money supply (as desired, for example, by the US Individualist Anarchists). As Adam Smith pointed out, *"the quantity of coin in every country is regulated by the value of the commodities which are to be circulated by it: increase that value and . . . the additional quantity of coin requisite for circulating them [will be found]."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 385]

Token money came into being because commodity money proved to be too inflexible for this to occur, as *"the expansion of production or trade unaccompanied by an increase in the amount of money must cause a fall in the price level. . . Token money was developed at an early date to shelter trade from the enforced deflations that accompanied the use of specie when the volume of business swelled. . . Specie is an inadequate money just because it is a commodity and its amount cannot be increased at will. The amount of gold available may be increased by a few per cent a year, but not by as many dozen within a few weeks, as might be required to carry out a sudden expansion of transactions. In the absence of token money business would have to be either curtailed or carried on at very much lower prices, thus inducing a slump and creating unemployment."* [Karl Polanyi, **The Great Transformation**, p. 193]

To sum up, *"[i]t is not credit but only the increase in production made possible by it that increases surplus value. It is then the rate of exploitation which determines credit expansion."* [Paul Mattick, **Economics, Politics and the Age of Inflation**, p. 18] Hence token money would increase and decrease in line with capitalist profitability, as predicted in capitalist economic theory. But this could not affect the business cycle, which has its roots in production for capital (i.e. profit) and capitalist authority

relations, to which the credit supply would obviously be tied, and not vice versa.

## C.8.1 Does this mean that Keynesianism works?

If state control of credit does not cause the business cycle, does that mean Keynesianism capitalism can work? Keynesian economics, as opposed to free market capitalism, maintains that the state can and should intervene in the economy in order to stop economic crises from occurring. The post-war boom presents compelling evidence that it can be effect the business cycle for the better by reducing its impact from developing into a full depression.

The period of social Keynesianism after the war was marked by reduced inequality, increased rights for working people, less unemployment, a welfare state you could actually use and so on. Compared to present-day capitalism, it had much going for it. However, Keynesian capitalism is still capitalism and so is still based upon oppression and exploitation. It was, in fact, a more refined form of capitalism, within which the state intervention was used to protect capitalism from itself while trying to ensure that working class struggle against it was directed, via productivity deals, into keeping the system going. For the population at large, the general idea was that the welfare state (especially in Europe) was a way for society to get a grip on capitalism by putting some humanity into it. In a confused way, the welfare state was supported as an attempt to create a society in which the economy existed for people, not people for the economy.

While the state has always had a share in the total surplus value produced by the working class, only under Keynesianism is this share increased and used actively to manage the economy. Traditionally, placing checks on state appropriation of surplus value had been one of the aims of classical capitalist thought (simply put, cheap government means more surplus value available for capitalists to compete for). But as capital has accumulated, so has the state increased and its share in social surplus (for control over the domestic enemy has to be expanded and society protected from the destruction caused by free market capitalism).

Indeed, such state intervention was not **totally** new for "*[f]rom its origins, the United States had relied heavily on state intervention and protection for the development of industry and agriculture, from the textile industry in the early nineteenth century, through the steel industry at the end of the century, to computers, electronics, and biotechnology today. Furthermore, the same has been true of every other successful industrial society.*" [World Orders, Old and New, p. 101]

The roots of the new policy of higher levels and different forms of state intervention lie in the Great Depression of the 1930s and the realisation that attempts to enforce widespread reductions in money wages and costs (the traditional means to overcome depression) were impossible because the social and economic costs would have been too expensive. A militant strike wave involving a half million workers occurred in 1934, with factory occupations and other forms of militant direct action commonplace.

Instead of attempting the usual class war (which may have had revolutionary results), sections of the



capitalist class thought a new approach was required. This involved using the state to manipulate credit in order to increase the funds available for capital and to increase demand by state orders. As Paul Mattick points out:

*"The additional production made possible by deficit financing does appear as additional demand, but as demand unaccompanied by a corresponding increase in total profits. . . [this] functions immediately as an increase in demand that stimulates the economy as a whole and can become the point for a new prosperity"* if objective conditions allow it.  
[**Economic Crisis and Crisis Theory**, p. 143]

State intervention can, in the short term, postpone crises by stimulating production. This can be seen from the in 1930s New Deal period under Roosevelt when the economy grew five years out of seven compared to it shrinking every year under the pro-laissez-faire Republican President Herbert Hoover (under Hoover, the GNP shrank an average of -8.4 percent a year, under Roosevelt it grew by 6.4 percent). The 1938 slump after 3 years of growth under Roosevelt was due to a decrease in state intervention:

*"The forces of recovery operating within the depression, as well as the decrease in unemployment via public expenditures, increased production up to the output level of 1929. This was sufficient for the Roosevelt administration to drastically reduce public works. . . in a new effort to balance the budget in response to the demands of the business world. . . The recovery proved to be short-lived. At the end of 1937 the Business Index fell from 110 to 85, bring the economy back to the state in which it had found itself in 1935. . . Millions of workers lost their jobs once again."* [Paul Mattick, **Economics, Politics and the Age of Inflation**, p. 138]

With the success of state intervention during the second world war, Keynesianism was seen as a way of ensuring capitalist survival. The resulting boom is well known, with state intervention being seen as the way of ensuring prosperity for all sections of society. Before the Second World War, the USA (for example) suffered eight depressions, since the war there has been none (although there has been periods of recession). There is no denying that for a considerable time, capitalism has been able to prevent the rise of depressions which so plagued the pre-war world and that this was accomplished by government interventions.

This is because Keynesianism can serve to initiate a new prosperity and postpone crisis by the extension of credit. This can mitigate the conditions of crisis, since one of its short-term effects is that it offers private capital a wider range of action and an improved basis for its own efforts to escape the shortage of profits for accumulation. In addition, Keynesianism can fund Research and Development in new technologies and working methods (such as automation), guarantee markets for goods as well as transferring wealth from the working class to capital via taxation and inflation.

In the long run, however, Keynesian *"management of the economy by means of monetary and credit*

*policies and by means of state-induced production must eventually find its end in the contradictions of the accumulation process.*" [Paul Mattick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 18]

So, these interventions did not actually set aside the underlying causes of economic and social crisis. The modifications of the capitalist system could not totally countermand the subjective and objective limitations of a system based upon wage slavery and social hierarchy. This can be seen when the rosy picture of post-war prosperity changed drastically in the 1970s when economic crisis returned with a vengeance, with high unemployment occurring along with high inflation. This soon led to a return to a more "free market" capitalism with, in Chomsky's words, *"state protection and public subsidy for the rich, market discipline for the poor."* This process, and its effects, are discussed in the next two sections.

## **C.8.2 What happened to Keynesianism in the 1970s?**

Basically, the subjective and objective limitations to Keynesianism we highlighted in the last section were finally reached in the early 1970s. Economic crisis returned with massive unemployment accompanied with high inflation, with the state interventions that for so long kept capitalism healthy making the crisis worse. In other words, a combination of social struggle and a lack of surplus value available to capital resulted in the breakdown of the successful post-war consensus.

The roots and legacy of this breakdown in Keynesianism is informative and worth analysing. The post-war period marked a distinct change for capitalism, with new, higher levels of state intervention. So why the change? Simply put, because capitalism was not a viable system. It had not recovered from the Great Depression and the boom economy during war had obviously contrasted deeply with the stagnation of the 1930s. Plus, of course, a militant working class, which has put up with years of denial in the struggle against fascist-capitalism would not have taken lightly to a return to mass unemployment and poverty. So, politically and economically a change was required. This change was provided by the ideas of Keynes, a change which occurred under working class pressure but in the interests of the ruling class.

The mix of intervention obviously differed from country to country, based upon the needs and ideologies of the ruling parties and social elites. In Europe nationalisation was widespread as inefficient capital was taken over by the state and reinvigorated by state funding and social spending more important as Social Democratic parties attempted to introduce reforms. Chomsky describes the process in the USA:

*"Business leaders recognised that social spending could stimulate the economy, but much preferred the military Keynesian alternative - for reasons having to do with privilege and power, not 'economic rationality.' This approach was adopted at once, the Cold War serving as the justification. . . . The Pentagon system was considered ideal for these purposes. It extends well beyond the military establishment, incorporating also the Department of Energy. . . and the space agency NASA, converted by the Kennedy administration to a significant component of the state-directed public subsidy to advanced industry. These arrangements impose on the public a large burden of the costs of industry*

*(research and development, R&D) and provide a guaranteed market for excess production, a useful cushion for management decisions. Furthermore, this form of industrial policy does not have the undesirable side-effects of social spending directed to human needs. Apart from unwelcome redistributive effects, the latter policies tend to interfere with managerial prerogatives; useful production may undercut private gain, while state-subsidised waste production. . . is a gift to the owner and manager, to whom any marketable spin-offs will be promptly delivered. Social spending may also resource public interest and participation, thus enhancing the threat of democracy. . . The defects of social spending do not taint the military Keynesian alternative. For such reasons, **Business Week** explained, 'there's a tremendous social and economic difference between welfare pump-priming and military pump-priming,' the latter being far preferable." [World Orders, Old and New, pp. 100-101]*

Over time, social Keynesianism took increasing hold even in the USA, partly in response to working class struggle, partly due to the need for popular support at elections and partly due to "[p]opular opposition to the Vietnam war [which] prevented Washington from carrying out a national mobilisation. . . which might have made it possible to complete the conquest without harm to the domestic economy. Washington was forced to fight a 'guns-and-butter' war to placate the population, at considerable economic cost." [Noam Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 157-8]

Social Keynesianism directs part of the total surplus value to workers and unemployed while military Keynesianism transfers surplus value from the general population to capital and from capital to capital. This allows R&D and capital to be publicly subsidised, as well as essential but unproductive capital to survive. As long as real wages did not exceed a rise in productivity, Keynesianism would continue. However, both functions have objective limits as the transfer of profits from successful capital to essential, but less successful, or long term investment can cause a crisis if there is not enough profit available to the system as a whole. The surplus value producing capital, in this case, would be handicapped due to the transfers and cannot respond to economic problems with freely as before.

This lack of profitable capital was part of the reason for the collapse of the post-war consensus. In their deeply flawed 1966 book, **Monopoly Capital**, radical economists Baran and Sweezy point out that "[i]f military spending were reduced once again to pre-Second World War proportions the nation's economy would return to a state of profound depression" [p. 153]

In other words, the US economy was still in a state of depression, countermanded by state expenditures (for a good, if somewhat economic, critique of Baran and Sweezy see Paul Mattick's "*Monopoly Capital*" in **Anti-Bolshevik Communism**).

In addition, the world was becoming economically "tripolar," with a revitalised Europe and a Japan-based Asian region emerging as major economic forces. This placed the USA under increased pressure, as did the Vietnam War. However, the main reason for its breakdown was social struggle by working people. The only limit to the rate of growth required by Keynesianism to function is the degree to which

final output consists of consumption goods for the presently employed population instead of investment. And investment is the most basic means by which work, i.e. capitalist domination, is imposed. Capitalism and the state could no longer ensure that working class struggles could be contained within the system.

This pressure on US capitalism had an impact in the world economy and was also accompanied by general social struggle across the world. This struggle was directed against hierarchy in general, with workers, students, women, ethnic groups, anti-war protesters and the unemployed all organising successful struggles against authority. This struggle attacked the hierarchical core of capitalism as well increasing the amount of income going to labour, resulting in a profit squeeze (see section [C.7](#)) creating an economic crisis.

In other words, post-war Keynesianism failed simply because it could not, in the long term, stop the subjective and objective pressures which capitalism always faces.

### C.8.3 How did capitalism adjust to the crisis in Keynesianism?

Basically by using, and then managing, the 1970s crisis to discipline the working class in order to reap increased profits and secure and extend the ruling classes' power. It did this using a combination of crisis, free markets and adjusted Keynesianism as part of a ruling elite lead class war against labour.

In the face of crisis in the 1970s, Keynesianist redirection of profits between capitals and classes had become a burden to capital as a whole and had increased the expectations and militancy of working people to dangerous levels. The crisis, however, helped control working class power and was latter utilised as a means of saving capitalism.

Initially the crisis was used to justify attacks on working class people in the name of the free market. And, indeed, capitalism was made more market based, although with a "safety net" and "welfare state" for the wealthy. We have seen a partial return to *"what economists have called freedom of industry and commerce, but which really meant the relieving of industry from the harassing and repressive supervision of the State, and the giving to it full liberty to exploit the worker, whom was still to be deprived of his freedom."* [Peter Kropotkin, **The Great French Revolution**, p. 28] The "crisis of democracy" was overcome and replaced with the *"liberty to exploit human labour without any safeguard for the victims of such exploitation and the political power organised as to assure freedom of exploitation to the middle-class."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 30]

Then under the rhetoric of "free market" capitalism, Keynesianism was used to manage the crisis as it had previously managed the prosperity. "Supply Side" economics (combined with neo-classical dogma) was used to undercut working class power and consumption and so allow capital to reap more profits off working people. Unemployment was used to discipline a militant workforce and as a means of getting workers to struggle **for** work instead of **against** wage labour. With the fear of job loss hanging over their heads, workers put up with speedups, longer hours, worse conditions, less safety protection and lower

wages and this increased the profits that could be extracted directly from workers as well as reducing business costs by allowing employers to reduce on-job safety and protection and so on. The labour "market" was fragmented to a large degree into powerless, atomised units with unions fighting a losing battle in the face of state backed recession. In this way capitalism could successfully change the composition of demand from the working class to capital.

This disciplining of the working class resulted in the income going to capital increasing by more than double the amount of that going to "labour." Between 1979 and 1989, total labour income rose by 22.8%, total capital income rose by 65.3% and realised capital gains by 205.5%. The real value of a standard welfare benefit package has also declined by some 26 percent since 1972. [Edward S. Herman, *Immiserating Growth: The First World*, **Z Magazine**] And Stanford University economist Victor Fuch estimates that US children have lost 10-12 hours of parental time between 1960 and 1986, leading to a deterioration of family relations and values. Unemployment and underemployment is still widespread, with most newly created jobs being part-time.

We should point out that the growth in income going to labour includes all "labour" incomes and as such includes the "wages" of CEOs and high level managers. As we have already noted, these "wages" are part of the surplus value extracted from workers and so should not be counted as income to "labour." The facts of the Reagan fronted class war of the 1980s is that while top management income has skyrocketed, workers wages have remained usually stable or decreased absolutely. For example, the median hourly wage of US production workers has fallen by some 13% since 1973 (we are not implying that only production workers create surplus value or are "the working class"). In contrast, US management today receives 150 times what the average worker earns. Unsurprisingly 70% of the recent gain in per capita income have gone to the top 1% of income earners (while the bottom lost absolutely). [Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 141] Income inequality has increased, with the income of the bottom fifth of the US population falling by 18%, while that of the richest fifth rose by 8%.

Indirect means of increasing capital's share in the social income were also used, such as reducing environment regulations, so externalising pollution costs onto current and future generations. In Britain, state owned monopolies were privatised at knock-down prices allowing private capital to increase its resources at a fraction of the real cost. Indeed, some nationalised industries were privatised as **monopolies** allowing monopoly profits to be extracted from consumers for many years before the state allowed competition in those markets. Indirect taxation also increased, being used to reduce working class consumption by getting us to foot the bill for Pentagon-style Keynesianism.

Exploitation of under-developed nations increased with \$418 billion being transferred to the developed world between 1982 and 1990 [Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 130] Capital also became increasingly international in scope, as it used advances in technology to move capital to third world countries where state repression ensured a less militant working class. This transfer had the advantage of increasing unemployment in the developed world, so placing more pressures upon working class resistance.

This policy of capital-led class war, a response to the successful working class struggles of the 1960s

and 1970s, obviously reaped the benefits it was intended to for capital. Income going to capital has increased and that going to labour has declined and the "labour market" has been disciplined to a large degree (but not totally we must add). Working people have been turned, to a large degree, from participants into spectators, as required for any hierarchical system. The human impact of these policies cannot be calculated. Little wonder, then, the utility of neo-classical dogma to the elite - it could be used by rich, powerful people to justify the fact that they are pursuing social policies that create poverty and force children to die.

As Chomsky argues, *"one aspect of the internationalisation of the economy is the extension of the two-tiered Third World mode to the core countries. Market doctrine thus becomes an essential ideological weapon at home as well, its highly selective application safely obscured by the doctrinal system. Wealth and power are increasingly concentrated. Service for the general public - education, health, transportation, libraries, etc. - become as superfluous as those they serve, and can therefore be limited or dispensed with entirely."* [Year 501, p. 109]

The state managed recession has had its successes. Company profits are up as the "competitive cost" of workers is reduced due to fear of job losses. The **Wall Street Journal's** review of economic performance for the last quarter of 1995 is headlined *"Companies' Profits Surged 61% on Higher Prices, Cost Cuts."* After-tax profits rose 62% from 1993, up from 34% for the third quarter. While working America faces market forces, Corporate America posted record profits in 1994. **Business Week** estimated 1994 profits to be up *"an enormous 41% over [1993],"* despite a bare 9% increase in sales, a *"colossal success,"* resulting in large part from a *"sharp"* drop in the *"share going to labour,"* though *"economists say labour will benefit -- eventually."* [cited by Noam Chomsky, "Rollback III", **Z Magazine**, April 1995]

Moreover, for capital, Keynesianism is still goes on as before, combined (as usual) with praises to market miracles. For example, Michael Borrus, co-director of the Berkeley Roundtable on the International Economy (a corporate-funded trade and technology research institute), cites a 1988 Department of Commerce study that states that *"five of the top six fastest growing U.S. industries from 1972 to 1988 were sponsored or sustained, directly or indirectly, by federal investment."* He goes on to state that the *"winners [in earlier years were] computers, biotechnology, jet engines, and airframes"* all *"the by-product of public spending."* [cited by Chomsky, **World Orders, Old and New**, p. 109]

As James Midgley points out, *"the aggregate size of the public sector did not decrease during the 1980s and instead, budgetary policy resulted in a significant shift in existing allocations from social to military and law enforcement."* ["The radical right, politics and society", **The Radical Right and the Welfare State**, Howard Glennerster and James Midgley (eds.), p. 11]

Indeed, the US state funds one third of all civil R&D projects, and the UK state provides a similar subsidy. [Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 107] And after the widespread collapse of Savings and Loans Associations in deregulated corruption and speculation, the 1980s pro-"free market" Republican administration happily bailed them out, showing that market forces were only for one class.

The corporate owned media attacks social Keynesianism, while remaining silent or justifying pro-business state intervention. Combined with extensive corporate funding of right-wing "think-tanks" which explain why (the wrong sort of) social programmes are counter-productive, the corporate state system tried to fool the population into thinking that there is no alternative to the rule by the market while the elite enrich themselves at the public's expense.

So, social Keynesianism has been replaced by Pentagon Keynesianism cloaked beneath the rhetoric of "free market" dogma. Combined with a strange mix of free markets (for the many) and state intervention (for the select few), the state has become stronger and more centralised and *"prisons also offer a Keynesian stimulus to the economy, both to the construction business and white collar employment; the fastest growing profession is reported to be security personnel."* [Chomsky, **Year 501**, p. 110]

While working class resistance continues, it is largely defensive, but, as in the past, this can and will change. Even the darkest night ends with the dawn and the lights of working class resistance can be seen across the globe. For example, the anti-Poll Tax struggle in Britain against the Thatcher Government was successful as have been many anti-cuts struggles across the USA and Western Europe, the Zapatista uprising in Mexico is inspiring and there has been continual strikes and protests across the world. Even in the face of state repression and managed economic recession, working class people are still fighting back. The job for anarchists is to encourage these sparks of liberty and help them win.

## C.7 What causes the capitalist business cycle?

The business cycle is the term used to describe the boom and slump nature of capitalism. Sometimes there is full employment, with workplaces producing more and more goods and services, the economy grows and along with it wages. However, as Proudhon argued, this happy situation does not last:

*"But industry, under the influence of property, does not proceed with such regularity. . . As soon as a demand begins to be felt, the factories fill up, and everybody goes to work. Then business is lively. . . Under the rule of property, the flowers of industry are woven into none but funeral wreaths. The labourer digs his own grave. . . [the capitalist] tries. . . to continue production by lessening expenses. Then comes the lowering of wages; the introduction of machinery; the employment of women and children . . . the decreased cost creates a larger market. . . [but] the productive power tends to more than ever outstrip consumption. . . To-day the factory is closed. Tomorrow the people starve in the streets. . . In consequence of the cessation of business and the extreme cheapness of merchandise. . . frightened creditors hasten to withdraw their funds [and] Production is suspended, and labour comes to a standstill."* [P-J Proudhon, **What is Property**, pp. 191-192]

Why does this happen? For anarchists, as Proudhon noted, it's to do with the nature of capitalist production and the social relationships it creates ("*the rule of property*"). The key to understanding the business cycle is to understand that, to use Proudhon's words, "*Property sells products to the labourer for more than it pays him for them; therefore it is impossible.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 194] In other words, the need for the capitalist to make a profit from the workers they employ is the underlying cause of the business cycle. If the capitalist class cannot make enough profit, then it will stop production, sack people, ruin lives and communities until such as enough profit can again be extracted from the workers.

So what influences this profit level? There are two main classes of pressure on profits, what we will call the "*subjective*" and "*objective*." The objective pressures are related to what Proudhon termed the fact that "*productive power tends more and more to outstrip consumption*" and are discussed in sections [C.7.2](#) and [C.7.3](#). The "subjective" pressures are to do with the nature of the social relationships created by capitalism, the relations of domination and subjection which are the root of exploitation and the resistance to them. In other words the subjective pressures are the result of the fact that "*property is despotism*" (to use Proudhon's expression). We will discuss the impact of the class struggle (the "subjective" pressure) in the [next section](#).

Before continuing, we would like to stress here that all three factors operate together in a real economy and we have divided them purely to help explain the issues involved in each one. The class struggle, market "communication" creating disproportionalities and over-investment all interact. Due to the needs of the internal (class struggle) and external (inter-company) competition, capitalists have to invest in new means of production. As workers' power increase during a boom, capitalists innovate and invest in



order to try and counter it. Similarly, to get market advantage (and so increased profits) over their competitors, a company invests in new machinery. However, due to lack of effective communication within the market caused by the price mechanism and incomplete information provided by the interest rate, this investment becomes concentrated in certain parts of the economy. Relative over-investment can occur, creating the possibility of crisis. In addition, the boom encourages new companies and foreign competitors to try and get market share, so decreasing the "*degree of monopoly*" in an industry, and so reducing the mark-up and profits of big business (which, in turn, can cause an increase in mergers and take-overs towards the end of the boom). Meanwhile, workers power is increasing, causing profit margins to be eroded, but also reducing tendencies to over-invest by resisting the introduction of new machinery and technics and by maintaining demand for the finished goods. This contradictory effect of class struggle matches the contradictory effect of investment. Just as investment causes crisis because it is useful (i.e. it helps increase profits for individual companies in the short term, but it leads to collective over-investment and falling profits in the long term), the class struggle both hinders over-accumulation of capital and maintains aggregate demand (so postponing the crisis) while at the same time eroding profit margins at the point of production (so accelerating it). Thus subjective and objective factors interact and counteract with each other, but in the end a crisis will result simply because the system is based upon wage labour and the producers are not producing for themselves. Ultimately, a crisis is caused when the capitalist class does not get a sufficient rate of profit. If workers produced for themselves, this decisive factor would not be an issue as no capitalist class would exist.

And we should note that these factors work in reverse during a slump, creating the potential for a boom. During a crisis, capitalists still try to improve their profitability (i.e. increase surplus value). Labour is in a weak position due to the large rise in unemployment and so, usually, accept the increased rate of exploitation this implies to remain in work. In the slump, many firms go out of business, so reducing the amount of fixed capital in the economy. In addition, as firms go under the "*degree of monopoly*" of each industry increases, which increases the mark-up and profits of big business. Eventually this increased surplus value production is enough relative to the (reduced) fixed capital stock to increase the rate of profit. This encourages capitalists to start investing again and a boom begins (a boom which contains the seeds of its own end).

And so the business cycle continues, driven by "subjective" and "objective" pressures -- pressures that are related directly to the nature of capitalist production and the wage labour on which it is based.

## **C.7.1 What role does class struggle play in the business cycle?**

At its most basic, the class struggle (the resistance to hierarchy in all its forms) is the main cause of the business cycle. As we argued in [section B.1.2](#) and [section C.2](#), capitalists in order to exploit a worker must first oppress them. But where there is oppression, there is resistance; where there is authority, there is the will to freedom. Hence capitalism is marked by a continuous struggle between worker and boss at the point of production as well as struggle outside of the workplace against other forms of hierarchy.

This class struggle reflects a conflict between workers attempts at liberation and self-empowerment and

capitals attempts to turn the individual worker into a small cog in a big machine. It reflects the attempts of the oppressed to try to live a fully human life, expressed when the *"worker claims his share in the riches he produces; he claims his share in the management of production; and he claims not only some additional well-being, but also his full rights in the higher enjoyment of science and art."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, pp. 48-49]

As Errico Malatesta argued, if workers *"succeed in getting what they demand, they will be better off: they will earn more, work fewer hours and will have more time and energy to reflect on things that matter to them, and will immediately make greater demands and have greater needs. . . [T]here exists no natural law (law of wages) which determines what part of a worker's labour should go to him [or her]. . . Wages, hours and other conditions of employment are the result of the struggle between bosses and workers. The former try and give the workers as little as possible; the latter try, or should try to work as little, and earn as much, as possible. Where workers accept any conditions, or even being discontented, do not know how to put up effective resistance to the bosses demands, they are soon reduced to bestial conditions of life. Where, instead, they have ideas of how human beings should live and know how to join forces, and through refusal to work or the latent and open threat of rebellion, to win bosses respect, in such cases, they are treated in a relatively decent way. . . Through struggle, by resistance against the bosses, therefore, workers can, up to a certain point, prevent a worsening of their conditions as well as obtaining real improvement."* [**Life and Ideas**, pp. 191-2]

It is this struggle that determines wages and indirect income such as welfare, education grants and so forth. This struggle also influences the concentration of capital, as capital attempts to use technology to control workers (and so extract the maximum surplus value possible from them) and to get an advantage against their competitors (see [section C.2.3](#)). And, as will be discussed in section D.10 ([How does capitalism affect technology?](#)), increased capital investment also reflects an attempt to increase the control of the worker by capital (or to replace them with machinery that cannot say "no") **plus** the transformation of the individual into "the mass worker" who can be fired and replaced with little or no hassle. For example, Proudhon quotes an "English Manufacturer" who states that he invested in machinery precisely to replace humans by machines because machines are easier to control:

*"The insubordination of our workforce has given us the idea of dispensing with them. We have made and stimulated every imaginable effort of the mind to replace the service of men by tools more docile, and we have achieved our object. Machinery has delivered capital from the oppression of labour."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 189]

(To which Proudhon replied *"[w]hat a misfortunate that machinery cannot also deliver capital from the oppression of consumers!"* as the over-production and inadequate market caused by machinery replacing people soon destroys these illusions of automatic production by a slump -- see [section C.7.3](#)).

Therefore, class struggle influences both wages and capital investment, and so the prices of commodities in the market. It also, more importantly, determines profit levels and it is profit levels that are the cause of the business cycle. This is because, under capitalism, production's *"only aim is to increase the profits*

*of the capitalist. And we have, therefore, - the continuous fluctuations of industry, the crisis coming periodically. . .* " [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 55]

A common capitalist myth, derived from the capitalist Subjective Theory of Value, is that free-market capitalism will result in a continuous boom, since the cause of slumps is allegedly state control of credit and money. Let us assume, for a moment, that this is the case. (In fact, it is not the case, as will be highlighted in [section C.8](#)). In the "boom economy" of "free market" dreams, there will be full employment. But in a period of full employment, while it helps *"increase total demand, its fatal characteristic from the business view is that it keeps the reserve army of the unemployed low, thereby protecting wage levels and strengthening labour's bargaining power."* [Edward S. Herman, **Beyond Hypocrisy**, p. 93]

In other words, workers are in a very strong position under boom conditions, a strength which can undermine the system. This is because capitalism always proceeds along a tightrope. If a boom is to continue smoothly, real wages must develop within a certain band. If their growth is too low then capitalists will find it difficult to sell the products their workers have produced and so, because of this, face what is often called a *"realisation crisis"* (i.e. the fact that capitalists cannot make a profit if they cannot sell their products). If real wage growth is too high then the conditions for producing profits are undermined as labour gets more of the value it produces. This means that in periods of boom, when unemployment is falling, the conditions for realisation improve as demand for consumer goods increase, thus expanding markets and encouraging capitalists to invest. However, such an increase in investment (and so employment) has an adverse effect on the conditions for **producing** surplus value as labour can assert itself at the point of production, increase its resistance to the demands of management and, far more importantly, make its own.

If an industry or country experiences high unemployment, workers will put up with longer hours, stagnating wages, worse conditions and new technology in order to remain in work. This allows capital to extract a higher level of profit from those workers, which in turn signals other capitalists to invest in that area. As investment increases, unemployment falls. As the pool of available labour runs dry, then wages will rise as employers bid for scarce resources and workers feel their power. As workers are in a better position they can go from resisting capital's agenda to proposing their own (e.g. demands for higher wages, better working conditions and even for workers' control). As workers' power increases, the share of income going to capital falls, as do profit rates, and capital experiences a profits squeeze and so cuts down on investment and employment and/or wages. The cut in investment increases unemployment in the capital goods sector of the economy, which in turn reduces demand for consumption goods as jobless workers can no longer afford to buy as much as before. This process accelerates as bosses fire workers or cut their wages and the slump deepens and so unemployment increases, which begins the cycle again. This can be called "subjective" pressure on profit rates.

This interplay of profits and wages can be seen in most business cycles. As an example, let's consider the crisis which ended post-war Keynesianism in the early 1970's and paved the way for the "supply side revolutions" of Thatcher and Reagan. This crisis, which occurred in 1973, had its roots in the 1960s

boom. If we look at the USA we find that it experienced continuous growth between 1961 and 1969 (the longest in its history). From 1961 onwards, unemployment steadily fell, effectively creating full employment. From 1963, the number of strikes and total working time lost steadily increased (from around 3000 strikes in 1963 to nearly 6000 in 1970). The number of wildcat strike rose from 22% of all strikes in 1960 to 36.5% in 1966. By 1965 both the business profit shares and business profit rates peaked. The fall in profit share and rate of profit continued until 1970 (when unemployment started to increase), where it rose slightly until the 1973 slump occurred. In addition, after 1965, inflation started to accelerate as capitalist firms tried to maintain their profit margins by passing cost increases to consumers (as we discuss below, inflation has far more to do with capitalist profits than it has with money supply or wages). This helped to reduce real wage gains and maintain profitability over the 1968 to 1973 period above what it otherwise would have been, which helped postpone, but not stop, a slump.

Looking at the wider picture, we find that for the advanced capital countries as a whole, the product wage rose steadily between 1962 and 1971 while productivity fell. The product wage (the real cost to the employer of hiring workers) meet that of productivity in 1965 (at around 4%) -- which was also the year in which profit share in income and the rate of profit peaked . From 1965 to 1971, productivity continued to fall while the product wage continued to rise. This process, the result of falling unemployment and rising workers' power (expressed, in part, by an explosion in the number of strikes across Europe and elsewhere), helped to ensure that the actual post-tax real wages and productivity in a the advanced capitalist countries increased at about the same rate from 1960 to 1968 (4%). But between 1968 and 1973, post-tax real wages increased by an average of 4.5% compared to a productivity rise of only 3.4%. Moreover, due to increased international competition companies could not pass on wage rises to consumers in the form of higher prices (which, again, would only have postponed, but not stopped, the slump). As a result of these factors, the share of profits going to business fell by about 15% in that period.

In addition, outside the workplace a *"series of strong liberation movements emerged among women, students and ethnic minorities. A crisis of social institutions was in progress, and large social groups were questioning the very foundations of the modern, hierarchical society: the patriarchal family, the authoritarian school and university, the hierarchical workplace or office, the bureaucratic trade union or party."* [Takis Fotopoulos, *"The Nation-state and the Market,"* p. 58, **Society and Nature**, Vol. 3, pp. 44-45]

These social struggles resulted in an economic crisis as capital could no longer oppress and exploit working class people sufficiently in order to maintain a suitable profit rate. This crisis was then used to discipline the working class and restore capitalist authority within and without the workplace (see [section C.8.2](#)). We should also note that this process of social revolt in spite, or perhaps because of, the increase of material wealth was predicted by Malatesta. In 1922 he argued that:

*"The fundamental error of the reformists is that of dreaming of solidarity, a sincere collaboration, between masters and servants. . .*

*"Those who envisage a society of well stuffed pigs which waddle contentedly under the ferule of a small number of swineherd; who do not take into account the need for freedom and the sentiment of human dignity. . . can also imagine and aspire to a technical organisation of production which assures abundance for all and at the same time materially advantageous both to bosses and the workers. But in reality 'social peace' based on abundance for all will remain a dream, so long as society is divided into antagonistic classes, that is employers and employees. . .*

*"The antagonism is spiritual rather than material. There will never be a sincere understanding between bosses and workers for the better exploitation [sic!] of the forces of nature in the interests of mankind, because the bosses above all want to remain bosses and secure always more power at the expense of the workers, as well as by competition with other bosses, whereas the workers have had their fill of bosses and don't want more!" [Life and Ideas, pp. 78-79]*

The experience of the post-war compromise and social democratic reform indicates well that, ultimately, the social question is not poverty but rather freedom. However, to return to the impact of class struggle on capitalism.

More recently, the panics in Wall Street that accompany news that unemployment is dropping in the USA reflect this fear of working class power. Without the fear of unemployment, workers may start to fight for improvements in their conditions, against capitalist oppression and exploitation and **for** liberty and a just world. Every slump within capitalism has occurred when workers have seen unemployment fall and their living standards improve -- not a coincidence.

The Philips Curve, which indicates that inflation rises as employment falls is also an indication of this relationship. Inflation is the situation when there is a general rise in prices. Neo-classical (and other pro-"free market" capitalist) economics argue that inflation is purely a monetary phenomenon, the result of there being more money in circulation than is needed for the sale of the various commodities on the market. However, this is not true. In general, there is no relationship between the money supply and inflation. The amount of money can increase while the rate of inflation falls, for example (as was the case in the USA between 1975 and 1984). Inflation has other roots, namely it is *"an expression of inadequate profits that must be offset by price and money policies. . . Under any circumstances, inflation spells the need for higher profits. . ."* [Paul Mattick, **Economics, Politics and the Age of Inflation**, p. 19] Inflation leads to higher profits by making labour cheaper. That is, it reduces *"the real wages of workers. . . [which] directly benefits employers. . . [as] prices rise faster than wages, income that would have gone to workers goes to business instead."* [J. Brecher and T. Costello, **Common Sense for Hard Times**, p. 120]

Inflation, in other words, is a symptom of an on-going struggle over income distribution between classes and, as workers do not have any control over prices, it is caused when capitalist profit margins are reduced (for whatever reason, subjective or objective). This means that it would be wrong to conclude

that wage increases "cause" inflation as such. To do so ignores the fact that workers do not set prices, capitalists do. Inflation, in its own way, shows the hypocrisy of capitalism. After all, wages are increasing due to "natural" market forces of supply and demand. It is the capitalists who are trying to buck the market by refusing to accept lower profits caused by conditions on that market. Obviously, to use Tucker's expression, under capitalism market forces are good for the goose (labour) but bad for the gander (capital).

This does not mean that inflation suits all capitalists equally (nor, obviously, does it suit those social layers who live on fixed incomes and who thus suffer when prices increase but such people are irrelevant in the eyes of capital). Far from it - during periods of inflation, lenders tend to lose and borrowers tend to gain. The opposition to high levels of inflation by many supporters of capitalism is based upon this fact and the division within the capitalist class it indicates. There are two main groups of capitalists, finance capitalists and industrial capitalists. The latter can and do benefit from inflation (as indicated above) but the former sees high inflation as a threat. When inflation is accelerating it can push the real interest rate into negative territory and this is a horrifying prospect to those for whom interest income is fundamental (i.e. finance capital). In addition, high levels of inflation can also fuel social struggle, as workers and other sections of society try to keep their income at a steady level. As social struggle has a politicising effect on those involved, a condition of high inflation could have serious impacts on the political stability of capitalism and so cause problems for the ruling class.

How inflation is viewed in the media and by governments is an expression of the relative strengths of the two sections of the capitalist class and of the level of class struggle within society. For example, in the 1970s, with the increased international mobility of capital, the balance of power came to rest with finance capital and inflation became the source of all evil. This shift of influence to finance capital can be seen from the rise of rentier income. The distribution of US manufacturing profits indicate this process -- comparing the periods 1965-73 to 1990-96, we find that interest payments rose from 11% to 24%, dividend payments rose from 26% to 36% while retained earnings fell from 65% to 40% (given that retained earnings are the most important source of investment funds, the rise of finance capital helps explain why, in contradiction to the claims of the right-wing, economic growth has become steadily worse as markets have been liberalised -- funds that would have been resulted in real investment have ended up in the finance machine). In addition, the waves of strikes and protests that inflation produced had worrying implications for the ruling class. However, as the underlying reasons for inflation remained (namely to increase profits) inflation itself was only reduced to acceptable levels, levels that ensured a positive real interest rate and acceptable profits.

It is the awareness that full employment is bad for business which is the basis of the so-called "*Non-Accelerating Inflation Rate of Unemployment*" (NAIRU). This is the rate of unemployment for an economy under which inflation, it is claimed, starts to accelerate. While the basis of this "theory" is slim (the NAIRU is an invisible, mobile rate and so the "theory" can explain every historical event simply because you can prove anything when your datum cannot be seen by mere mortals) it is very useful for justifying policies which aim at attacking working people, their organisations and their activities. The NAIRU is concerned with a "*wage-price*" spiral caused by falling unemployment and rising workers' rights and power. Of course, you never hear of an "*interest-price*" spiral or a "*rent-price*" spiral or a

"profits-price" spiral even though these are also part of any price. It is always a "wage-price" spiral, simply because interest, rent and profits are income to capital and so, by definition, above reproach. By accepting the logic of NAIRU, the capitalist system implicitly acknowledges that it and full employment are incompatible and so with it any claim that it allocates resources efficiently or labour contracts benefit both parties equally.

For these reasons, anarchists argue that a continual "boom" economy is an impossibility simply because capitalism is driven by profit considerations, which, combined with the subjective pressure on profits due to the class struggle between workers and capitalists, **necessarily** produces a continuous boom-and-bust cycle. When it boils down to it, this is unsurprising, as "*[o]f necessity, the abundance of some will be based upon the poverty of others, and the straitened circumstances of the greater number will have to be maintained at all costs, that there may be hands to sell themselves for a part only of that which they are capable of producing, without which private accumulation of capital is impossible!*" [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 128]

Of course, when such "subjective" pressures are felt on the system, when private accumulation of capital is threatened by improved circumstances for the many, the ruling class denounces working class "greed" and "selfishness." When this occurs we should remember what Adam Smith had to say on this subject:

*"In reality high profits tend much more to raise the price of work than high wages. . . That part of the price of the commodity that resolved itself into wages would. . . rise only in arithmetical proportion to the rise in wages. But if profits of all the different employers of those working people should be raised five per cent., that price of the commodity which resolved itself into profit would. . . rise in geometrical proportion to this rise in profit. . . Our merchants and master manufacturers complain of the bad effects of high wages in raising the price and thereby lessening the sale of their goods at home and abroad. They say nothing concerning the bad effects of high profits. They are silent with regard to the pernicious effects of their own gains. They complain only of those of other people"* [**The Wealth of Nations**, pp. 87-88]

As an aside, we must note that these days we would have to add economists to Smith's "*merchants and master manufacturers.*" Not that this is surprising, given that economic theory has progressed (or degenerated) from Smith's disinterested analysis to apologetics for any action of the boss (a classic example, we must add, of supply and demand, with the marketplace of ideas responding to a demand for such work from "*our merchants and master manufacturers*"). Any "theory" which blames capitalism's problems on "greedy" workers will always be favoured over one that correctly places them in the contradictions created by wage slavery. Proudhon summed up capitalist economic theory well when he stated that "*Political economy -- that is, proprietary despotism -- can never be in the wrong: it must be the proletariat.*" [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 187] And little has changed since 1846 (or 1776!) when it comes to economics "explaining" capitalism's problems (such as the business cycle or unemployment). Ultimately, capitalist economics blame every problem of capitalism on the working class refusing to kow-tow to the bosses (for example, unemployment is caused by wages being too high

rather than bosses needing unemployment to maintain their power and profits -- see [section C.9.2](#) on empirical evidence that indicates that the second explanation is the accurate one).

Before concluding, one last point. While it may appear that our analysis of the "subjective" pressures on capitalism is similar to that of mainstream economics, this is not the case. This is because our analysis recognises that such pressures are inherent in the system, have contradictory effects (and so cannot be easily solved without making things worse before they get better) and hold the potential for creating a free society. Our analysis recognises that workers' power and resistance **is** bad for capitalism (as for any hierarchical system), but it also indicates that there is nothing capitalism can do about it without creating authoritarian regimes (such as Nazi Germany) or by generating massive amounts of unemployment (as was the case in the early 1980s in both the USA and the UK, when right-wing governments deliberately caused deep recessions) and even this is no guarantee of eliminating working class struggle as can be seen, for example, from 1930s America or 1970s Britain.

This means that our analysis shows the limitations and contradictions of the system as well as its need for workers to be in a weak bargaining position in order for it to "work" (which explodes the myth that capitalism is a free society). Moreover, rather than portray working people as victims of the system (as is the case in many Marxist analyses of capitalism) our analysis recognises that we, both individually and collectively, have the power to influence and **change** that system by our activity. We should be proud of the fact that working people refuse to negate themselves or submit their interests to that of others or play the role of order-takers required by the system. Such expressions of the human spirit, of the struggle of freedom against authority, should not be ignored or down-played, rather they should be celebrated. That the struggle against authority causes the system so much trouble is not an argument against social struggle, it is an argument against a system based on hierarchy, exploitation and the denial of freedom.

To sum up, in many ways, social struggle is the inner dynamic of the system, and its most basic contradiction: while capitalism tries to turn the majority of people into commodities (namely, bearers of labour power), it also has to deal with the human responses to this process of objectification (namely, the class struggle). However, it does not follow that cutting wages will solve a crisis -- far from it, for, as we argue in [section C.9.1](#), cutting wages will deepen any crisis, making things worse before they get better. Nor does it follow that, if social struggle were eliminated, capitalism would work fine. After all, if we assume that labour power is a commodity like any other, its price will rise as demand increases relative to supply (which will either produce inflation or a profits squeeze, probably both). Therefore, even without the social struggle which accompanies the fact that labour power cannot be separated from the individuals who sell it, capitalism would still be faced with the fact that only surplus labour (unemployment) ensures the creation of adequate amounts of surplus value.

Moreover, even assuming that individuals can be totally happy in a capitalist economy, willing to sell their freedom and creativity for a little money, putting up, unquestioningly, with every demand and whim of their bosses (and so negating their own personality and individuality in the process), capitalism does have "objective" pressures limiting its development. So while social struggle, as argued above, can have a decisive effect on the health of the capitalist economy, it is not the only problems the system



faces. This is because there are objective pressures within the system beyond and above the authoritarian social relations it produces (and the resistance to them). These pressures are discussed next, in sections [C.7.2](#) and [C.7.3](#).

## C.7.2 What role does the market play in the business cycle?

A major problem with capitalism is the working of the capitalist market itself. For the supporters of "free market" capitalism, the market provides all the necessary information required to make investment and production decisions. This means that a rise or fall in the price of a commodity acts as a signal to everyone in the market, who then respond to that signal. These responses will be co-ordinated by the market, resulting in a healthy economy. For example, a rise in the price of a commodity will result in increased production and reduced consumption of that good, and this will move the economy towards equilibrium.

While it can be granted that this account of the market is not without foundation, it is also clear that the price mechanism does not communicate all the relevant information needed by companies or individuals. This means that capitalism does not work in the way suggested in the economic textbooks. It is the workings of the price mechanism itself which leads to booms and slumps in economic activity and the resulting human and social costs they entail. This can be seen if we investigate the actual processes hidden behind the workings of the price mechanism.

When individuals and companies make plans concerning future production, they are planning not with respect of demand **now** but with respect to expected demand at some **future time** when their products reach the market. The information the price mechanism provides, however, is the relation of supply and demand (or market price with respect to the market production price) at the current time. While this information **is** relevant to people's plans, it is not **all** the information that is relevant or is required by those involved.

The information which the market does **not** provide is that of the plans of **other** people's reactions to the supplied information. This information, moreover, cannot be supplied due to competition. Simply put, if A and B are in competition, if A informs B of her activities and B does not reciprocate, then B is in a position to compete more effectively than A. Hence communication within the market is discouraged and each production unit is isolated from the rest. In other words, each person or company responds to the same signal (the change in price) but each acts independently of the response of other producers and consumers. The result is often a slump in the market, causing unemployment and economic disruption.

For example, let's assume a price rise due to a shortage of a commodity. This results in excess profits in that market, leading the owners of capital to invest in this branch of production in order to get some of these above-average profits. However, consumers will respond to the price rise by reducing their consumption of that good. This means that when the results of these independent decisions are realised, there is an overproduction of that good in the market in relation to effective demand for it. Goods cannot be sold and so there is a realisation crisis as producers cannot make a profit from their products. Given

this overproduction, there is a slump, capital disinvests, and the market price falls. This eventually leads to a rise in demand against supply, production expands leading to another boom and so on.

Proudhon described this process as occurring because of the "*contradiction*" of "the double character of value" (i.e. between value in use and value in exchange). This contradiction results in a good's "*value decreases* [ing] as the production of utility increases, and a producer may arrive at poverty by continually enriching himself" via over-production. This is because a producer "*who has harvested twenty sacks of wheat. . . believes himself twice as rich as if he had harvested only ten. . . Relatively to the household, [they] are right; looked at in their external relations, they may be utterly mistaken. If the crop of wheat is double throughout the whole country, twenty sacks will sell for less than ten would have sold for if it had been as half as great.*" [**The System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 78, pp. 77-78]

This, it should be noted, is not a problem of people making a series of unrelated mistakes. Rather, it results because the market imparts the same information to all involved and this information is not sufficient for rational decision making. While it is rational for each agent to expand or contract production, it is not rational for all agents to act in this manner. In a capitalist economy, the price mechanism does not supply all the information needed to make rational decisions. In fact, it actively encourages the suppression of the needed extra information concerning the planned responses to the original information.

It is this irrationality and lack of information which feed into the business cycle. These local booms and slumps in production of the kind outlined here can then be amplified into general crises due to the insufficient information spread through the economy by the market. However, disproportionalities of capital between industries do not **per se** result in a general crisis. If this was that case the capitalism would be in a constant state of crisis because capital moves between markets during periods of prosperity as well as just before periods of depression. This means that market dislocations cannot be a basis for explaining the existence of a general crisis in the economy (although it can and does explain localised slumps).

Therefore, the tendency to general crisis that expresses itself in a generalised glut on the market is the product of deeper economic changes. While the suppression of information by the market plays a role in producing a depression, a general slump only develops from a local boom and slump cycle when it occurs along with the second side-effect of capitalist economic activity, namely the increase of productivity as a result of capital investment, as well as the subjective pressures of class struggle.

The problems resulting from increased productivity and capital investment are discussed in the [next section](#).

### **C.7.3 What role does investment play in the business cycle?**

Other problems for capitalism arise due to increases in productivity which occur as a result of capital investment or new working practices which aim to increase short term profits for the company. The need

to maximise profits results in more and more investment in order to improve the productivity of the workforce (i.e. to increase the amount of surplus value produced). A rise in productivity, however, means that whatever profit is produced is spread over an increasing number of commodities. This profit still needs to be realised on the market but this may prove difficult as capitalists produce not for existing markets but for expected ones. As individual firms cannot predict what their competitors will do, it is rational for them to try to maximise their market share by increasing production (by increasing investment). As the market does not provide the necessary information to co-ordinate their actions, this leads to supply exceeding demand and difficulties realising the profits contained in the produced commodities. In other words, a period of over-production occurs due to the over-accumulation of capital.

Due to the increased investment in the means of production, variable capital (labour) uses a larger and larger constant capital (the means of production). As labour is the source of surplus value, this means that in the short term profits must be increased by the new investment, i.e. workers must produce more, in relative terms, than before so reducing a firm's production costs for the commodities or services it produces. This allows increased profits to be realised at the current market price (which reflects the old costs of production). Exploitation of labour must increase in order for the return on total (i.e. constant **and** variable) capital to increase or, at worse, remain constant.

However, while this is rational for one company, it is not rational when all firms do it, which they must in order to remain in business. As investment increases, the surplus value workers have to produce must increase faster. If the mass of available profits in the economy is too small compared to the total capital invested then any problems a company faces in making profits in a specific market due to a localised slump caused by the price mechanism may spread to affect the whole economy. In other words, a fall in the rate of profit (the ratio of profit to investment in capital and labour) in the economy as a whole could result in already produced surplus value, earmarked for the expansion of capital, remaining in its money form and thus failing to act as capital. No new investments are made, goods cannot be sold resulting in a general reduction of production and so increased unemployment as companies fire workers or go out of business. This removes more and more constant capital from the economy, increasing unemployment which forces those with jobs to work harder, for longer so allowing the mass of profits produced to be increased, resulting (eventually) in an increase in the rate of profit. Once profit rates are high enough, capitalists have the incentive to make new investments and slump turns to boom.

It could be argued that such an analysis is flawed as no company would invest in machinery if it would reduce its rate of profit. But such an objection is flawed, simply because (as we noted) such investment is perfectly sensible (indeed, a necessity) for a specific firm. By investing they gain (potentially) an edge in the market and so increased profits. Unfortunately, while this is individually sensible, collectively it is not as the net result of these individual acts is over-investment in the economy as a whole. Unlike the model of perfect competition, in a real economy capitalists have no way of knowing the future, and so the results of their own actions, nevermind the actions of their competitors. Thus over-accumulation of capital is the natural result of competition simply because it is individually rational and the future is unknowable. Both of these factors ensure that firms act as they do, investing in machinery which, in the end, will result in a crisis of over-accumulation.

Cycles of prosperity, followed by over-production and then depression are the natural result of capitalism. Over-production is the result of over-accumulation, and over-accumulation occurs because of the need to maximise short-term profits in order to stay in business. So while the crisis appears as a glut of commodities on the market, as there are more commodities in circulation that can be purchased by the aggregate demand ("*Property sells products to the labourer for more than it pays him for them,*" to use Proudhon's words), its roots are deeper. It lies in the nature of capitalist production itself.

A classic example of these "objective" pressures on capitalism is the "Roaring Twenties" that preceded the Great Depression of the 1930s. After the 1921 slump, there was a rapid rise in investment in the USA with investment nearly doubling between 1919 and 1927.

Because of this investment in capital equipment, manufacturing production grew by 8.0% per annum between 1919 and 1929 and labour productivity grew by an annual rate of 5.6% (this is including the slump of 1921-22). This increase in productivity was reflected in the fact that over the post-1922 boom, the share of manufacturing income paid in salaries rose from 17% to 18.3% and the share to capital rose from 25.5% to 29.1%. Managerial salaries rose by 21.9% and firm surplus by 62.6% between 1920 and 1929. With costs falling and prices comparatively stable, profits increased which in turn lead to high levels of capital investment (the production of capital goods increased at an average annual rate of 6.4%).

Unsurprisingly, in such circumstances, in the 1920s prosperity was concentrated at the top 60% of families made less than \$2000 a year, 42% less than \$1000. One-tenth of the top 1% of families received as much income as the bottom 42% and only 2.3% of the population enjoyed incomes over \$10000. While the richest 1% owned 40% of the nation's wealth by 1929 (and the number of people claiming half-million dollar incomes rose from 156 in 1920 to 1489 in 1929) the bottom 93% of the population experienced a 4% drop in real disposable per-capita income between 1923 and 1929.

However, in spite of this, US capitalism was booming and the laissez-faire capitalism was at its peak. But by 1929 all this had changed with the stock market crashing -- followed by a deep depression. What was its cause? Given our analysis presented above, it may have been expected to have been caused by the "boom" decreasing unemployment, so increased working class power and leading to a profits squeeze, but this was not the case.

This slump was **not** the result of working class resistance, indeed the 1920s were marked by a labour market which remained continuously favourable to employers. This was for two reasons. Firstly, the "Palmer Raids" at the end of the 1910s saw the state root out radicals in the US labour movement and wider society. Secondly, the deep depression of 1920-21 (during which national unemployment rates averaged over 9%) combined with the use of legal injunctions by employers against work protests and the use of industrial spies to identify and sack union members made labour weak and so the influence and size of unions fell as workers were forced to sign "yellow-dog" contracts to keep their jobs.

During the post-1922 boom, this position did not change. The national 3.3% unemployment rate hid the fact that non-farm unemployment averaged 5.5% between 1923 and 1929. Across all industries, the growth of manufacturing output did not increase the demand for labour. Between 1919 and 1929, employment of production workers fell by 1% and non-production employment fell by about 6% (during the 1923 to 29 boom, production employment only increased by 2%, and non-production employment remained constant). This was due to the introduction of labour saving machinery and the rise in the capital stock. In addition, the high productivity associated with farming resulted in a flood of rural workers into the urban labour market.

Facing high unemployment, workers' quit rates fell due to fear of losing jobs (particularly those workers with relatively higher wages and employment stability). This combined with the steady decline of the unions and the very low number of strikes (lowest since the early 1880s) indicates that labour was weak. Wages, like prices, were comparatively stable. Indeed, the share of total manufacturing income going to wages fell from 57.5% in 1923-24 to 52.6% in 1928/29 (between 1920 and 1929, it fell by 5.7%). It is interesting to note that even **with** a labour market favourable to employers for over 5 years, unemployment was still high. This suggests that the neo-classical "argument" that unemployment within capitalism is caused by strong unions or high real wages is somewhat flawed to say the least (see [section C.9](#)).

The key to understanding what happened lies the contradictory nature of capitalist production. The "boom" conditions were the result of capital investment, which increased productivity, thereby reducing costs and increasing profits. The large and increasing investment in capital goods was the principal device by which profits were spent. In addition, those sectors of the economy marked by big business (i. e. oligopoly, a market dominated by a few firms) placed pressures upon the more competitive ones. As big business, as usual, received a higher share of profits due to their market position (see [section C.5](#)), this lead to many firms in the more competitive sectors of the economy facing a profitability crisis during the 1920s.

The increase in investment, while directly squeezing profits in the more competitive sectors of the economy, also eventually caused the rate of profit to stagnate, and then fall, over the economy as a whole. While the mass of available profits in the economy grew, it eventually became too small compared to the total capital invested. Moreover, with the fall in the share of income going to labour and the rise of inequality, aggregate demand for goods could not keep up with production, leading to unsold goods (which is another way of expressing the process of over-investment leading to over-production, as over-production implies under-consumption and vice versa). As expected returns (profitability) on investments hesitated, a decline in investment demand occurred and so a slump began (rising predominantly from the capital stock rising faster than profits). Investment flattened out in 1928 and turned down in 1929. With the stagnation in investment, a great speculative orgy occurred in 1928 and 1929 in an attempt to enhance profitability. This unsurprisingly failed and in October 1929 the stock market crashed, paving the way for the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The crash of 1929 indicates the "objective" limits of capitalism. Even with a very weak position of

labour, crisis still occurred and prosperity turned to "hard times." In contradiction to neo-classical economic theory, the events of the 1920s indicate that even if the capitalist assumption that labour is a commodity like all others **is** approximated in real life, capitalism is still subject to crisis (ironically, a militant union movement in the 1920s would have postponed crisis by shifting income from capital to labour, increasing aggregate demand, reducing investment and supporting the more competitive sectors of the economy!). Therefore, any neo-classical "blame labour" arguments for crisis (which were so popular in the 1930s and 1970s) only tells half the story (if that). Even if workers do act in a servile way to capitalist authority, capitalism will still be marked by boom and bust (as shown by the 1920s and 1980s).

To take another example, America's 100 largest firms, employing 5 million persons and having assets of \$126 billion, saw their average amount of assets per worker grow from \$12,200 in 1949 to \$20,900 in 1959 and to \$24,000 in 1962. [First National City Bank, **Economic Letter**, June 1963]. As can be seen, the rate of increase in average assets per worker falls off over time. The initial period of high capital formation was followed by a recessionary period between 1957 and 1961. These years were marked by a sharp increase in unemployment (from 3 million in 1956 to a high of 5 million in 1961) and a higher unemployment rate after the slump than before (an increase of 1 million from 1956 figures to around 4 million in 1962). [T. Brecher and T. Costello, **Common Sense for Hard Times**, chart 2]

We have referred to data from this period, because some supporters of "free market" capitalism have used the same period to argue for the advantages of capital investment. This data actually indicates, however, that increased capital formation helps to create the potential for recession, because although it increases productivity (and so profits) for a period, it reduces profit rates in the long run because there is a relative scarcity of surplus value in the economy (compared to invested capital). This fall in profit rates is indicated by the decrease in capital formation, which is the point of production in the first place within capitalism, as well as by the increase of unemployment during that period.

So, if the profit rate falls to a level that does not allow capital formation to continue, a slump sets in. This general slump is usually started by overproduction for a specific commodity, possibly caused by the process described in [section C.7.2](#). If there are enough profits in the economy, localised slumps have a reduced tendency to grow and become general. A slump only becomes general when the rate of profit over the whole economy falls. A local slump spreads through the market because of the lack of information the market provides producers. When one industry over-produces, it cuts back production, introduces cost-cutting measures, fires workers and so on in order to try and realise more profits. This reduces demand for industries that supplied the affected industry and reduces general demand due to unemployment. The related industries now face over-production themselves and the natural response to the information supplied by the market is for individual companies to reduce production, fire workers, etc., which again leads to declining demand. This makes it even harder to realise profit on the market and leads to more cost cutting, deepening the crisis. While individually this is rational, collectively it is not and so soon all industries face the same problem. A local slump is propagated through the economy because the capitalist economy does not communicate enough information for producers to make rational decisions or co-ordinate their activities.

"Over-production," we should point out, exists only from the viewpoint of capital, not of the working class:

*"What economists call over-production is but a production that is above the purchasing power of the worker. . . this sort of over-production remains fatally characteristic of the present capitalist production, because workers cannot buy with their salaries what they have produced and at the same time copiously nourish the swarm of idlers who live upon their work."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 127-128]

In other words, over-production and under-consumption reciprocally imply each other. There is no over production except in regard to a given level of solvent demand. There is no deficiency in demand except in relation to a given level of production. The goods "over-produced" may be required by consumers, but the market price is too low to generate a profit and so production must be reduced in order to artificially increase it. So, for example, the sight of food being destroyed while people go hungry is a common one in depression years.

So, while the crisis appears on the market as a "commodity glut" (i.e. as a reduction in effective demand) and is propagated through the economy by the price mechanism, its roots lie in production. Until such time as profit levels stabilise at an acceptable level, thus allowing renewed capital expansion, the slump will continue. The social costs of such cost cutting is yet another "externality," to be bothered with only if they threaten capitalists' power and wealth.

There are means, of course, by which capitalism can postpone (but not stop) a general crisis developing. Imperialism, by which markets are increased and profits are extracted from less developed countries and used to boost the imperialist countries profits, is one method ("*The workman being unable to purchase with their wages the riches they are producing, industry must search for markets elsewhere*" - Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 55). Another is state manipulation of credit and other economic factors (such as minimum wages, the incorporation of trades unions into the system, arms production, maintaining a "natural" rate of unemployment to keep workers on their toes etc.). Another is state spending to increase aggregate demand, which can increase consumption and so lessen the dangers of over-production. Or the rate of exploitation produced by the new investments can be high enough to counteract the increase in constant capital and keep the profit rate from falling. However, these have (objective and subjective) limits and can never succeed in stopping depressions from occurring.

Hence capitalism will suffer from a boom-and-bust cycle due to the above-mentioned objective pressures on profit production, even if we ignore the subjective revolt against authority by workers, explained earlier. In other words, even if the capitalist assumption that workers are not human beings but only "variable capital" was true, it would not mean that capitalism was a crisis free system. However, for most anarchists, such a discussion is somewhat academic for human beings are not commodities, the labour "market" is not like the iron market, and the subjective revolt against capitalist domination will exist as long as capitalism does.

C.7 What causes the capitalist business cycle?



## C.2 Where do profits come from?

As mentioned in the [last section](#), profits are the driving force of capitalism. If a profit cannot be made, a good is not produced, regardless of how many people "subjectively value" it. But where do profits come from?

In order to make more money, money must be transformed into capital, i.e., workplaces, machinery and other "capital goods." By itself, however, capital (like money) produces nothing. Capital only becomes productive in the labour process when workers use capital ("*Neither property nor capital produces anything when not fertilised by labour*" - Bakunin). Under capitalism, workers not only create sufficient value (i.e. produced commodities) to maintain existing capital and their own existence, they also produce a surplus. This surplus expresses itself as a surplus of goods, i.e. an excess of commodities compared to the number a workers' wages could buy back. Thus Proudhon:

*"The working man cannot. . . repurchase that which he has produced for his master. It is thus with all trades whatsoever. . . since, producing for a master who in one form or another makes a profit, they are obliged to pay more for their own labour than they get for it."* [**What is Property**, p. 189]

In other words, the price of all produced goods is greater than the money value represented by the workers' wages (plus raw materials and overheads such as wear and tear on machinery) when those goods were produced. The labour contained in these "surplus-products" is the source of profit, which has to be realised on the market. (In practice, of course, the value represented by these surplus-products is distributed throughout all the commodities produced in the form of profit -- the difference between the cost price and the market price).

Obviously, pro-capitalist economics argue against this theory of how a surplus arises. However, one example will suffice here to see why labour is the source of a surplus, rather than (say) "waiting", risk or capital (these arguments, and others, will be discussed below). A good poker-player uses equipment (capital), takes risks, delays gratification, engages in strategic behaviour, tries new tricks (innovates), not to mention cheats, and earns large winnings (and can even do so repeatedly). But no surplus product results from such behaviour; the gambler's winnings are simply redistributions from others with no new production occurring. Thus, risk-taking, abstinence, entrepreneurship, etc. might be necessary for an individual to receive profits but are far from sufficient for them not to be the result a pure redistribution from others (a redistribution, we may add, which can only occur under capitalism if workers produce goods to sell).

Thus, in order for a profit to be generated within capitalism two things are required. Firstly, a group of workers to work the available capital. Secondly, that they must produce more value than they are paid in wages. If only the first condition is present, all that occurs is that social wealth is redistributed between

individuals. With the second condition, a surplus proper is generated. In both cases, however, workers are exploited for without their labour there would be no goods to facilitate a redistribution of existing wealth nor surplus products.

The surplus value produced by labour is divided between profits, interest and rent (or, more correctly, between the owners of the various factors of production other than labour). In practice, this surplus is used by the owners of capital for: (a) investment (b) to pay themselves dividends on their stock, if any; (c) to pay for rent and interest payments; and (d) to pay their executives and managers (who are sometimes identical with the owners themselves) much higher salaries than workers. As the surplus is being divided between different groups of capitalists, this means that there can be clashes of interest between (say) industrial capitalists and finance capitalists. For example, a rise in interest rates can squeeze industrial capitalists by directing more of the surplus from them into the hands of rentiers. Such a rise could cause business failures and so a slump (indeed, rising interest rates is a key way of regulating working class power by generating unemployment to discipline workers by fear of the sack). The surplus, like the labour used to reproduce existing capital, is embodied in the finished commodity and is realised once it is sold. This means that workers do not receive the full value of their labour, since the surplus appropriated by owners for investment, etc. represents value added to commodities by workers -- value for which they are not paid.

So capitalist profits (as well as rent and interest payments) are in essence **unpaid labour**, and hence capitalism is based on exploitation. As Proudhon noted, "**Products, say economists, are only bought by products. This maxim is property's condemnation. The proprietor producing neither by his own labour nor by his implement, and receiving products in exchange for nothing, is either a parasite or a thief.**" [Op. Cit., p. 170] It is this appropriation of wealth from the worker by the owner which differentiates capitalism from the simple commodity production of artisan and peasant economies. All anarchists agree with Bakunin when he stated that:

*"what is property, what is capital in their present form? For the capitalist and the property owner they mean the power and the right, guaranteed by the State, to live without working. . . [and so] the power and right to live by exploiting the work of someone else . . . those . . . [who are] forced to sell their productive power to the lucky owners of both."* [The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 180]

Obviously supporters of capitalism disagree. Profits are not the product of exploitation and workers, capitalists and landlords get paid the value of their contributions to output, they say. A few even talk about "making money work for you" (as if pieces of paper can actually do any form of work!) while, obviously, human beings have to do the actual work (and usually for money). However, all agree that capitalism is not exploitative (no matter how exploitative it may look) and present various arguments why capitalists deserve to keep the products others make. This section of the FAQ presents some of the reasons why anarchists reject this claim.

Lastly, we would like to point out that some apologists for capitalism cite the empirical fact that, in a

modern capitalist economy, a large majority of all income goes to "labour," with profit, interest and rent adding up to something under twenty percent of the total. Of course, even if surplus value was less than 20% of a workers' output, this does not change its exploitative nature. These apologists of capitalism do not say that taxation stops being "theft" just because it is around 10% of all income. However, this value for profit, interest and rent is based on a statistical sleight-of-hand, as "worker" is defined as including everyone who has a salary in a company, including managers and CEOs (income to "labour" includes both wages **and** salaries, in other words). The large incomes which many managers and all CEOs receive would, of course, ensure that a large majority of all income does go to "labour." Thus this "fact" ignores the role of most managers as de facto capitalists and exploiters of surplus value and ignores the changes in industry that have occurred in the last 50 years (see section C.2.5 - [Aren't Executives workers and so creators of value?](#)).

To get a better picture of the nature of exploitation within modern capitalism we have to compare workers wages to their productivity. According to the World Bank, in 1966, US manufacturing wages were equal to 46% of the value-added in production (value-added is the difference between selling price and the costs of raw materials and other inputs to the production process). In 1990, that figure had fallen to 36% and (using figures from 1992 Economic Census of the US Census Bureau) by 1992 it had reached 19.76% (39.24% if we take the **total** payroll which includes managers and so on). In the US construction industry, wages were 35.4% of value added in 1992 (with total payroll, 50.18%). Therefore the argument that because a large percentage of income goes to "labour" capitalism is fine hides the realities of that system and the exploitation its hierarchical nature creates.

We now move on to why this surplus value exists.

## C.2.1 Why does this surplus exist?

It is the nature of capitalism for the monopolisation of the worker's product by others to exist. This is because of private property in the means of production and so in "*consequence of [which] . . . [the] worker, when he is able to work, finds no acre to till, no machine to set in motion, unless he agrees to sell his labour for a sum inferior to its real value.*" [Peter Kropotkin, **Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 55]

Therefore workers have to sell their labour on the market. However, as this "commodity" "*cannot be separated from the person of the worker like pieces of property. The worker's capacities are developed over time and they form an integral part of his self and self-identity; capacities are internally not externally related to the person. Moreover, capacities or labour power cannot be used without the worker using his will, his understanding and experience, to put them into effect. The use of labour power requires the presence of its 'owner'. . . To contract for the use of labour power is a waste of resources unless it can be used in the way in which the new owner requires . . . The employment contract must, therefore, create a relationship of command and obedience between employer and worker.*" [Carole Pateman, **The Sexual Contract**, pp. 150-1]

So, *"the contract in which the worker allegedly sells his labour power is a contract in which, since he cannot be separated from his capacities, he sells command over the use of his body and himself. . . The characteristics of this condition are captured in the term **wage slave**."* [**Ibid.**, p. 151] Or, to use Bakunin's words, *"the worker sells his person and his liberty for a given time" and so "concluded for a term only and reserving to the worker the right to quit his employer, this contract constitutes a sort of **voluntary and transitory serfdom**."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 187]

This domination is the source of the surplus, for *"wage slavery is not a consequence of exploitation - exploitation is a consequence of the fact that the sale of labour power entails the worker's subordination. The employment contract creates the capitalist as master; he has the political right to determine how the labour of the worker will be used, and - consequently - can engage in exploitation."* [Carole Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 149]

So profits exist because the worker sells themselves to the capitalist, who then owns their activity and, therefore, controls them (or, more accurately, **tries** to control them) like a machine. Benjamin Tucker's comments with regard to the claim that capital is entitled to a reward are of use here. He notes that some *"combat. . . the doctrine that surplus value -- oftener called profits -- belong to the labourer because he creates it, by arguing that the horse. . . is rightly entitled to the surplus value which he creates for his owner. So he will be when he has the sense to claim and the power to take it. . . Th[is] argument . . . is based upon the assumption that certain men are born owned by other men, just as horses are. Thus its **reductio ad absurdum** turns upon itself."* [**Instead of a Book**, pp. 495-6]

In other words, to argue that capital should be rewarded is to implicitly assume that workers are just like machinery, another "factor of production" rather than human beings and the creator of things of value. So profits exists because during the working day the capitalist controls the activity and output of the worker (i.e. owns them during working hours as activity cannot be separated from the body and *"[t]here is an integral relationship between the body and self. The body and self are not identical, but selves are inseparable from bodies."* [Carole Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 206]).

Considered purely in terms of output, this results in, as Proudhon noted, workers working *"for an entrepreneur who pays them and keeps their products."* [quoted by Martin Buber, **Paths in Utopia**, p. 29] The ability of capitalists to maintain this kind of monopolisation of another's time and output is enshrined in "property rights" enforced by either public or private states. In short, therefore, property *"is the right to enjoy and dispose at will of another's goods - the fruit of an other's industry and labour."* [P-J Proudhon, **What is Property**, p. 171] And because of this "right," a worker's wage will always be less than the wealth that he or she produces.

The size of this surplus, the amount of unpaid labour, can be changed by changing the duration and intensity of work (i.e. by making workers labour longer and harder). If the duration of work is increased, the amount of surplus value is increased absolutely. If the intensity is increased, e.g. by innovation in the production process, then the amount of surplus value increases relatively (i.e. workers produce the equivalent of their wage sooner during their working day resulting in more unpaid labour for their boss).

Such surplus indicates that labour, like any other commodity, has a use value and an exchange value. Labour's exchange value is a worker's wages, its use value their ability to work, to do what the capitalist who buys it wants. Thus the existence of "surplus products" indicates that there is a difference between the exchange value of labour and its use value, that labour can **potentially** create **more** value than it receives back in wages. We stress potentially, because the extraction of use value from labour is not a simple operation like the extraction of so many joules of energy from a ton of coal. Labour power cannot be used without subjecting the labourer to the will of the capitalist - unlike other commodities, labour power remains inseparably embodied in human beings. Both the extraction of use value and the determination of exchange value for labour depends upon - and are profoundly modified by - the actions of workers. Neither the effort provided during an hours work, nor the time spent in work, nor the wage received in exchange for it, can be determined without taking into account the worker's resistance to being turned into a commodity, into an order taker. In other words, the amount of "surplus products" extracted from a worker is dependent upon the resistance to dehumanisation within the workplace, to the attempts by workers to resist the destruction of liberty during work hours.

Thus unpaid labour, the consequence of the authority relations explicit in private property, is the source of profits. Part of this surplus is used to enrich capitalists and another to increase capital, which in turn is used to increase profits, in an endless cycle (a cycle, however, which is not a steady increase but is subject to periodic disruption by recessions or depressions - "The business cycle." The basic causes for such crises will be discussed later, in sections [C.7](#) and [C.8](#)).

## C.2.2 Are capitalists justified in appropriating a portion of surplus value for themselves (i.e. making a profit)?

In a word, no. As we will attempt to indicate, capitalists are not justified in appropriating surplus value from workers. No matter how this appropriation is explained by capitalist economics, we find that inequality in wealth and power are the real reasons for this appropriation rather than some actual productive act. Indeed, neo-classical economics reflects this truism. In the words of the noted left-wing economist Joan Robinson:

*"the neo-classical theory did not contain a solution to the problems of profits or of the value of capital. They have erected a towering structure of mathematical theorems on a foundation that does not exist."* [**Contributions to Modern Economics**, p. 186]

If profits **are** the result of private property and the inequality it produces, then it is unsurprising that neo-classical theory would be as foundationless as Robinson argues. After all, this is a **political** question and neo-classical economics was developed to ignore such questions. Here we indicate why this is the case and discuss the various rationales for capitalist profit in order to show why they are false.

Some consider that profit is the capitalist's "contribution" to the value of a commodity. However, as David Schweickart points out, *"providing capital' means nothing more than 'allowing it to be used.'* But

*an act of granting permission, in and of itself, is not a productive activity. If labourers cease to labour, production ceases in any society. But if owners cease to grant permission, production is affected only if their **authority** over the means of production is respected.*" [**Against Capitalism**, p. 11] This authority, as discussed earlier, derives from the coercive mechanisms of the state, whose primary purpose is to ensure that capitalists have this ability to grant or deny workers access to the means of production. Therefore, not only is "providing capital" not a productive activity, it depends on a system of organised coercion which requires the appropriation of a considerable portion of the value produced by labour, through taxes, and hence is actually parasitic. Needless to say, rent can also be considered as "profit", being based purely on "granting permission" and so not a productive activity. The same can be said of interest, although the arguments are somewhat different (see [section C.2.6](#)).

Another problem with the capitalists' "contribution to production" argument is that one must either assume (a) a strict definition of who is the producer of something, in which case one must credit only the worker, or (b) a looser definition based on which individuals have contributed to the circumstances that made the productive work possible. Since the worker's productivity was made possible in part by the use of property supplied by the capitalist, one can thus credit the capitalist with "contributing to production" and so claim that he or she is entitled to a reward, i.e. profit.

However, if one assumes (b), one must then explain why the chain of credit should stop with the capitalist. Since all human activity takes place within a complex social network, many factors might be cited as contributing to the circumstances that allowed workers to produce -- e.g. their upbringing and education, the government maintained infrastructure that permits their place of employment to operate, and so on. Certainly the property of the capitalist contributed in this sense. But his contribution was less important than the work of, say, the worker's mother. Yet no capitalist, so far as we know, has proposed compensating workers' mothers with any share of the firm's revenues, and particularly not with a **greater** share than that received by capitalists! Plainly, however, if they followed their own logic consistently, capitalists would have to agree that such compensation would be fair.

Therefore, as capital is not autonomously productive and is the product of human (mental and physical) labour, anarchists reject the idea that providing capital is a productive act. As Proudhon pointed out, *"Capital, tools, and machinery are likewise unproductive. . . The proprietor who asks to be rewarded for the use of a tool or for the productive power of his land, takes for granted, then, that which is radically false; namely, that capital produces by its own effort - and, in taking pay for this imaginary product, he literally receives something for nothing."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 169].

Of course, it could be argued (and it frequently is) that capital makes work more productive and so the owner of capital should be "rewarded" for allowing its use. This, however, is a false conclusion, since providing capital is unlike normal commodity production. This is because capitalists, unlike workers, get paid multiple times for one piece of work (which, in all likelihood, they paid others to do) and **keep** the result of that labour. As Proudhon argued:

*"He [the worker] who manufactures or repairs the farmer's tools receives the price **once**,*

*either at the time of delivery, or in several payments; and when this price is once paid to the manufacturer, the tools which he has delivered belong to him no more. Never can he claim double payment for the same tool, or the same job of repairs. If he annually shares in the products of the farmer, it is owing to the fact that he annually does something for the farmer.*

*"The proprietor, on the contrary, does not yield his implement; eternally he is paid for it, eternally he keeps it." [Op. Cit., pp. 169-170]*

Therefore, providing capital is **not** a productive act, and keeping the profits that are produced by those who actually do use capital is an act of theft. This does not mean, of course, that creating capital goods is not creative nor that it does not aid production. Far from it! But owning the outcome of such activity and renting it does not justify capitalism or profits.

Some supporters of capitalism claim that profits represent the productivity of capital. They argue that a worker is said to receive exactly what she has produced because (according to the neo-classical answer) if she ceases to work, the total product will decline by precisely the value of her wage. However, this argument has a flaw in it. This is because the total product will decline by more than that value if two or more workers leave. This is because the wage each worker receives under conditions of perfect competition is assumed to be the product of the **last** labourer in neo-classical theory. The neo-classical argument presumes a "declining marginal productivity," i.e. the marginal product of the last worker is assumed to be less than the second last and so on.

In other words, in neo-classical economics, all workers bar the mythical "last worker" do not receive the full product of their labour. They only receive what the **last** worker is claimed to produce and so everyone **bar** the last worker does not receive exactly what he or she produces. It looks like the neo-classical claim of no exploitation within capitalism seems invalidated by its own theory.

This is recognised by the theorists. Because of this declining marginal productivity, the contribution of labour is less than the total product. The difference is claimed to be precisely the contribution of capital. But what is this "contribution" of capital? Without any labourers there would be no output. In addition, in physical terms, the marginal product of capital is simply the amount by which production would decline if one piece of capital were taken out of production. It does not reflect any productive activity whatsoever on the part of the owner of said capital. **It does not, therefore, measure his or her productive contribution.** In other words, capitalist economics tries to confuse the owners of capital with the machinery they own.

Indeed, the notion that profits represent the contribution of capital is one that is shattered by the practice of "profit sharing." **If** profits were the contribution of capital, then sharing profits would mean that capital was not receiving its full "contribution" to production (and so was being exploited by labour!). Moreover, given that profit sharing is usually used as a technique to **increase** productivity and profits it seems strange that such a technique would be required if profits, in fact, **did** represent capital's

"contribution." After all, the machinery which the workers are using is the same as before profit sharing was introduced -- how could this unchanged capital stock produce an increased "contribution"? It could only do so if, in fact, capital was unproductive and it was the unpaid efforts, skills and energy of workers' that actually was the source of profits. Thus the claim that profit equals capital's "contribution" has little basis in fact.

While it is true that the value invested in fixed capital is in the course of time transferred to the commodities produced by it and through their sale transformed into money, this does not represent any actual labour by the owners of capital. Anarchists reject the ideological sleight-of-hand that suggests otherwise and recognise that (mental and physical) labour is the **only** form of contribution that can be made by humans to a productive process. Without labour, nothing can be produced nor the value contained in fixed capital transferred to goods. As Charles A. Dana pointed out in his popular introduction to Proudhon's ideas, "[t]he labourer without capital would soon supply his wants by its production . . . but capital with no labourers to consume it can only lie useless and rot." [**Proudhon and his "Bank of the People"**, p. 31] If workers do not get paid the full value of their contributions to the output they produce then they are exploited and so, as indicated, capitalism is based upon exploitation.

So, in and of themselves, fixed costs do not create value. Whether value is created depends on how investments are developed and used once in place. In the words of the English socialist Thomas Hodgskin:

*"Fixed capital does not derive its utility from previous, but present labour; and does not bring its owner a profit because it has been stored up, but because it is a means of obtaining a command over labour."* [**Labour Defended against the Claims of Capital**]

Which brings us back to labour (and the social relationships which exist within an economy) as the fundamental source of profits. Moreover the idea (so beloved by pro-capitalist economics) that a worker's wage **is** the equivalent of what she produces is one violated everyday within reality. As one economist critical of neo-classical dogma put it:

*"Managers of a capitalist enterprise are not content simply to respond to the dictates of the market by equating the wage to the value of the marginal product of labour. Once the worker has entered the production process, the forces of the market have, for a time at least, been superseded. The effort-pay relation will depend not only on market relations of exchange but also. . . on the hierarchical relations of production - on the relative power of managers and workers within the enterprise."* [William Lazonick, **Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, pp. 184-5]

But, then again, capitalist economics is more concerned with justifying the status quo than being in touch with the real world. To claim that a workers wage represents her contribution and profit capital's is simply false. Capital cannot produce anything (nevermind a surplus) unless used by labour and so profits do not represent the productivity of capital.



Other common justifications of profit are based on claims about the "special abilities" of a select few, e. g. as "risk taking" or "creative" ability, and are equally unsound as the one just outlined.

As for risk taking, virtually all human activity involves risk. To claim that capitalists should be paid for the risks associated with investment is to implicitly state that money is more valuable than human life. After all, workers risk their health and often their lives in work and often the most dangerous workplaces are those associated with the lowest pay (safe working conditions can eat into profits and so to reward capitalist "risk", the risk workers face may actually increase). In the inverted world of capitalist ethics, it is usually cheaper (or more "efficient") to replace an individual worker than a capital investment.

Moreover, the risk theory of profit fails to take into account the different risk-taking abilities of that derive from the unequal distribution of society's wealth. As James Meade puts it, while *"property owners can spread their risks by putting small bits of their property into a large number of concerns, a worker cannot easily put small bits of his effort into a large number of different jobs. This presumably is the main reason we find risk-bearing capital hiring labour"* and not vice versa [quoted by David Schweickart, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 129-130]. Needless to say, the most serious consequences of "risk" are usually suffered by working people who can lose their jobs, health and even lives. So, rather than individual evaluations determining "risk", these evaluations will be dependent on the class position of the individuals involved. Risk, therefore, is not an independent factor and so cannot be the source of profit. Indeed, as indicated, other activities can involve far more risk and be rewarded less.

As for the "creative" spirit which innovates profits into existence, it is true that individuals do see new potential and act in innovative ways to create new products or processes. However, as discussed in the [next section](#), this is not the source of profit.

### **C.2.3 Why does innovation occur and how does it affect profits?**

There is a given amount of surplus value in existence within the economy at any one time. How this surplus is created by or divided between firms is determined by competition, within which innovation plays an important role.

Innovation occurs in order to expand profits and so survive competition from other companies. While profits can be generated in circulation (for example by oligopolistic competition or inflation) this can only occur at the expense of other people or capitals (see C.5 - [Why does Big Business get a bigger slice of profits?](#) and C.7 - [What causes the capitalist business cycle?](#) - respectively). Innovation, however, allows the generation of profits directly from the new or increased productivity (i.e. exploitation) of labour. This is because it is in production that commodities, and so profits, are created and innovation results in new products and/or new production methods. New products mean that the company can reap excess profits until competitors enter the new market and force the market price down by competition. New production methods allow the intensity of labour to be increased, meaning that workers do more work relative to their wages (in other words, the cost of production falls relative to the market price,

meaning extra profits).

So while competition ensures that capitalist firms innovate, innovation is the means by which companies can get an edge in the market. This is because innovation means that *"capitalist excess profits come from the production process. . . when there is an above-average rise in labour productivity; the reduced costs then enable firms to earn higher than average profits in their products. But this form of excess profits is only temporary and disappears again when improved production methods become more general."* [Paul Mattick, **Economics, Politics and the Age of Inflation**, p. 38]

In addition, innovation in terms of new technology is also used to help win the class war at the point of production for the capitalists. As the aim of capitalist production is to maximise profits, it follows that capitalism will introduce technology that will allow more surplus value to be extracted from workers. As Cornelius Castoriadis argues, capitalism *"has created a capitalist technology, for its own ends, which are by no means neutral. The real essence of capitalist technology is not to develop production for production's sake: it is to subordinate and dominate the producers."* [**Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society**, p. 13]

Therefore, technological improvement can also be used to increase the power of capital over the workforce, to ensure that workers will do as they are told. In this way innovation can maximise surplus value production by trying to increase domination during working hours as well as by increasing productivity by new processes.

These attempts to increase profits by using innovation is the key to capitalist expansion and accumulation. As such innovation plays a key role within the capitalist system. However, the source of profits does not change and remains in the labour, skills and creativity of workers in the workplace. And we must stress that innovation itself is a form of labour -- mental labour. Indeed, many companies have Research and Development departments in which groups of workers are paid to generate new and innovative ideas for their employers. And we must also point out that many new innovations come from individuals who combine mental and physical labour outside of capitalist companies. In other words, arguments that mental labour alone is the source of wealth (or profits) are false. That this is the case can be seen from various experiments in workers' control (see the [next section](#)) where increased equality within the workplace actually increases productivity and innovation. As these experiments show workers, when given the chance, can develop numerous "good ideas" **and**, equally as important, produce them. A capitalist with a "good idea," on the other hand, would be powerless to produce it without workers and it is this fact that shows that innovation, in and of itself, is not the source of surplus value.

## **C.2.4 Wouldn't workers' control stifle innovation?**

Contrary to much capitalist apologetics, innovation is not the monopoly of an elite class of humans. It is within all of us, although the necessary social environment needed to nurture and develop it in ordinary workers is crushed by the authoritarian workplaces of capitalism. If workers were truly incapable of innovation, any shift toward greater control of production by workers should result in decreased

productivity. What one actually finds, however, is just the opposite: In the few examples where workers' control has been implemented, productivity increased dramatically as ordinary people were given the chance, usually denied them, to apply their skills, talents, and creativity.

As Christopher Eaton Gunn notes, there is *"a growing body of empirical literature that is generally supportive of claims for the economic efficiency of the labour-managed firm. Much of this literature focuses on productivity, frequently finding it to be positively correlated with increasing levels of participation. . . Studies that encompass a range of issues broader than the purely economic also tend to support claims for the efficiency of labour managed and worker-controlled firms. . . In addition, studies that compare the economic preference of groups of traditionally and worker-controlled forms point to the stronger performance of the latter."* [**Workers' Self-Management in the United States**, pp. 42-3]

This has been strikingly confirmed in studies of the Mondragon co-operatives in Spain, where workers are democratically involved in production decisions and encouraged to innovate. As George Bennello notes, *"Mondragon productivity is very high -- higher than in its capitalist counterparts. Efficiency, measured as the ratio of utilised resources -- capital and labour -- to output, is far higher than in comparable capitalist factories."* [**The Challenge of Mondragon**, p. 216]

The example of the Lucas workers in Britain, during the 1970's, again indicates the creative potential waiting to be utilised. The workers in Lucas created a plan which would convert the military-based Lucas company into a company producing useful goods for ordinary people. The workers in Lucas designed the products themselves, using their own experiences of work and life. The management just were not interested.

During the Spanish Revolution of 1936-39, workers self-managed many factories following the principles of participatory democracy. Productivity and innovation in the Spanish collectives was exceptionally high. The metal-working industry is a good example. As Augustine Souchy observes, at the outbreak of the Civil War, the metal industry in Catalonia was *"very poorly developed."* Yet within months, the Catalonian metal workers had rebuilt the industry from scratch, converting factories to the production of war materials for the anti-fascist troops. A few days after the July 19th revolution, the Hispano-Suiza Automobile Company was already converted to the manufacture of armoured cars, ambulances, weapons, and munitions for the fighting front. *"Experts were truly astounded,"* Souchy writes, *"at the expertise of the workers in building new machinery for the manufacture of arms and munitions. Very few machines were imported. In a short time, two hundred different hydraulic presses of up to 250 tons pressure, one hundred seventy-eight revolving lathes, and hundreds of milling machines and boring machines were built."* [**The Anarchist Collectives: Workers' Self-management in the Spanish Revolution, 1936-1939**, ed. Sam Dolgoff, p. 96]

Similarly, there was virtually no optical industry in Spain before the July revolution, only some scattered workshops. After the revolution, the small workshops were voluntarily converted into a production collective. *"The greatest innovation,"* according to Souchy, *"was the construction of a new factory for optical apparatuses and instruments. The whole operation was financed by the voluntary contributions*

*of the workers. In a short time the factory turned out opera glasses, telemeters, binoculars, surveying instruments, industrial glassware in different colours, and certain scientific instruments. It also manufactured and repaired optical equipment for the fighting fronts . . . What private capitalists failed to do was accomplished by the creative capacity of the members of the Optical Workers' Union of the CNT."* [Op. Cit., pp. 98-9]

Therefore, far from being a threat to innovation, workers' control would increase it and, more importantly, direct it towards improving the quality of life for all as opposed to increasing the profits of the few. This aspect an anarchist society will be discussed in more detail in section I ([What would an anarchist society look like?](#)). In addition, see sections [J.5.10](#), [J.5.11](#) and [J.5.12](#) for more on why anarchists support self-management and why, in spite of its higher efficiency and productivity, the capitalist market will select against it.

In short, rather than being a defence of capitalist profit taking (and the inequality it generates) the argument that freedom increases innovation and productivity actually points towards libertarian socialism and workers' self-management. This is unsurprising, for only equality can maximise liberty and so workers' control (rather than capitalist power) is the key to innovation. Only those who confuse freedom with the oppression of wage labour would be surprised by this.

## C.2.5 Aren't Executives workers and so creators of value?

Of course it could be argued that executives are also "workers" and so contribute to the value of the commodities produced. However, this is not the case. Though they may not own the instruments of production, they are certainly buyers and controllers of labour power, and under their auspices production is still **capitalist** production. The creation of a "salary-slave" strata of managers does not alter the capitalist relations of production. In effect, the management strata are **de facto** capitalists. As exploitation requires labour ("*There is work and there is work.*" as Bakunin noted, "*There is productive labour and there is the labour of exploitation*" [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 180]), management is like the early "working capitalist" and their "wages" come from the surplus value appropriated from workers and realised on the market. Or, to use a different analogy, managers are like the slave drivers hired by slave owners who do not want to manage the slaves themselves. The slave drivers' wages come from the surplus value extracted from the slaves; it is not in itself productive labour.

Thus the exploitative role of managers, even if they can be fired, is no different from capitalists. Moreover, "*shareholders and managers/technocrats share common motives: to make profits and to reproduce hierarchy relations that exclude most of the employees from effective decision making*" [Takis Fotopoulos, "*The Economic Foundations of an Ecological Society*", p. 16, **Society and Nature** No.3, pp. 1-40]

This is not to say that 100 percent of what managers do is exploitative. The case is complicated by the fact that there is a legitimate need for co-ordination between various aspects of complex production processes -- a need that would remain under libertarian socialism and would be filled by elected and

recallable (and in some cases rotating) managers (see [Section I](#)). But under capitalism, managers become parasitic in proportion to their proximity to the top of the pyramid. In fact, the further the distance from the production process, the higher the salary; whereas the closer the distance, the more likely that a "manager" is a worker with a little more power than average. In capitalist organisations, the less you do, the more you get. In practice, executives typically call upon subordinates to perform managerial (i.e. coordinating) functions and restrict themselves to broader policy-making decisions. As their decision-making power comes from the hierarchical nature of the firm, they could be easily replaced if policy making was in the hands of those who are affected by it.

## C.2.6 Is interest not the reward for waiting, and so isn't capitalism just?

The idea that interest is the reward for "*abstinence*" on the part of savers is a common one in capitalist economics. As Alfred Marshall argues, "*[i]f we admit it [a commodity] is the product of labour alone, and not of labour and waiting, we can no doubt be compelled by an inexorable logic to admit that there is no justification of interest, the reward for waiting*" [**Principles of Economics**, p. 587]. While implicitly recognising that labour is the source of all value in capitalism (and that abstinence is not the **source** of profits), it is claimed that interest is a justifiable claim on the surplus value produced by a worker.

Why is this the case? Capitalist economics claims that by "deferring consumption," the capitalist allows new means of production to be developed and so should be rewarded for this sacrifice. In other words, in order to have capital available as an input -- i.e. to bear costs now for returns in the future -- someone has to be willing to postpone his or her consumption. That is a real cost, and one that people will pay only if rewarded for it.

This theory usually appears ludicrous to a critic of capitalism -- simply put, does the mine owner really sacrifice more than a miner, a rich stockholder more than an autoworker working in their car plant? It is far easier for a rich person to "defer consumption" than for someone on an average income. This is borne out by statistics, for as Simon Kuznets has noted, "*only the upper income groups save; the total savings of groups below the top decile are fairly close to zero.*" [**Economic Growth and Structure**, p. 263] Therefore, the plausibility of interest as payment for the pain of deferring consumption rests on the premise that the typical saving unit is a small or medium-income household. But in contemporary capitalist societies, this is not the case. Such households are not the source of most savings; the bulk of interest payments do not go to them.

To put this point differently, the capitalist proponents of interest only consider "postponing consumption" as an abstraction, without making it concrete. For example, a capitalist may "postpone consumption" of 48 Rolls Royces because he needs the money to upgrade some machinery in his factory; whereas a single mother may have to "postpone consumption" of food or adequate housing in order to attempt to better take care of her children. The two situations are vastly different, yet the capitalist equates them. This equation implies that "not being able to buy anything you want" is the same

as "not being able to buy things you need", and is thus skewing the obvious difference in costs of such postponement of consumption!

Thus Proudhon's comments that the loaning of capital "*does not involve an actual sacrifice on the part of the capitalist*" and so "*does not deprive himself. . . of the capital which he lends. He lends it, on the contrary, precisely because the loan is not a deprivation to him; he lends it because he has no use for it himself, being sufficiently provided with capital without it; he lends it, finally, because he neither intends nor is able to make it valuable to him personally, -- because, if he should keep it in his own hands, this capital, sterile by nature, would remain sterile, whereas, by its loan and the resulting interest, it yields a profit which enables the capitalist to live without working. Now, to live without working is, in political as well as moral economy, a contradictory proposition, an impossible thing.*" [**Interest and Principal: A Loan is a Service**]

He goes on:

*"The proprietor who possesses two estates, one at Tours, and the other at Orleans, and who is obliged to fix his residence on the one which he uses, and consequently to abandon his residence on the other, can this proprietor claim that he deprives himself of anything, because he is not, like God, ubiquitous in action and presence? As well say that we who live in Paris are deprived of a residence in New York! Confess, then, that the privation of the capitalist is akin to that of the master who has lost his slave, to that of the prince expelled by his subjects, to that of the robber who, wishing to break into a house, finds the dogs on the watch and the inmates at the windows."* [**Ibid.**]

In the capitalist's world, an industrialist who cannot buy a third summer home "suffers" a cost equivalent to that of someone who postpones consumption to get something they need. Similarly, if the industrialist "earns" hundred times more in interest than the wage of the coal miner who works in his mine, the industrialist "suffers" hundred times more discomfort living in his palace than the coal miner does working at the coal face in dangerous conditions. The "disutility" of postponing consumption while living in luxury is obviously 100 times greater than the "disutility" of working for a living and so should be rewarded appropriately. Of course, the difference is that proponents of capitalism feel that capitalists deserves compensation for their "restraint" in anticipation of future gain, while at the same time refusing to recognise the ambiguity of this statement.

All in all, as Joan Robinson pointed out, "*'waiting' only means owning wealth.*" [**Contributions to Modern Economics**, p. 11] Interest is not the reward for "waiting," rather it is one of the rewards for being rich.

Little wonder, then, that neo-classical economists introduced the term **waiting** as an "explanation" for returns to capital (such as interest). Before this change in the jargon of economics, mainstream economists used the notion of "abstinence" (a term invented by Nassau Senior) to account for (and so justify) interest. Just as Senior's "theory" was seized upon to defend returns to capital, so was the term

"waiting" after it was introduced in 1887. Interestingly, while describing **exactly** the same thing, "waiting" became the preferred term simply because it had a less apologetic ring to it. According to Marshall, the term "*abstinence*" was "*liable to be misunderstood*" because there were just too many wealthy people around who received interest and dividends without ever having abstained from anything (as he noted, the "*greatest accumulators of wealth are very rich persons, some [!] of whom live in luxury*" [Op. Cit., p. 232]). So he opted for the term "*waiting*" because there was "*advantage*" in its use, particularly because socialists had long been pointing out the obvious fact that capitalists do not "*abstain*" from anything (see Marshall, Op. Cit., p. 233). The lesson is obvious, in mainstream economics if reality conflicts with your theory, do not reconsider the theory, change its name!

Indeed, as Joan Robinson points out, the pro-capitalist theories of who abstains are wrong, "*since saving is mainly out of profits, and real wages tend to be lower the higher the rate of profit, the abstinence associated with saving is mainly done by the workers, who do not receive any share in the 'reward.'*" [The Accumulation of Capital, p. 393]

To say that those who hold capital can lay claim to a portion of the social product by abstaining or waiting provides no explanation of what makes production profitable, and so to what extent interest and dividends can be paid. Reliance on a "waiting" theory of why returns of capital exist represents nothing less than a reluctance by economists to confront the sources of value creation in an economy or to analyse the social relations between workers and managers/bosses on the shop floor. To do so would be to bring into question the whole nature of capitalism and any claims it was based upon freedom.

## **C.2.7 But wouldn't the "time value" of money justify charging interest in a more egalitarian capitalism?**

More needs to be said about interest, since a more egalitarian capitalism (if such a thing could exist) would still have interest, and the greater egalitarianism could even be used as the basis of a justification for it.

Indeed, the conceptual history that supporters of capitalism present to justify interest (or the appropriation of surplus value in general) usually start in a fictional community of equals. The time preference theory of interest bases itself on such a fiction. We are presented with the argument that individuals have different "time preferences." Most individuals prefer, it is claimed, to consume now rather than later while a few prefer to save now on the condition that they can consume more later. Interest, therefore, is the payment that encourages people to defer consumption and so is dependent upon the subjective evaluations of individuals.

Based on this argument, many supporters of capitalism claim that it is legitimate for the person who provided the capital to get back **more** than they put in, because of the "time value of money." This is because the person who provided the machinery, tools, etc. had to postpone X amount of consumption which he could have had with his money. Capital providers will only get back X amount of consuming power later, after they have been paid back for the machinery etc. by receiving a portion, over time, of

the increased output that it makes possible. Since people prefer consumption now to consumption later, they can only be persuaded to give up consumption now by the promise of receiving more later. Hence returns to capital are based upon this "time value" of money and the argument that individuals have different "time preferences."

That the idea of doing nothing (i.e. not consuming) can be considered as productive says a lot about capitalist theory. Even supporters of capitalism recognise that interest income *"arises independently of any personal act of the capitalist. It accrues to him even though he has not moved any finger in creating it. . . And it flows without ever exhausting that capital from which it arises, and therefore without any necessary limit to its continuance. It is, if one may use such an expression in mundane matters, capable of everlasting life."* [Eugen Bohm-Bawark, **Capital and Interest**, vol. 1, p. 1] Needless to say, Bohm-Bawark then went on to justify this situation.

Lets not forget that, due to **one** decision not to do anything (i.e. **not** to consume), a person (and his or her heirs) may receive **forever** a reward that is not tied to any productive activity. Unlike the people actually doing the work (who only get a reward every time they "contribute" to creating a commodity), the capitalist will get rewarded for just **one** act of abstention. This is hardly a just arrangement. As David Schweickart has pointed out, *"Capitalism does reward some individuals perpetually. This, if it is to be justified by the canon of contribution, one must defend the claim that some contributions are indeed eternal."* [**Against Capitalism**, p.17] In addition, the receiver of interest can pass the benefits of this **one** decision to his family after he or she dies, weakening the case for "abstinence" even more.

It was in the face of the weaknesses of the "abstinence" or "waiting" theories of capital that Bohm-Bawark suggested the "time preference" theory (namely that surplus value is generated by the exchange of present goods for future goods, as future goods are valued less than present goods due to "time preference"). Of course, this theory is subject to exactly the same points we raised in the [last section](#). An individual's psychology is conditioned by the social situation they find themselves in. Just as "abstaining" or "waiting" is far easier to do when one is rich, ones "time preference" is also determined by ones social position. If one has more than enough money for current needs, one can more easily "discount" the future (for example, workers will value the future product of their labour less than their current wages simply because without those wages there will be no future). And if ones "time preference" is dependent on social facts (such as available resources, ones class, etc.), then interest cannot be based upon subjective evaluations, as these are not the independent factor. In other words, saving does not express "time preference", it simply expresses the extent of inequality.

Even if we ignore the problem that inequality influences the subjective "time preference" of individuals, the theory still does not provide a defence of interest. It is worthwhile quoting the noted post-Keynesian economist Joan Robinson on why this is so:

*"The notion that human beings discount the future certainly seems to correspond to everyone's subjective experience, but the conclusion drawn from it is a **non sequitor**, for most people have enough sense to want to be able to exercise consuming power as long as*



*fate permits, and many people are in the situation of having a higher income in the present than they expect in the future (salary earners will have to retire, business may be better now than it seems likely to be later, etc.) and many look beyond their own lifetime and wish to leave consuming power to their heirs. Thus a great many . . . are eagerly looking for a reliable vehicle to carry purchasing power into the future . . . It is impossible to say what price would rule if there were a market for present **versus** future purchasing power, unaffected by any other influence except the desires of individuals about the time-pattern of their consumption. It might well be such a market would normally yield a negative rate of discount . . .*

*"The rate of interest is normally positive for a quite different reason. Present purchasing power is valuable partly because, under the capitalist rules of the game, it permits its owner . . . to employ labour and undertake production which will yield a surplus of receipts over costs. In an economy in which the rate of profit is expected to be positive, the rate of interest is positive . . . [and so] the present value of purchasing power exceeds its future value to the corresponding extent. . . This is nothing whatever to do with the subjective **rate of discount of the future** of the individual concerned. . . "* [**The Accumulation of Capital**, p. 395]

So, interest has little to do with "time preference" and a lot more to do with the inequalities associated with the capitalist system. In effect, the "time preference" theory assumes what it is trying to prove. Interest is positive simply because capitalists can appropriate surplus value from workers and so current money is more valuable than future money because of this fact. Indeed, in an uncertain world future money may be its own reward (for example, workers facing unemployment in the future could value the same amount of money more than in the present). It is only because money provides the authority to allocate resources and exploit wage labour that money now is more valuable. In other words, the capitalist does not supply "time" (as the "time value" theory argues), it provides authority/power.

So, does someone who saves deserve a reward for saving? Simply put, no. Why? Because the act of saving is no more an act of production than is purchasing a commodity. Clearly the reward for purchasing a commodity is that commodity. By analogy, the reward for saving should be not interest but one's savings -- the ability to consume at a later stage.

Capitalists assume that people will not save unless promised the ability to consume **more** at a later stage, yet close examination of this argument reveals its absurdity. People in many different economic systems save in order to consume later, but only in capitalism is it assumed that they need a reward for it beyond the reward of having those savings available for consumption later. The peasant farmer "defers consumption" in order to have grain to plant next year, the squirrel "defers consumption" of nuts in order to have a stock through winter. But neither expects to see their stores increase in size over time. Therefore, saving is rewarded by saving, as consuming is rewarded by consuming. In fact, the capitalist "explanation" for interest has all the hallmarks of apologetics. It is merely an attempt to justify an activity without careful analysing it.

To be sure, there is an economic truth underlying this argument for justifying interest, but the formulation by supporters of capitalism is inaccurate and unfortunate. There is a sense in which 'waiting' is a condition for capital **increase**, though not for capital per se. Any society which wishes to increase its stock of capital goods may have to postpone some gratification. Workplaces and resources turned over to producing capital goods cannot be used to produce consumer items, after all. So, like most capitalist economics there is a grain of truth in it but this grain of truth is used to grow a forest of half-truths and confusion.

Any economy is a network, where decisions affect everyone. Therefore, if some people do not consume now, production is turned away from consumption goods, and this has an effect on all. Or, to put it slightly differently, aggregate demand -- and so aggregate supply -- is changed when some people postpone consumption, and this affects others. The decrease in the demand for consumer goods affects the producers of these goods. Under capitalism, this may result in other people having to "defer consumption," as they cannot sell their goods on the market; but supporters of capitalism assume that **only** capitalists are affected by their decision to postpone consumption, and therefore that they should get a reward for it. Indeed, why should someone be rewarded for a decision which may cause companies to go bust, so **reducing** the available means of production as reduced demand results in job losses and idle factories, is not even raised as an issue by the supporters of capitalism.

Lastly, we must consider what interest actually means. It is **not** the same as other forms of exchange. Proudhon pointed out the difference:

*"Comparing a loan to a **sale**, you say: Your argument is as valid against the latter as against the former, for the latter who sells hats does not **deprive** himself.*

*"No, for he receives for his hats -- at least he is reputed to receive for them -- their exact value immediately, neither **more** nor **less**. But the capitalist lender not only is not deprived, since he recovers his capital intact, but he receives more than his capital, more than he contributes to the exchange; he receives in addition to his capital an interest which represents no positive product on his part. Now, a service which costs no labour to him who renders it is a service which may become gratuitous." [Interest and Principal: The Circulation of Capital, Not Capital Itself, Gives Birth to Progress]*

Thus selling the use of money (paid for by interest) is not the same as selling a commodity. The seller of the commodity does not receive the commodity back as well as its price. In effect, as with rent and profits, interest is payment for permission to use something and, therefore, not a productive act which should be rewarded. Ultimately, interest is an expression of inequality, **not** exchange:

*"If there is chicanery afoot in calling 'money now' a different good than 'money later,' it is by no means harmless, for the intended effect is to subsume moneylending under the normative rubric of exchange. . . [but] there are obvious differences... [for in normal commodity exchange] both parties have something [while in loaning] he has something*

*you don't. . . [so] inequality dominates the relationship. He has more than you have now, and he will get back more than he gives."* [Schweickart, **Op. Cit.**, p.23]

Therefore, money lending is, for the poor person, not a choice between more consumption now/less later and less consumption now/more later. If there is no consumption now, there will not be any later. In addition, even in a relatively egalitarian capitalism, interest implies that the producer of new capital is **not** producing commodities. Would-be capitalists have "deferred consumption" and allowed a machine to be created. They then offer to let others use it for a fee, but they are **not** selling a commodity, they are renting the use of something. And giving permission is not a productive act (as noted above).

Therefore, providing capital and charging interest are not productive acts. As Proudhon argued, "*all rent received (nominally as damages, but really as payment for a loan) is an act of property - of robbery [theft].*" [**What is Property**, p. 171]. In other words, capitalism is based on usury, i.e. paying for the use of something. The machine owner has "deferred consumption" and so is "rewarded" with wage labourers to boss about and payment in excess of what he or she originally put forward. In addition, the commodity producers have made goods which the owner of the machine gets paid for and still has the machine! This means that the interest paid has been taken from the labour of those who use the machine, who end up with **nothing** at the end beyond their wages and so are still wage slaves, looking for a new boss. Little wonder Proudhon argued that "*Property is theft!*"

Interest is a con, pure and simple. Little wonder both social and individualist anarchists have opposed it. Ben Tucker assumed that mutual banking, besides reducing interest to zero, would also increase the power of workers in the economy, meaning that workers would be in a position to refuse to work for a capitalist unless they agreed to a hire-purchase deal on the capital they used (see [section G](#)). As for the social anarchists, they realised that free agreements between syndicates and communes would ensure suitable investment in new means of production. They also recognised the network of common influence in any advanced economy, and thus that since everyone is affected by investment decisions, all should have a say in them (see [section I](#)).

# C.1 What determines price within capitalism?

Supporters of capitalism usually agree with what is called the **Subjective Theory of Value** (STV), as explained by most mainstream economic textbooks. This system of economics is usually termed "marginalist" economics, for reasons which will become clear.

In a nutshell, the STV states that the price of a commodity is determined by its marginal utility to the consumer and producer. Marginal utility is the point, on an individual's scale of satisfaction, at which his/her desire for a good is satisfied. Hence price is the result of individual, subjective evaluations within the marketplace. One can easily see why this theory could be appealing to those interested in individual freedom.

However, the STV is a myth. Like most myths, it does have a grain of truth in it. But as an explanation of how to determine the price of a commodity, it has serious flaws.

The kernel of truth is that individuals, groups, companies, etc. do indeed value goods and consume/produce them. The rate of consumption, for example, is based on the use-value of goods to the users (although whether some one buys a product is affected by price and income considerations, as we will see). Similarly, production is determined by the utility to the producer of supplying more goods. The use-value of a good is a highly subjective evaluation, and so varies from case to case, depending on the individual's taste and needs. As such it has an **effect** on the price, as will be shown, but as the means to **determine** a product's price it ignores the dynamics of a capitalist economy and the production relations that underlie the market. In effect, the STV treats all commodities like works of art, and such products of human activity (due to their uniqueness) are **not** a capitalistic commodity in the usual sense of the word (i.e. they cannot be reproduced and so labour cannot increase their quantity). Therefore the STV ignores the nature of production under capitalism. This is what will be discussed in the following sections.

Of course, modern economists try and portray economics as a "value-free science." Of course, it rarely dawns on them that they are usually just taking existing social structures and the economic dogmas build round them for granted and so justifying them. As Kropotkin pointed out:

*"[A]ll the so-called laws and theories of political economy are in reality no more than statements of the following nature:*

*'Granting that there are always in a country a considerable number of people who cannot subsist a month, or even a fortnight, without accepting the conditions of work imposed upon them by the State, or offered to them by those whom the State recognises as owners of land, factories, railways, etc., then the results will be so and so.'*

*"So far middle-class political economy has been only an enumeration of what happens under the just-mentioned conditions -- without distinctly stating the conditions themselves. And then, having described **the facts** which arise in our society under these conditions, they represent to us these facts as rigid, **inevitable economic laws.**" [Kropotkin's **Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 179]*

In other words, economists usually take the political and economic aspects of capitalist society (such as property rights, inequality and so on) as given and construct their theories around it. Marginalism, in effect, took the "political" out of "political economy" by taking capitalist society for granted along with its class system, its hierarchies and its inequalities. By concentrating on individual choices they abstracted from the social system within which such choices are made and what influences them. Indeed, the STV was built upon abstracting individuals from their social surroundings and generating economic "laws" applicable for all individuals, in all societies, for all times. This results in all concrete instances, no matter how historically different, being treated as expressions of the same universal concept. Thus, in neo-classical economics, wage-labour becomes labour, capital becomes the means of production, the labour process becomes a production function, acquisitive behaviour becomes human nature. In this way the uniqueness of contemporary society, namely its basis in wage labour, is ignored (*"The period through which we are passing . . . is distinguished by a special characteristic -- WAGES."* [Proudhon, **System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 199]) and what is specific to capitalism is universalised and made applicable for all time. Such a perspective cannot help being ideological rather than scientific. By trying to create a theory applicable for all time (and so, apparently, value free) they just hide the fact their theory justifies the inequalities of capitalism. As Edward Herman points out:

*"Back in 1849, the British economist Nassau Senior chided those defending trade unions and minimum wage regulations for expounding an 'economics of the poor.' The idea that he and his establishment confreres were putting forth an 'economics of the rich' never occurred to him; he thought of himself as a scientist and spokesperson of true principles. This self-deception pervaded mainstream economics up to the time of the Keynesian Revolution of the 1930s. Keynesian economics, though quickly tamed into an instrument of service to the capitalist state, was disturbing in its stress on the inherent instability of capitalism, the tendency toward chronic unemployment, and the need for substantial government intervention to maintain viability. With the resurgent capitalism of the past 50 years, Keynesian ideas, and their implicit call for intervention, have been under incessant attack, and, in the intellectual counterrevolution led by the Chicago School, the traditional laissez-faire ('let-the-fur-fly') economics of the rich has been reestablished as the core of mainstream economics." [The Economics of the Rich]*

Herman goes on to ask "[w]hy do the economists serve the rich?" and argues that "[f]or one thing, the leading economists are among the rich, and others seek advancement to similar heights. Chicago School economist Gary Becker was on to something when he argued that economic motives explain a lot of actions frequently attributed to other forces. He of course never applied this idea to economics as a profession . . ." [Ibid.] There are a great many well paying think tanks, research posts, consultancies and so on that create an "'effective demand' that should elicit an appropriate supply resource." [Ibid.]

The introduction of marginalism and its acceptance as "orthodoxy" served, and serves in the present, to divert serious attention from the most critical questions facing working people (for example, what goes on in production, how authority relations impact on society and in the workplace). Rather than looking to how things are produced, the conflicts generated in the production process and the generation/division of surplus, marginalism took what was produced as given, as well as the capitalist workplace, the division of labour and authority relations and so on.

Theories can pursue truth or serve vested interests. In the later capacity they will incorporate only concepts suited to attaining the results desired. An economic theory, for example, may highlight profits, quantities of output, amount of investment, and prices, and leave out class struggle, alienation, hierarchy and bargaining power. Then the theory will serve capitalists, and, since capitalists pay economists' wages and endow their universities, economists and their students who comply, will benefit as well.

General equilibrium analysis and marginalism is made to order for the ruling class. Marginalism ignores the question of production and concentrates on exchange. It argues that any attempt by working people to improve their position in society (by, for example, unions) is counter-productive, it preaches that "in the long run" everyone will be better off and so present day problems are irrelevant (and any attempt to fix them counterproductive) and, of course, the capitalists are entitled to their profits, interest payments and rent. The utility of such a theory is obvious. An economic theory that justifies inequality, "proves" that profits, rent and interest are not exploitative and argues that the economically powerful be given free reign will have more use-value ("utility") to the ruling class than those that do not. In the market place of ideas, it is these which will satisfy the demand and become intellectually "respectable."

Of course, not all supporters of capitalist economics are rich (although most desire to become so). Many do believe its claims that capitalism is based upon freedom and that the profits, interest and rent represent "rewards" for services provided rather than resulting from the exploitation generated by hierarchical workplaces and social inequality. However, before tackling the question of profits, interest and rent we must first discuss why the STV is wrong.

## C.1.1 So what is wrong with this theory?

The first problem in using marginal utility to determine price is that it leads to circular reasoning. Prices are supposed to measure the "marginal utility" of the commodity, yet consumers need to know the price **first** in order to evaluate how best to maximise their satisfaction. Hence subjective value theory *"obviously rest[s] on circular reasoning. Although it tries to explain prices, prices [are] necessary to explain marginal utility."* [Paul Mattick, **Economics, Politics and the Age of Inflation**, p.58] In the end, as Jevons (one of the founders of marginalism) acknowledged, the price of a commodity is the only test we have of the utility of the commodity to the producer. Given that marginality utility was meant to explain those prices, the failure of the theory could not be more striking.

Secondly, consider the definition of equilibrium price. Equilibrium price is the price for which the

quantity demanded is precisely equal to the quantity supplied. At such a price there is no incentive for either demanders or suppliers to alter their behaviour.

Why does this happen? The subjective theory cannot really explain why **this** price is the equilibrium price, as opposed to any other. This is because the STV ignores that an objective measure is required upon which to base "subjective" evaluations within the market. The consumer, when shopping, requires prices in order to allocate their money to best maximise their "utility" (and, of course, the consumer faces prices on the market, the very thing marginal utility theory was meant to explain!). And how does a company know it is making a profit unless it compares the market price with the production costs of the commodity it produces? As Proudhon put it, "*[i]f supply and demand alone determine value, how can we tell what is an excess and what is a sufficiency? If neither cost, nor market price, nor wages can be mathematically determined, how is it possible to conceive of a surplus, a profit?*" [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 114] This objective measure can only be the actual processes of production within capitalism, production which is for profit. The implications of this are important when discovering what determines price within capitalism, as will be discussed in the next section ([C.1.2 - So what does determine price?](#)).

The early marginalists were aware of this problem and argued that price reflected the utility at the "margin" (Jevons, one of the founders of the marginalist school, argued that the "*final degree of utility determines value*"); but what determined the position of the margin itself? This is fixed by the available supply ("*Supply determines final degree of utility*" -- Jevons); but what determines the level of supply? ("*Cost of production determines supply*" -- Jevons). In other words, price is dependent on marginal utility, which is dependent on supply, which is dependent on the cost of production. In other words, ultimately on an **objective** measure (supply or cost of production) rather than subjective evaluations! This is unsurprising because before you can consume ("subjectively value") something on the market, it has to be produced. It is the process of production that rearranges matter and energy from less useful to more useful (to us) forms. Which brings us straight back to production and the social relations which exist within a given society -- and the political dangers of defining (exchange) value in terms of labour (see [next section](#)). After all, the individual does not just face a given supply on the market, they also face prices, including the costs associated with production and profit taking.

As the whole aim of marginalism was to abstract away from production (where power relations are clear) and concentrate on exchange (where power works indirectly), it is unsurprising that early marginal utility value theory was quickly abandoned. The continued discussion of "utility" in economics textbooks is primarily heuristic. First the neo-classical economists used measurable (cardinal) "utility" (i. e. that utility was the same for all) but that caused political problems (as cardinal utility implied that the "utility" of an extra dollar to a poor person was clearly greater than the loss of one dollar to a rich man and this obviously justified redistribution politics). When this was recognised (along with the obvious fact that cardinal utility was impossible in practice) utility became "ordinal" (i.e. utility was an individual thing and so could not be measured). Then even ordinal utility was abandoned as cross-personal utilities were not comparable and so objective prices could be derived from it (which was Adam Smith's argument and which led him to develop a **labour** theory of value rather than one based

on utility, or use value). With the abandonment of "ordinal" utility, mainstream economics gave up even thinking about individual preferences in those terms. This means that modern economics does not have a value theory at all -- and without a value theory, the claim that the workings of capitalism will benefit all or its outcome will realise individual preferences has no rational foundation.

Thus utility theory was gradually deprived of all its bite and reduced from cardinal to ordinal utility and from ordinal utility to 'revealed preference.' This retreat from cardinal utility (patently dreamland) to ordinal utility (distinction without a difference) to "revealed preferences" (the naked tautology -- consumers maximise total utility as "revealed" in the structures of spending or, consumers maximise what they maximise) was but one of the many retreats made among the marginalists as their contrived core assumptions were exposed to simple but penetrating questions.

While ignoring "utility" theory of value, most mainstream economics accept the notions of "perfect competition" and (Walrasian) "general equilibrium" which were part and parcel of it. Marginalism attempted to show, in the words of Paul Ormerod, *"that under certain assumptions the free market system would lead to an allocation of a given set of resources which was in a very particular and restricted sense optimal from the point of view of every individual and company in the economy."* [**The Death of Economics**, p. 45] This was what Walrasian general equilibrium proved. However, the assumptions required prove to be somewhat unrealistic (to understate the point). As Ormerod points out:

*"[i]t cannot be emphasised too strongly that . . . the competitive model is far removed from being a reasonable representation of Western economies in practice. . . [It is] a travesty of reality. The world does not consist, for example, of an enormous number of small firms, none of which has any degree of control over the market . . . The theory introduced by the marginal revolution was based upon a series of postulates about human behaviour and the workings of the economy. It was very much an experiment in pure thought, with little empirical rationalisation of the assumptions."*

Indeed, *"the weight of evidence" is "against the validity of the model of competitive general equilibrium as a plausible representation of reality."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 48, p. 62] For example, oligopoly and imperfect competition have been abstracted from so that the theory does not allow one to answer interesting questions which turn on the asymmetry of information and bargaining power among economic agents, whether due to size, or organisation, or social stigmas, or whatever else. In the real world, oligopoly is common place and asymmetry of information and bargaining power the norm. To abstract from these means to present an economic vision at odds with the reality people face and, therefore, can only propose solutions which harm those with weaker bargaining positions and without information. In addition, the model is set in a timeless environment, with people and companies working in a world where they have perfect knowledge and information about the state of the market. A world without a future and so with no uncertainty (any attempt to include time, and so uncertainty, ensures that the model ceases to be of value). Thus model cannot easily or usefully account for the reality that economic agents do not actually know such things as future prices, future availability of goods, changes in production techniques or in markets to occur in the future, etc. Instead, to achieve its results -- proofs about equilibrium conditions -- the model assumes that actors have perfect knowledge at least of the



probabilities of all possible outcomes for the economy. The opposite is the case in reality.

In this timeless, perfect world, "free market" capitalism will prove itself an efficient method of allocating resources and all markets will clear. In part at least, General Equilibrium Theory is an abstract answer to an abstract and important question: Can an economy relying only on price signals for market information be orderly? The answer of general equilibrium is clear and definitive -- one can describe such an economy with these properties. However, no actual economy has been described and, given the assumptions involved, no such economy could ever exist. An theoretical question has been answered involving some amount of intellectual achievement, but it is a answer which has no bearing to reality. And this is often termed the "high theory" of equilibrium. Obviously most economists must treat the real world as a special case.

Thus General Equilibrium theory analyses an economic state which there is no reason to suppose will ever, or have ever, come about. It is, therefore, an abstraction which has no discernible applicability or relevance to the world as it is. To argue that it can give insights into the real world is ridiculous. As mainstream economic theory begins with axioms and assumptions and uses a deductivist methodology to arrive at conclusions, its usefulness in discovering how the world works is limited. Firstly, as we note in [section F.1.3](#), the deductive method is **pre-scientific** in nature. Secondly, the axioms and assumptions can be considered fictitious (as they have negligible empirical relevance) and the conclusions of deductivist models can only really have relevance to the structure of those models as the models themselves bear no relation to economic reality. While it is true that there are certain imaginary intellectual problems for which the general equilibrium model is well designed to provide precise answers (if anything really could), in practice this means the same as saying that if one insists on analysing a problem which has no real world equivalent or solution, it may be appropriate to use a model which has no real-world application. Models derived to provide answers to imaginary problems will be unsuitable for resolving practical, real-world economic problems or even providing a useful insight into how capitalism works and develops. In the words of noted left-wing economist Nicholas Kaldor, *"equilibrium theory has reached the stage where the pure theorist has successfully (though perhaps inadvertently) demonstrated that the main implications of this theory cannot possibly hold in reality, but has not yet managed to pass his message down the line to the textbook writer and to the classroom."* Little wonder, then, that his *"basic objection to the theory of general equilibrium is not that it is abstract -- all theory is abstract and must necessarily be so since there can be no analysis without abstraction -- but that it starts from the wrong kind of abstraction, and therefore gives a misleading 'paradigm' . . . of the world as it is; it gives a misleading impression of the nature and the manner of operation of economic forces."* [**The Essential Kaldor**, p. 377 and p. 399]

There is a more realistic neo-classical notion of equilibrium called "partial" equilibrium theory (developed by Alfred Marshall). "Time" is included via Alfred Marshall's notion of equilibrium existing in various runs. The most important of Marshall's concepts are "short run" and "long run" equilibrium. However, this is just comparing one static (ideal) state with another. Marshall treated markets "one at a time" (hence the expression "partial equilibrium") with "all other things being equal" -- the assumption being that the rest of the economy is unchanged! This theory confuses the comparison of possible alternative equilibrium positions with the analysis of a process taking place through time, i.e. historical

events are introduced into a timeless picture. In other words, time as the real world knows it does not exist. In the real world, any adjustment takes a certain time to complete and events may occur that alter equilibrium. The very process of moving has an effect upon the destination and so there is no such thing as a position of long-run equilibrium which exists independently of the course which the economy is following. Marshall's assumptions of "one market at a time" and "all other things equal" ensure that the concept of time is as foreign to "partial" equilibrium as it is to "general" equilibrium.

So much of mainstream economics is based upon theories which have little or no relation to reality. The aim of marginal utility theory was to show that capitalism was efficient and that everyone benefits from it (it maximises utility, in the limited sense imposed by what is available on the market, of course). This was what perfect competition was said to prove. But perfect competition is impossible. And as perfect competition is itself an assumption of marginal utility, we might expect the theory to have been abandoned at this point. Instead, the contradiction was swept under the carpet.

In addition, like most religions, neo-classical economics cannot be scientifically tested. This is because the perfect competition model makes no falsifiable predictions whatsoever. As Martin Hollis and Edward Nell argue:

*"Indeed the whole idea of testing the marginal analysis is absurd. For what could a test reveal? Negative results show only that the market is defective. Various interpretations can be given . . . But one interpretation is not possible -- that the marginal analysis has been refuted. . . . To generalise the point, marginalist statements to the effect that, if the assumptions of Positive micro-economics hold, then so-and-so will happen, are tautologies and their consequences are simply logical deductions from their protases. . . the model is untestable."* [Rational Economic Man, p. 34]

In other words, if a prediction of marginalist economics does not hold all we can draw from the test is that perfect competition was not in existence. The theory cannot be disproven, no matter how much evidence is gathered against it. In addition, there are other useful techniques which can be used in defending the neo-classical ideology from empirical evidence. For example, neo-classical economics maintains that production is marked by diminishing returns to scale. Any empirical evidence that suggests otherwise can be dismissed simply because, obviously, the scale is not large enough -- **eventually** returns will decrease with size. Similarly, the term "in the long run" can work wonders for the ideology. For if the claimed good results of a given policy do not materialise for anyone but the ruling class, then, rather than blame the ideology, the time scale can be the culprit (in the long run, things will turn out for the best -- unfortunately for the majority, the long run has not arrived yet, but it will; until then you will have to make sacrifices for your future gains...). Obviously with such an "analysis" anything can be proven.

Little wonder Nicholas Kaldor argued that:

*"The Walrasian [i.e. general] equilibrium theory is a highly developed intellectual system,*

*much refined and elaborated by mathematical economists since World War II -- an intellectual experiment . . . But it does not constitute a scientific hypothesis, like Einstein's theory of relativity or Newton's law of gravitation, in that its basic assumptions are axiomatic and not empirical, and no specific methods have been put forward by which the validity or relevance of its results could be tested. The assumptions make assertions about reality in their implications, but these are not founded on direct observation, and, in the opinion of practitioners of the theory at any rate, they cannot be contradicted by observation or experiment." [Op. Cit., p. 416]*

Marginalism, however, in spite of these slight problems, did serve a valuable ideological function. It removed the appearance of exploitation from the system, justifies giving business leaders the "freedom" to operate as they liked and portrayed a world of harmony between the owners of factors. Hence its general acceptance within economics. In other words, it justified the mentality of "what is profitable is right" and removed politics and ethics from the field of economics. Moreover, the theory of "perfect competition" (regardless of its impossibility) allowed economists to portray capitalism as optimal, efficient and the satisfier of individual desires. And this is important, for without the assumption of equilibrium, market transactions need not benefit all. Indeed, it may lead to the tyranny of the fortunate over the unfortunate, with the majority facing a series of dismal choices between the lesser of a group of evils. Of course, **with** the assumption of equilibrium, reality must be ignored. So capitalist economics is between a rock and a hard place.

All in all, the world assumed by neo-classical economics is not the one we actually live in, and so applying that theory is both misleading and (usually) disastrous (at least to the "have-nots").

Some pro-"free market" capitalist economists (such as those in the right-wing "Austrian school") reject the notion of equilibrium completely and embrace a dynamic model of capitalism. While being far more realistic than mainstream neo-classical theory, this method abandons the possibility of demonstrating that the market outcome is in any sense a realisation of the individual preferences of whose interaction it is an expression. It has no way of establishing the supposedly stabilising character of entrepreneurial activity or its alleged socially beneficial character. Indeed, entrepreneurial activity tends to disrupt markets (particularly labour markets) **away** from equilibrium (i.e. the full use of available resources) rather than towards it. In other words, the dynamic process could lead to a divergence rather than a convergence of behaviour and so to increased unemployment, a reduction in the **quality** of available choices available from which to maximise your "utility" and so on. A dynamic system need not be self-correcting, particularly in the labour market, nor show any sign of self-equilibrium (i.e. be subject to the business cycle). Ironically enough, economists of this school often maintain that while equilibrium cannot be reached the labour market will experience full employment under "free market" or "pure" capitalism. That this condition is one of equilibrium does not seem to cause them much concern. Thus we find von Hayek, for example, arguing that the *"cause of unemployment . . . is a deviation of prices and wages from their equilibrium position which would establish itself with a free market and stable money"* and that *"the deviation of existing prices from that equilibrium position . . . is the cause of the impossibility of selling part of the labour supply."* [New Studies, p. 201] Therefore, we see the usual embrace of equilibrium theory to defend capitalism against the evils it creates even by those who claim

to know better. Perhaps this is a case of political expediency, allowing the ideological supporters of free market capitalism to attack the notion of equilibrium when it clearly clashes with reality but being able to return to it when attacking, say, trade unions, welfare programmes and other schemes which aim to aid working class people against the ravages of the capitalist market?

These supporters of capitalism stress "freedom" -- the freedom of individuals to make their own decisions. And who can deny that individuals, when free to choose, will pick the option they consider best for themselves? However, what this praise for individual freedom ignores is that capitalism often reduces choice to picking the lesser of two (or more) evils due to the inequalities it creates (hence our reference to the **quality** of the decisions available to us). The worker who agrees to work in a sweatshop does "maximise" her "utility" by so doing -- after all, this option is better than starving to death -- but only an ideologue blinded by capitalist economics will think that she is free or that her decision is not made under economic compulsion. In other words, this idealisation of freedom through the market completely ignores the fact that this freedom can be, to a large number of people, very limited in scope. Moreover, the freedom associated with capitalism, as far as the labour market goes, becomes little more than the freedom to pick your master. All in all, this defence of capitalism ignores the existence of economic inequality (and so power) which infringes the freedom and opportunities of others (for a fuller discussion of this, see [section F.3.1](#)). Social inequalities can ensure that people end up "wanting what they get" rather than "getting what they want" simply because they have to adjust their expectations and behaviour to fit into the patterns determined by concentrations of economic power. This is particularly the case within the labour market, where sellers of labour power are usually at a disadvantage when compared to buyers due to the existence of unemployment (see sections [B.4.3](#), [C.7](#) and [F.10.2](#)).

Which brings us to another problem associated with marginalism, namely the distribution of resources within society. Market demand is usually discussed in terms of tastes, not in the distribution of purchasing power required to satisfy those tastes. So, as a method of determining price, marginal utility ignores the differences in purchasing power between individuals and assumes the legal fiction that corporations are individual persons (income distribution is taken as a given). Those who have a lot of money will be able to maximise their satisfactions far easier than those who have little. Also, of course, they can out-bid those with less money. If, as many right-"Libertarians" say, capitalism is "one dollar, one vote," it is obvious whose values are going to be reflected most strongly in the market. This is why orthodox economists make the convenient assumption of a 'given distribution of income' when they try to show the best allocation of resources is the market based one.

In other words, under capitalism, it is not "utility" as such that is maximised, rather it is "effective" utility (usually called "effective demand") -- namely utility that is backed up with money. The capitalist market places (or rather, the owning class in such a system places) value (i.e. prices) on things according to the effective demand for them. "Effective demand" is people's desires weighted by their ability to pay. So, the market counts the desires of affluent people as more important than the desires of destitute people. And so capitalism skews consumption away from satisfying the "utility" of those most in need and into satisfying the needs of the wealthy few first. This does not mean that the needs of the many will not be met (usually, but not always, they are to some degree), it means that for any given resource those

with money can out-bid those with less -- regardless of the human cost. As the pro-free market capitalism economist Von Hayek argued the "[s]pontaneous order produced by the market does not ensure that what general opinion regards as more important needs are always met before the less important ones." [**The Essential Hayek**, p. 258] Which is just a polite way of referring to the process by which millionaires build a new mansion while thousands are homeless or live in slums, feed luxury food to their pets while humans go hungry or when agribusiness grow cash crops for foreign markets while the landless starve to death (see also [section I.4.5](#)). Needless to say, marginalist economics justifies this market power and its results.

In summary, neo-classical economics shows the viability of an unreal system and this is translated into assertions about the world that we live in until most people just accept that reality reflects the model (rather than vice versa, as it should but does not in neo-classical theory). Moreover, and even worse, policy decisions will be enacted based on a model which has no bearing in reality -- with disastrous results (for example, the rise and fall of Monetarism -- see [section C.8](#)). In addition, it justifies (when not ignoring) hierarchical structures and massive inequalities in wealth and bargaining power in society, which make a mockery of individual freedom. (see [section F.3.1](#) for details). It serves the interests of those with power and wealth in modern society as well as the aims of a soul-destroying, world-polluting commercial system by deprecating the importance of aesthetic, humane and, indeed, human factors in economic decision making. Indeed, the mere suggestion that people should be placed before (never mind instead of) profits would produce a fit. Starting from a false premise, marginalism ends up negating its own stated ideals -- rather than being the economics of individual freedom it becomes the means of justifying restrictions and negations of that freedom.

So, if the STV is flawed, what does determine prices? Obviously, in the short term, prices are heavily influenced by supply and demand. If demand exceeds supply, the price rises and vice versa. This truism, however, does not answer the question. The answer lies in production and in the social relationships generated there. This is discussed in the [next section](#).

## C.1.2 So what does determine price?

The key to understanding prices lies in understanding that production under capitalism has as its *"only aim . . . to increase the profits of the capitalist."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 55] In other words, profit is the driving force of capitalism. Once this fact and its implications are understood, the determination of price is simple and the dynamics of the capitalist system made clearer. The price of a capitalist commodity will tend towards its **production price** in a free market, production price being the sum of production costs plus average profit rates (the average profit rate, we should note, depends upon the ease of entry into the market, see below).

Consumers, when shopping, are confronted by given prices and a given supply. The price determines the demand, based on the use-value of the product to the consumer and his/her financial situation. If supply exceeds demand, supply is reduced (either by firms reducing production or by firms closing and capital moving to other, more profitable, markets) until an average **rate of profit** is generated (although we must

stress that investment decisions are difficult to reverse and this means mobility can be reduced, causing adjustment problems -- such as unemployment -- within the economy). The *rate of profit* is the amount of profit divided by the total capital invested (i.e. constant capital -- means of production -- and variable capital -- wages and slavery). If the given price generates above-average profits (and so profit rate), then capital will try to move from profit-poor areas into this profit-rich area, increasing supply and competition and so reducing the price until an average rate of profit is again produced (we stress **try to** as many markets have extensive barriers to entry which limit the mobility of capital and so allow big business to reap higher profit rates -- see [section C.4](#)). So, if the price results in demand exceeding supply, this causes a short term price increase and these extra profits indicate to other capitalists to move into this market. The supply of the commodity will tend to stabilise at whatever level of the commodity is demanded at the price which produces average profit rates (this level being dependent on the "*degree of monopoly*" within a market -- see [section C.5](#)). This profit level means that suppliers have no incentive to move capital into or out of that market. Any change from this level in the long term depends on changes on the production price of the good (lower production prices meaning higher profits, indicating to other capitalists that the market could be profitable for new investment).

As can be seen, this theory (often called the *Labour Theory of Value* -- or LTV for short) does not deny that consumers subjectively evaluate goods and that this evaluation can have a short term effect on price (which determines supply and demand). Many right-"libertarian" and mainstream economists assert that the labour theory of value removes demand from the determination of price. A favourite example is that of the "mud pie" -- if it takes the same labour as an apple pie to make, they ask, surely it has the same value (price)? These assertions are incorrect as the LTV bases itself on supply and demand and seeks to explain the dynamics of prices and so recognises (indeed bases itself on the fact) that individuals make their own decisions based upon their subjective needs (in the words of Proudhon, "*utility is the necessary condition for exchange.*" [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 77]). What the LTV seeks to explain is price (i.e. *exchange* value) -- and a good can only have an exchange value if others desire it (i.e. has a use value for them and they seek to *exchange* money or goods for it). Thus the example of the "mud pie" is a classic straw man argument -- the "mud pie" does not have an exchange value as it has no use value to others and is not subject to exchange. In other words, if a commodity cannot be exchanged, it cannot have an *exchange* value (and so price). As Proudhon argued, "*nothing is exchangeable if it be not useful.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 85]

The LTV is based upon the insight that without labour nothing would be produced and you have to produce something before you can exchange it (or you can steal it, as in the case of land). As the utility (i.e. use value) of a commodity cannot be measured, labour is the basis of (exchange) value. The LTV bases itself on the objective needs of production and recognises the key role labour plays (directly and indirectly) in the creation of commodities. However, this does not mean that value exists independently of demand. Far from it -- as noted, in order to have an exchange value, a good must be desired by someone other than its maker (or the capitalist who employs the maker), it must have a use-value for them (in other words, it is subjectively valued by them). Therefore workers produce that which has (use) value, as determined by the demand, and the costs of production involved in creating these use-values help determine the price (its exchange value) along with profit levels.

Therefore the LTV includes the element of truth of "subjective" theory while destroying its myths. For, in the end, the STV just states that *"prices are determined marginal utility; marginal utility is measured by prices. Prices . . . are nothing more or less than prices. Marginalists, having begun their search in the field of subjectivity, proceeded to walk in a circle."* [Allan Engler, **Apostles of Greed**, p. 27] The LTV, on the other hand, bases itself on the objective fact of production and the costs (ultimately expressed in labour time) ensuing in it (*"The absolute value of a thing, then, is its cost in time and expense."* [Proudhon, **What is Property?**, p. 145]). The variations in supply and demand (i.e. market prices) oscillate round this "absolute value" (i.e. production price) and so it is the cost of production of a commodity which ultimately regulates its price, not supply and demand (which only temporarily affects its market price).

While the STV is handy for describing the price of works of art (and we should note that the LTV can also provide an explanation for this), there is little point having an economic theory which ignores the nature of the vast majority of economic activity in society. What the labour theory of value explains is what is beneath supply and demand, what actually determines price under capitalism. It recognises the objectivity given price and supply which face a consumer and indicates how consumption ("subjective evaluations") affect their movements. It explains why a certain commodity sells at a certain price and not another -- something which the subjective theory cannot really do. Why should a supplier "alter their behaviour" in the market if it is based purely on "subjective evaluations"? There has to be an objective indication that guides their actions and this is found in the reality of capitalist production. To re-quote Proudhon, *"[i]f supply and demand alone determine value, how can we tell what is an excess and what is a sufficiency? If neither cost, nor market price, nor wages can be mathematically determined, how is it possible to conceive of a surplus, a profit?"* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 114] Therefore, *"[t]o say . . . that supply and demand is the law of exchange is to say that supply and demand is the law of supply and demand; it is not an explanation of the general practice, but a declaration of its absurdity."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 91] Thus the labour theory of value more accurately reflects reality: namely, that for a normal commodity, prices as well as supply exist before subjective evaluations can take place and that capitalism is based on the production of profit rather than abstractly satisfying consumer needs.

It could be argued that this *"prices of production"* theory is close to the neo-classical "partial equilibrium" theory. In some ways this is true. Marshall basically synthesised this theory from the marginal utility theory and the older "cost of production" theory which J.S. Mill derived from the LTV. However, the differences are important. First, the LTV does not get into the circular reasoning associated with attempts to derive utility from price we have indicated above. Second, it argues that rent, profit and interest are the unpaid labour of workers rather than being the "rewards" to owners for being owners. Thirdly, it is a **dynamic** system in which the prices of production can and do change as economic decisions are made. Fourthly, it can easily reject the idea of "perfect competition" and give an account of an economy marked by barriers to entry and difficult to reverse investment decisions. And, lastly, labour markets need not clear in the long run. Given that modern economics has given up trying to measure utility, it means that in practice (if not in rhetoric) the neo-classical model has rejected the marginal utility theory of value part of the synthesis and returned, basically, to the classical (LTV) approach -- but with important differences which gut the earlier version of its critical edge and dynamic nature.

Needless to say, the LTV does not ignore naturally occurring objects like gems, wild foods, and water. Nature is a vast source of use-values which humanity must utilise in order to produce other, different, use-values. If you like, the earth is the mother and labour the father of wealth. Its sometimes claimed that the labour theory of value implies that naturally occurring objects should have no price, since it takes no labour to produce them. This, however, is false. For example, gemstones are valuable because it takes a huge amount of labour to find them. If they were easy to find, like sand, they would be cheap. Similarly, wild foods and water have value according to how much labour is needed to find, collect, and process them in a given area (for example water in arid places is more "valuable" than water near a lake).

The same logic applies to other naturally occurring objects. If it takes virtually no effort to obtain them -- like air -- then they will have little or no exchange value. However, the more effort it takes to find, collect, purify, or otherwise process them for use, the more exchange value they will have relative to other goods (i.e. their production prices are higher, leading to a higher market price).

The attempt to ignore production implied in the STV comes from a desire to hide the exploitative nature of capitalism. By concentrating upon the "subjective" evaluations of individuals, those individuals are abstracted away from real economic activity (i.e. production) so the source of profits and power in the economy can be ignored. Section C.2 ([Where do profits come from?](#)) indicates why exploitation of labour in production is the source of profits, not activity in the market.

Of course, the pro-capitalist will argue that the labour theory of value is not universally accepted within mainstream economics. How true; but this hardly suggests that the theory is wrong. Afterall, it would have been easy to "prove" that democratic theory was "wrong" in Nazi Germany simply because it was not universally accepted by most lecturers and political leaders at the time. Under capitalism, more and more things are turned into commodities -- including economic theories and jobs for economists. Given a choice between a theory which argues that profits, interest and rent are unpaid labour (i.e. exploitation) or one that argues they are all valid "rewards" for service, which one do you think the wealthy will back in terms of funding?

This was the case with the labour theory of value. From the time of Adam Smith onwards, radicals had used the LTV to critique capitalism. The classical economists (Adam Smith and David Ricardo and their followers like J.S. Mill) argued that, in the long run, commodities exchanged in proportion to the labour used to produce them. Thus commodity exchange benefited all parties as they received an equivalent amount of labour as they had expended. However, this left the nature and source of capitalist profits subject to debate, debate which soon spread to the working class. Long before Karl Marx (the person most associated with the LTV) wrote his (in)famous work **Capital**, Ricardian Socialists like Robert Owen and William Thompson and anarchists like Proudhon were using the LTV to present a critique of capitalism, exposing it as being based upon exploitation (the worker did not, in fact, receive in wages the equivalent of the value she produced and so capitalism was **not** based on the exchange of equivalents). In the United States, Henry George was using it to attack the private ownership of land. When



marginalist economics came along, it was quickly seized upon as a way of undercutting radical influence. Indeed, followers of Henry George argue that neo-classical economics was developed primarily to counter act his ideas and influence (see **The Corruption of Economics** by Mason Gaffney and Fred Harrison).

Thus, as noted above, marginalist economics was seized upon, regardless of its merits as a science, simply because it took the political out of political economy. With the rise of the socialist movement and the critiques of Owen, Thompson, Proudhon and many others, the labour theory of value was considered too political and dangerous. Capitalism could no longer be seen as being based on the exchange of equivalent labour. Rather, it should be seen as being based on exchange of equivalent utility. But, as indicated (in the [last section](#)) the notion of equivalent utility was quickly dropped while the superstructure built upon it became the basis of capitalist economics. And without a theory of value, capitalist economics cannot prove that capitalism will result in harmony, the satisfaction of individual needs, justice in exchange or the efficient allocation of resources.

One last point. We must stress that not all anarchists support the LTV. Kropotkin, for example, did not agree with it. He considered socialist use of the LTV as taking *"the metaphysical definitions of the academical economists"* to critique capitalism using its own definitions and so, like capitalist economics, it was not scientific [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 92]. However, his rejection of the LTV did not imply that Kropotkin did not consider capitalism as exploitative. Far from it. Like every anarchist, Kropotkin attacked the *"appropriation of the produce of human labour by the owners of capital,"* seeing its roots in the fact that *"millions of men [and women] have literally nothing to live upon, unless they sell their labour force and their intelligence at a price that will make the net profit of the capitalist and 'surplus value' possible."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 106] We discuss profits in more detail in section C.2 ([Where do profits come from?](#)).

Kropotkin's rejection of the LTV is based on the fact that, within capitalism, *"[v]alue in exchange and the necessary labour are not proportional to each other"* and so *"Labour is not the measure of Value."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 91] Which is, of course, true under capitalism. As Proudhon (and Marx) argued, under capitalism (due to existence of capitalist profit, rent and interest) prices could not be proportional to the average labour required to produce a commodity (*"Wherever labour has not been socialised, -- that is, wherever value is not synthetically determined, -- there is irregularity and dishonesty in exchange."* [Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 128]) Only when the rate of profit is zero could prices directly reflect labour values (which is, of course, what Proudhon and Tucker desired -- *"Socialism . . . extends its ["that labour is the true measure of price"] function to the description of society as it should be, and the discovery of the means of making it what it should be."* [Tucker, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 79]). Therefore, Kropotkin is correct to state that *"[u]nder the capitalist system, value in exchange is measured no more by the amount of necessary labour."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 91]

However, this does not mean that the LTV is irrelevant to analysing the capitalist economy. Rather, it argues that under capitalism labour is, essentially, the **regulator** of price, **not** its measure. *"The idea that has been entertained hitherto of the measure of value,"* argued Proudhon, *"then, is inexact; the object of*

*our inquiry is not the standard of value, as has been said so often and so foolishly, but the law which regulates the proportions of the various products to the social wealth; for upon the knowledge of this law depends the rise and fall of prices.*" [System of Economical Contradictions, p. 94] So Kropotkin's argument does not undermine the LTV as such. Stripped of the metaphysical baggage which many (particularly Marxists) have placed on the LTV (and correctly attacked as unscientific by Kropotkin), it is essentially a methodological tool, a means of investigating the key aspects of capitalism -- namely wage labour and the conflicts associated with it at the point of production -- at a high level of abstraction. Thus it is a **explanatory** tool and value an explanatory category, a means of understanding the dynamics of capitalism.

Therefore, rather than being the crude idea that "exchange value" equals prices the LTV is primarily a means of analysis. This can be seen by our use of "production prices" rather than (exchange) value in our description of how the theory works. The LTV focuses analysis onto the production process and thus correctly points our investigations of how capitalism works to what goes on in production, to the relations of authority in the capitalist workplace, the struggle between the power of the boss and the liberty of the workers, the struggle over who controls the production process and how the surplus produced by workers is divided (i.e. how much remains in the hands of those who produced it and how much is appropriated by capitalists). Therefore, the claim that prices deviate from values and so the LTV is outdated indicates a confusion between the explanatory role of the LTV and the actual world of prices and profits. The LTV reminds us that production comes before and so underlies exchange and what happens at the point of production directly influences what happens in exchange. Decreasing the direct and indirect labour time required for production will decrease the cost price of a commodity and so reduce its production price. Thus the rise and fall of prices and profits is the result of changes in value relations (i.e. in the objective labour costs of production -- labour-time value) and so the use of the LTV as an explanatory tool is valid.

In other words, the labour theory of value is simply a good heuristic analysis device which gives an insight into how prices are formed rather than the prices as such. In practice, production prices are dependent on wages and these **reflect** labour-time values rather than **are** labour-time values.

Thus Kropotkin was right -- up to a point. His critique of the LTV is correct for those versions of it which state that "equilibrium" price equals the (exchange) value of a good. He was correct to note that under capitalism this rarely happens. Which means that our use of the LTV is simply that of an explanatory tool, a means of looking at the key aspect of capitalism -- namely the production process which creates things which have use value for others and are then exchanged. Production comes first and so we must first start there to understand the dynamics of capitalism. Not to do so, as the STV does, will lead your analysis into a dead end and will ignore the fundamental aspect of capitalism -- wage labour, the authority structures in production and the exploitation of labour such oppression generates.

Indeed, Kropotkin's argument is reflected the "prices of production" perspective outlined above as we concentrate of **prices** rather than "values." We reject the metaphysical abstractions often associated with the LTV and rather concentrate on real phenomenon, such as prices, profits, class struggle and so on. Such a perspective helps ground our critique of capitalism in what happens in the real world rather than

in the realms of abstraction. Marx's concentration on **value** (i.e. the abstract level of analysis) made him ignore the role of class struggle in capitalism and its affect on profits (with bad results for his theory and the movement he inspired).

### C.1.3 What else affects price levels?

As indicated in the [last section](#), the price of a capitalist commodity is, in the long term, equal to its production price, which in turn determines supply and demand. If demand or supply changes, which of course they can and do as consumers' values change and new means of production are created and old ones end, these will have a short-term effect on prices, but the average production price is the price around which a capitalist commodity sells. Thus it is the cost of production which ultimately regulates the price of commodities. In other words, "*market relations are governed by the production relations.*" [Paul Mattick, **Economic Crisis and Crisis Theory**, p. 51] As Proudhon put it:

*"Thus value varies, and the law of value is unchangeable, further, if value is susceptible of variation, it is because it is governed by a law whose principle is essentially inconstant, -- namely, labour measured by time."* [Op. Cit., p. 100]

However, the amount of time and effort spent in producing a particular commodity is not the essential factor in determining its price in the market. What counts is the costs (including the amount of work time) that it takes **on average** to produce that type of commodity, when the work is performed with average intensity, with typically used tools and average skill levels. Commodity production that falls below such standards, e.g. using obsolete technology or less-than-average intensity of work, will not allow the seller to raise the price of the commodity to compensate for its inefficient production, because its price is determined in the market by average conditions (and thus average costs) of production, plus the average profit levels required to meet the average rate of profit on the invested capital. On the other hand, using production methods that are **more** efficient than average -- i.e.. which allow more commodities to be produced with **less labour** -- will allow the seller to reap more profits and/or lower the price below average, and thus capture more market share, which will eventually force other producers to adopt the same technology in order to survive, and so lower the market production price of that type of commodity. In this way, advances that reduce labour time translate into reduced exchange value (and so price), thus showing the regulating function of labour time (and indicating the usefulness of the LTV as a methodological tool).

Similarly, the LTV also provides an explanation of why common resources in one area become more valuable in others (for example, the price of water to a person in a desert would be far higher than to someone next to a river). In the short term, the owner of water in the desert can charge a vast amount to those who want it simply because it is rare and the amount of labour required to find an alternative source would be high (we will ignore the ethics of charging high prices to people in need for the moment, as does marginalist economics which portrays such situations -- which most people would intuitively class as exploitative -- as "fair exchange"). But if such excess profits could be maintained for long periods, then they would tempt others to increase competition. If a steady demand for water existed

in that region then competition would drive down the price of water to around to the average price required to make it available (which explains why capitalists desire to reduce competition via the use of copyright laws, patents and so on -- see [section B.3.2](#) -- as well as increasing company size, market share and power -- see [section C.4](#)).

To summarise, as the production cost for a commodity is a given, only can indicate whether a given product is "valued" enough by consumers to warrant increased production. This means that *"capital moves from relatively stagnating into rapidly developing industries. . . . The extra profit, in excess of the average profit, won at a given price level disappears again, however, with the influx of capital from profit-poor into profit-rich industries,"* so increasing supply and reducing prices, and thus profits. [Paul Mattick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 49]

This process of capital investment, and its resulting competition, is the means by which markets prices tend towards production prices in a given market. Profit and the realities of the production process are the keys to understanding prices and how they affect (and are affected by) supply and demand.

Lastly, we must stress that to state that market price tends toward production is **not** to suggest that capitalism is at equilibrium. Far from it. Capitalism is always unstable, since *"growing out of capitalist competition, to heighten exploitation, . . . the relations of production... [are] in a state of perpetual transformation, which manifests itself in changing relative prices of goods on the market. Therefore the market is continuously in disequilibrium, although with different degrees of severity, thus giving rise, by its occasional approach to an equilibrium state, to the illusion of a tendency toward equilibrium."* [Paul Mattick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 51]

Therefore, innovation due to class struggle, competition, or the creation of new markets, has an important effect on market prices. This is because innovation changes the production costs of a commodity or creates new, profit-rich markets. While equilibrium may not be reached in practice, this does not change the fact that price determines demand, since consumers face prices as (usually) an already given objective value when they shop and make decisions based on these prices in order to satisfy their subjective needs. Thus the LTV recognises that capitalism is a system existing in time, with an uncertain future (a future influenced by many factors, including class struggle) and, by its very nature, dynamic. In addition, unlike neo-classical "long run equilibrium" prices, the LTV does not claim that labour markets will clear or that a change within one market will have no effect on others. Indeed, the labour market may see extensive unemployment as this helps maintain profit levels by maintaining discipline -- via fear of the sack -- in the workplace (see [section C.7](#)). Neither does it maintain that capitalism will be stable. As the history of "actually existing" capitalism shows, unemployment is always with us and the business cycle exists (in neo-classical economics such things cannot happen as the theory assumes that all markets clear and that slumps are impossible).

Moreover, the LTV indicates the source of this instability -- namely the *"contradictory idea of value, so clearly exhibited by the inevitable distinction between useful value and value in exchange."* [Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 84] This is particularly the case with labour, as the exchange value of labour (its cost, i.e.

wages) is different than its use value (i.e. what it actually produces during a working day). As we argue in the [next section](#), this difference between the use value of labour (its product) and its exchange value (its wage) is the source of capitalist profit (we will indicate in [section C.7](#) how this distinction influences the business cycle -- i.e. instability in the economy).

## F.1 Are "anarcho"-capitalists really anarchists?

In a word, no. While "anarcho"-capitalists obviously try to associate themselves with the anarchist tradition by using the word "anarcho", their ideas are distinctly at odds with those associated with anarchism. Because of this any claims that their ideas are anarchist or that they are part of the anarchist tradition or movement are false.

"Anarcho"-capitalists claim to be anarchists because they say that they oppose government. As such, as noted in the [last section](#), they use a dictionary definition of anarchism. However, this fails to appreciate that anarchism is a **political theory**, not a dictionary definition. As dictionaries are rarely politically sophisticated things, this means that they fail to recognise that anarchism is more than just opposition to government, it is also marked a opposition to capitalism (i.e. exploitation and private property). Thus, opposition to government is a necessary but not sufficient condition for being an anarchist -- you also need to be opposed to exploitation and capitalist private property. As "anarcho"-capitalists do not consider interest, rent and profits (i.e. capitalism) to be exploitative nor oppose capitalist property rights, they are not anarchists.

So in what ways do "anarcho"-capitalists differ from anarchists? There are three main ones:

Firstly, unlike both Individualist and Social anarchists, "anarcho"-capitalists support capitalism (a "pure" free market type of capitalism). This means that they reject totally the ideas of anarchists with regards to property and economic analysis. For example, like all supporters of capitalists they consider rent, profit and interest as valid incomes. In contrast, all Anarchists consider these as exploitation and agree with the Individualist Anarchist Tucker when argued that *"[w]hoever contributes to production is alone entitled. What has no rights that who is bound to respect. What is a thing. Who is a person. Things have no claims; they exist only to be claimed. The possession of a right cannot be predicted of dead material, but only a living person."* [quoted by Wm. Gary Kline, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 73] (And this, we must note, is the fundamental critique of the capitalist theory that capital is productive. In and of themselves, fixed costs do not create value. Rather value is creation depends on how investments are developed and used once in place. Because of this the Individualist Anarchists considered non-labour derived income as usury, unlike "anarcho"-capitalists).

Similarly, anarchists reject the notion of capitalist property rights in favour of possession (including the full fruits of one's labour). For example, anarchists reject private ownership of land in favour of a "occupancy and use" regime. In this we follow Proudhon's **What is Property?** and argue that *"property is theft"*.

As these ideas are an **essential** part of anarchist politics, they cannot be removed without seriously damaging the rest of the theory. This can be seen from Tucker's comments that *"Liberty insists. . . [on] the abolition of the State and the abolition of usury; on no more government of man by man, and no*

*more exploitation of man by man.*" [cited by Eunice Schuster in **Native American Anarchism**, p. 140]. He indicates that anarchism has specific economic **and** political ideas, that it opposes capitalism along with the state. Therefore anarchism was never purely a "political" concept, but always combined an opposition to oppression with an opposition to exploitation. The social anarchists made exactly the same point. Which means that when Tucker argued that "*Liberty insists on Socialism. . . - true Socialism, Anarchistic Socialism: the prevalence on earth of Liberty, Equality, and Solidarity*" [**Instead of a Book**, p. 363] he knew exactly what he was saying and meant it whole heartedly.

This combination of the political and economic is essential as they mutually reinforce each other. Without the economic ideas, the political ideas would be meaningless as inequality would make a mockery of them. As Kline notes, the Individualist Anarchists' "*proposals were designed to establish true equality of opportunity . . . and they expected this would result in a society without great wealth or poverty. In the absence of monopolistic factors which would distort competition, they expected a society largely of self-employed workmen with no significant disparity of wealth between any of them since all would be required to live at their own expense and not at the expense of exploited fellow human beings.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 103-4]

By removing the underlying commitment to abolish non-labour income, any "anarchist" capitalist society would have vast differences in wealth and so power. Instead of a government imposed monopolies in land, money and so on, the economic power flowing from private property and capital would ensure that the majority remained in (to use Spooner's words) "*the condition of servants*" (see sections [F.2](#) and [F.3.1](#) for more on this). The Individualist Anarchists were aware of this danger and so supported economic ideas that opposed usury (i.e. rent, profit and interest) and ensured the worker the full value of her labour. While not all of them called these ideas "socialist" it is clear that these ideas **are** socialist in nature and in aim (similarly, not all the Individualist Anarchists called themselves anarchists but their ideas are clearly anarchist in nature and in aim).

Because "anarcho"-capitalists embrace capitalism and reject socialism, they cannot be considered anarchists or part of the anarchist tradition.

Which brings us nicely to the second point, namely a lack of concern for equality. In stark contrast to anarchists of all schools, inequality is not seen to be a problem with "anarcho"-capitalists (see [section F.3](#)). However, it is a truism that not all "traders" are equally subject to the market (i.e. have the same market power). In many cases, a few have sufficient control of resources to influence or determine price and in such cases, all others must submit to those terms or not buy the commodity. When the commodity is labour power, even this option is lacking -- workers have to accept a job in order to live. As we argue in [section F.10.2](#), workers are usually at a disadvantage on the labour market when compared to capitalists, and this forces them to sell their liberty in return for making profits for others. These profits increase inequality in society as the property owners receive the surplus value their workers produce. This increases inequality further, consolidating market power and so weakens the bargaining position of workers further, ensuring that even the freest competition possible could not eliminate class power and society (something B. Tucker recognised as occurring with the development of trusts within capitalism

-- see [section G.4](#)). Little wonder Proudhon argued that the law of supply and demand was a "*deceitful law . . . suitable only for assuring the victory of the strong over the weak, of those who own property over those who own nothing.*" [quoted by Alan Ritter, **The Political Thought of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 121]

Wage labour is a key way of creating, maintaining and increasing inequality (as well as being a source of domination and subordination, i.e. unfreedom). Needless to say, inequalities of power and wealth do not restrict themselves solely to workplaces nor is the damage of hierarchy upon individuals and their liberty limited to working hours. Both have a deep impact on the rest of society, expanding into **all** areas of life and restricting liberty everywhere (see [section F.3](#) for a further discussion on this). You cannot isolate one aspect of life (i.e. work) and believe that it will somehow not affect all others. However, the "anarcho"-capitalist seems to believe you can.

Therefore anarchists recognise that "free exchange" in unequal circumstances will increase inequality between individuals and classes, **not** reduce it (and that inequality will produce social relationships which are based on hierarchy and domination, **not** freedom). As Noam Chomsky put it:

*"Anarcho-capitalism, in my opinion, is a doctrinal system which, if ever implemented, would lead to forms of tyranny and oppression that have few counterparts in human history. There isn't the slightest possibility that its (in my view, horrendous) ideas would be implemented, because they would quickly destroy any society that made this colossal error. The idea of 'free contract' between the potentate and his starving subject is a sick joke, perhaps worth some moments in an academic seminar exploring the consequences of (in my view, absurd) ideas, but nowhere else."* [Noam Chomsky on Anarchism, interview with Tom Lane, December 23, 1996]

Because of the evil effects of inequality on freedom, both the social and individualist anarchists desired to create an environment in which circumstances would not drive people to sell their liberty to others in return for wages. In other words, they desired an equalisation of market power by opposing interest, rent and profit and capitalist definitions of private property. Kline summarises this by saying "*the American [individualist] anarchists exposed the tension existing in liberal thought between private property and the ideal of equal access. The Individual Anarchists were, at least, aware that existing conditions were far from ideal, that the system itself working against the majority of individuals in their efforts to attain its promises. Lack of capital, the means to creation and accumulation of wealth, usually doomed a labourer to a life of exploitation. This the anarchists knew and they abhorred such a system.*" [Op. Cit., p. 102]

And this desire for bargaining equality is reflected in their economic ideas and by removing these underlying economic ideas of the individualist anarchists, "anarcho"-capitalism makes a mockery of any ideas they do appropriate. Essentially, the Individualist Anarchists agreed with Rousseau that in order to prevent extreme inequality of fortunes you deprive people of the means to accumulate in the first place and **not** take away wealth from the rich. An important point which "anarcho"-capitalism fails to



understand or appreciate.

In addition, we must note that such inequalities in power and wealth will need "defending" from those subject to them ("anarcho"-capitalists recognise the need for private police and courts to defend property from theft -- and, anarchists add, to defend the theft and despotism associated with property!). Due to its support of private property (and thus authority), "anarcho"-capitalism ends up retaining a state in its "anarchy"; namely a **private** state whose existence its proponents attempt to deny simply by refusing to call it a state, like an ostrich hiding its head in the sand (see [section F.6](#) for more on this and why "anarcho"-capitalism is better described as "private state" capitalism).

For anarchists, this need of capitalism for some kind of state is unsurprising because:

*"Anarchy without socialism seems equally as impossible to us [as socialism without anarchy], for in such a case it could not be other than the domination of the strongest, and would therefore set in motion right away the organisation and consolidation of this domination; that is to the constitution of government."* [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 148]

Because of this, the "anarcho"-capitalist rejection of anarchist ideas on capitalist property economics and the need for equality, they cannot be considered anarchists or part of the anarchist tradition.

Thirdly, unlike anarchists, "anarcho"-capitalists consider a society of generalised wage labour as a free and non-exploitative one -- but such a society is opposed by anarchists. Like all socialists, anarchists desire to see workers reunited with the means of production they use and so end the exploitation of workers by capitalists and landlords. In other words, when the Individual anarchists called themselves "socialists" they meant it (see [section G](#) for more details on this)!

If we look at the work of Individualist Anarchist Lysander Spooner, we find that he considered capitalism to result in labourers becoming *"mere tools and machines in the hands of their employers"* and labour *"only for the benefit of their employers."* [**A Letter to Grover Cleveland**, p. 50] He considered the Money Monopoly (a combination of specie commodity money and a 10% tax on non-registered banks) as *"the one great obstacle to the liberation of the labouring classes all over the world"*, a monopoly created by *"the employers of wage labour"* to ensure necessity *"compel[led] them [the great body of wealth producers] . . . - by the alternative of starvation - to sell their labour to the money monopolists."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 49, p. 48, p. 20]

Such an analysis is essentially socialist in nature, recognising that apparently "free" markets create conditions which drive working class people to sell their liberty on the market. Similarly, his vision of a free society is also socialist, with wage labour no more. With the end of the money (and land) monopolies, he considered that *"with few or no exceptions"* working people would stop being wage slaves and become self-employed workers. In stark contrast to wage labour, he considered that free labour involved the worker *"appl[ying] both his . . . head and his hands"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 48, p. 50]. Thus

Spencer recognised that under wage labour, there is a division of labour, with a few using their heads (giving orders) and the many using their hands (following orders).

*"Committed as they were to equality in the pursuit of property," argues Kline, "the objective for the anarchist became the construction of a society providing equal access to those things necessary for creating wealth. The goal of the anarchists who extolled mutualism and the abolition of all monopolies was, then, a society where everyone willing to work would have the tools and raw materials necessary for production in a non-exploitative system . . . the dominant vision of the future society . . . [was] underpinned by individual, self-employed workers."* [Op. Cit., p. 95]

"Anarcho"-capitalists assume that generalised wage labour would remain under their system (while paying lip-service to the possibilities of co-operatives -- and if an "anarcho"-capitalist thinks that co-operative will become the dominant form of workplace organisation, then they are some kind of market socialist, **not** a capitalist). It is clear that their end point (a pure capitalism, i.e. generalised wage labour) is directly the opposite of that desired by anarchists. This was the case of the Individualist Anarchists who embraced the ideal of (non-capitalist) laissez faire competition -- they did so, as noted, to **end** wage labour and usury, **not** to maintain them (indeed, their analysis of the change in American society from one of mainly independent producers into one based mainly upon wage labour has many parallels with, of all people, Karl Marx's presented in chapter 33 of **Capital**).

"Anarcho"-capitalists, in contrast, believe that it is likely that workplaces will remain hierarchical (i.e. capitalistic) even if the public state has been dissolved and that this is of no concern. This belief reveals the priority of their values: "efficiency" (the bottom line) is considered more important than eliminating the domination, coercion, and exploitation of workers. Similarly, they consider that profits, interest and rent as valid sources of income while anarchists oppose these as usury and exploitative.

Moreover, in practice, wage labour is a major source of oppression and authoritarianism within society -- there is little or no freedom within capitalist production (as Bakunin noted, *"the worker sells his person and his liberty for a given time"*). So, in stark contrast to anarchists, "anarcho"-capitalists have no problem with factory fascism (i.e. wage labour), a position which seems highly illogical for a theory calling itself libertarian. If it were truly libertarian, it would oppose all forms of domination, not just statism. This position flows from the "anarcho"-capitalist definition of freedom as the absence of coercion and will be discussed in [section F.2](#) in more detail.

This whole-hearted support for wage labour and capitalist property rights indicates that "anarcho"-capitalists are not anarchists because they do not reject all forms of **archy**. They obviously support the hierarchy between boss and worker (wage labour) and landlord and tenant. Anarchism, by definition, is against all forms of **archy**, including the hierarchy generated by capitalist property. To ignore the obvious **archy** associated with capitalist property is highly illogical.

The anti-anarchist nature of "anarcho"-capitalism can best be seen by quoting a leading "anarcho"-capitalist, Murray Rothbard. He argues, that the state *"arrogates to itself a monopoly of force, of ultimate*

*decision-making power, over a given area territorial area.*" [Rothbard, **The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 170] In and of itself, this definition is unremarkable. Unfortunately for him (and "anarcho"-capitalist claims of being anarchist), he also notes that capitalist property owners have similar powers. As he states, "[o]bviously, in a free society, Smith has the ultimate decision-making power over his own just property, Jones over his, etc." [Op. Cit., p. 173] and, equally obviously, this ultimate-decision making power extends to those who **use**, but do not own, such property (i.e. tenants and workers). The statist nature of property property is clearly indicated by Rothbard's words -- the property owner in an "anarcho"-capitalist society possesses the "*ultimate decision-making power*" over a given area, which is also what the state has currently.

As we argue in more depth in [section F.2](#), "anarcho"-capitalism cannot be considered as anarchist simply because they replace the authority of the state with that of the property owner. Both has "*ultimate decision-making power*" over a given area and so over those who live in (or use) that area. The similarities between capitalism and statism are clear -- and so why "anarcho"-capitalism cannot be anarchist. To reject the authority (the "*ultimate decision-making power*") of the state and embrace that of the property owner indicates not only a highly illogical stance but one at odds with the basic principles of anarchism.

Thus anarchism is far more than the common dictionary definition of "*no government*" -- it also entails being against all forms of **archy**, including those generated by capitalist property. This is clear from the roots of the word "anarchy." As we noted in [section A.1](#), the word anarchy means "*no rulers*" or "*contrary to authority*". As Rothbard himself acknowledges, the property owner is the ruler of their property and, therefore, those who use it (hence Bakunin's above quoted comment that "*the worker sells his person and his liberty for a given time*"). For this reason "anarcho"-capitalism cannot be considered as a form of anarchism -- a real anarchist must logically oppose the authority of the property owner along with that of the state.

Because "anarcho"-capitalism does not explicitly (or implicitly, for that matter) call for economic arrangements that will end wage labour and usury they cannot be considered anarchists or part of the anarchist tradition.

To conclude.

Political theories should be identified by their actual features and history rather than labels. Once we recognise that, we soon find out that "anarcho"-capitalism is an oxymoron. Anarchists and "anarcho"-capitalists are not part of the same movement or tradition. Their ideas and aims are in direct opposition to those of all kinds of anarchists.

While anarchists have always opposed capitalism, "anarcho"-capitalists have embraced it. And due to this embrace their "anarchy" will be marked by extensive differences in wealth and power, differences that will show themselves up in relationships based upon subordination and hierarchy (such as wage labour), **not** freedom (little wonder that Proudhon argued that "*property is despotism*" -- it creates

authoritarian and hierarchical relationships between people in a similar way to statism).

Their support for "free market" capitalism ignores the impact of wealth and power on the nature and outcome of individual decisions within the market (see sections [F.2](#) and [F.3](#) for further discussion). For example, as we indicate in sections [J.5.10](#), [J.5.11](#) and [J.5.12](#) wage labour is less efficient than self-management in production but due to the structure and dynamics of the capitalist market, "market forces" will actively discourage self-management due to its empowering nature for workers. In other words, a developed capitalist market will promote hierarchy and unfreedom in production in spite of its effects on individual workers and their wants (see also [section F.10.2](#)). Thus "free market" capitalism tends to re-enforce inequalities of wealth and power, **not** eliminate them.

Furthermore, any such system of (economic and social) power will require extensive force to maintain it and the "anarcho"-capitalist system of competing "defence firms" will simply be a new state, enforcing capitalist power, property rights and law.

Overall, the lack of concern for meaningful freedom within production and the effects of vast differences in power and wealth within society as a whole makes "anarcho"-capitalism little better than "anarchism for the rich." Emma Goldman recognised this when she argued that *"'Rugged individualism' has meant all the 'individualism' for the masters . . . in whose name political tyranny and social oppression are defended and held up as virtues while every aspiration and attempt of man to gain freedom . . . is denounced as . . . evil in the name of that same individualism."* [ **Red Emma Speaks**, p. 112] And, as such, is no anarchism at all.

So, unlike anarchists, "anarcho"-capitalists do not seek the *"abolition of the proletariat"* (to use Proudhon's expression) via changing capitalist property rights and institutions. Thus the "anarcho"-capitalist and the anarchist have different starting positions and opposite ends in mind and so they cannot be considered part of the same (anarchist) tradition.

As we discuss further in later sections, the "anarcho"-capitalist claims to being anarchists are bogus simply because they reject so much of the anarchist tradition as to make what they do accept non-anarchist in theory and practice. Little wonder Peter Marshall said that *"few anarchists would accept the 'anarcho-capitalists' into the anarchist camp since they do not share a concern for economic equality and social justice."* [ **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 565]

## **F.1.1 Why is the failure to renounce hierarchy the Achilles Heel of right-wing libertarianism and "anarcho"-capitalism?**

Any capitalist system will produce vast differences in economic (and social) wealth and power. As we argue in [section F.3.1](#), such differences will reflect themselves in the market and any "free" contracts agreed there will create hierarchical relationships. Thus capitalism is marked by hierarchy (see [section B.1.2](#)) and, unsurprisingly, right-libertarians and "anarcho"-capitalists fail to oppose such "free market"

generated hierarchy.

Both groups approve of it in the capitalist workplace or rented accommodation and the right-Libertarians also approve of it in a 'minimal' state to protect private property ("anarcho"-capitalists, in contrast, approve of the use of private defence firms to protect property). But the failure of these two movements to renounce hierarchy is their weakest point. For anti-authoritarianism has sunk deep roots into the modern psyche, as a legacy of the sixties.

Many people who do not even know what anarchism is have been profoundly affected by the personal liberation and counterculture movements of the past thirty years, epitomised by the popular bumper sticker, "*Question Authority.*" As a result, society now tolerates much more choice than ever before in matters of religion, sexuality, art, music, clothing, and other components of lifestyle. We need only recall the conservatism that reigned in such areas during the fifties to see that the idea of liberty has made tremendous advances in just a few decades.

Although this liberatory impulse has so far been confined almost entirely to the personal and cultural realms, it may yet be capable of spilling over and affecting economic and political institutions, provided it continues to grow. The Right is well aware of this, as seen in its ongoing campaigns for "family values," school prayer, suppression of women's rights, fundamentalist Christianity, sexual abstinence before marriage, and other attempts to revive the Ozzie-and-Harriet mindset of the Good Old Days. This is where the efforts of "cultural anarchists" -- artists, musicians, poets, and others -- are important in keeping alive the ideal of personal freedom and resistance to authority as a necessary foundation for economic and political restructuring.

Indeed, the libertarian right (as a whole) support restrictions on freedom **as long as its not the state that is doing it!** Their support for capitalism means that they have no problem with bosses dictating what workers do during working hours (nor outside working hours, if the job requires employees to take drug tests or not be gay in order to keep it). If a private landlord or company decrees a mandatory rule or mode of living, workers/tenets must "love it or leave it!" Of course, that the same argument also applies to state laws is one hotly denied by right-Libertarians -- a definite case of not seeing the wood for the trees (see [section F.2.3](#)).

Of course, the "anarcho"-capitalist will argue, workers and tenants can find a more liberal boss or landlord. This, however, ignores two key facts. Firstly, being able to move to a more liberal state hardly makes state laws less offensive (as they themselves will be the first to point out). Secondly, looking for a new job or home is not that easy. Just a moving to a new state can involve drastic upheavals, so change changing jobs and homes. Moreover, the job market is usually a buyers market (it has to be in capitalism, otherwise profits are squeezed -- see sections [C.7](#) and [F.10.2](#)) and this means that workers are not usually in a position (unless they organise) to demand increased liberties at work.

It seems somewhat ironic, to say the least, that right-libertarians place rights of property over the rights of self-ownership, even though (according to their ideology) self-ownership is the foundational right

from which property rights are derived. Thus in right-libertarianism the rights of property owners to discriminate and govern the property-less are more important than the freedom from discrimination (i.e. to be yourself) or the freedom to govern oneself at all times.

So, when it boils down to it, right-libertarians are not really bothered about restrictions on liberty and, indeed, they will defend private restrictions on liberty with all their might. This may seem a strange position for self-proclaimed "libertarians" to take, but it flows naturally from their definition of freedom (see [section F.2](#) for a full discussion of this). but by not attacking hierarchy beyond certain forms of statism, the 'libertarian' right fundamentally undermines its claim to be libertarian. Freedom cannot be compartmentalised, but is holistic. The denial of liberty in, say, the workplace, quickly results in its being denied elsewhere in society (due to the impact of the inequalities it would produce), just as the degrading effects of wage labour and the hierarchies with which is it bound up are felt by the worker outside work.

Neither the Libertarian Party nor so-called "anarcho"-capitalism is **genuinely** anti-authoritarian, as those who are truly dedicated to liberty must be.

## F.1.2 How libertarian is right-Libertarian theory?

The short answer is, not very. Liberty not only implies but also requires independent, critical thought (indeed, anarchists would argue that critical thought requires free development and evolution and that it is precisely **this** which capitalist hierarchy crushes). For anarchists a libertarian theory, if it is to be worthy of the name, must be based upon critical thought and reflect the key aspect that characterises life - change and the ability to evolve. To hold up dogma and base "theory" upon assumptions (as opposed to facts) is the opposite of a libertarian frame of mind. A libertarian theory must be based upon reality and recognise the need for change and the existence of change. Unfortunately, right-Libertarianism is marked more by ideology than critical analysis.

Right-Libertarianism is characterised by a strong tendency of creating theories based upon assumptions and deductions from these axioms (for a discussion on the pre-scientific nature of this methodology and of its dangers, see the [next section](#)). Robert Nozick, for example, in **Anarchy, State, and Utopia** makes no attempt to provide a justification of the property rights his whole theory is based upon. His main assumption is that "*[i]ndividuals have rights, and there are certain things no person or group may do to them (without violating their rights).*" [**Anarchy, State and Utopia**, p. ix] While this does have its intuitive appeal, it is not much to base a political ideology upon. After all, what rights people consider as valid can be pretty subjective and have constantly evolved during history. To say that "individuals have rights" is to open up the question "what rights?" Indeed, as we argue in greater length in [section F.2](#), such a rights based system as Nozick desires can and does lead to situations developing in which people "consent" to be exploited and oppressed and that, intuitively, many people consider supporting the "violation" of these "certain rights" (by creating other ones) simply because of their evil consequences.

In other words, starting from the assumption "people have [certain] rights" Nozick constructs a theory

which, when faced with the reality of unfreedom and domination it would create for the many, justifies this unfreedom as an expression of liberty. In other words, regardless of the outcome, the initial assumptions are what matter. Nozick's intuitive rights system can lead to some very non-intuitive outcomes.

And does Nozick prove the theory of property rights he assumes? He states that "*we shall not formulate [it] here.*" [Op. Cit., p. 150] Moreover, it is not formulated anywhere else in his book. And if it is not formulated, what is there to defend? Surely this means that his Libertarianism is without foundations? As Jonathan Wolff notes, Nozick's "*Libertarian property rights remain substantially undefended.*" [Robert Nozick: Property, Justice and the Minimal State, p. 117] Given that the right to acquire property is critical to his whole theory you would think it important enough to go into in some detail (or at least document). After all, unless he provides us with a firm basis for property rights then his entitlement theory is nonsense as no one has the right to (private) property.

It could be argued that Nozick **does** present enough information to allow us to piece together a possible argument in favour of property rights based on his modification of the "*Lockean Proviso*" (although he does not point us to these arguments). However, assuming this is the case, such a defence actually fails (see [section B.3.4](#) for more on this). If individuals **do** have rights, these rights do not include property rights in the form Nozick assumes (but does not prove). Nozick appears initially convincing because what he assumes with regards to property is a normal feature of the society we are in (we would be forgiven when we note here that feeble arguments pass for convincing when they are on the same side as the prevailing sentiment).

Similarly, both Murray Rothbard and Ayn Rand (who is infamous for repeating "*A is A*" ad infinitum) do the same - base their ideologies on assumptions (see [section F.7](#) for more on this).

Therefore, we see that most of the leading right-Libertarian ideologues base themselves on assumptions about what "Man" is or the rights they should have (usually in the form that people have (certain) rights because they are people). From these theorems and assumptions they build their respective ideologies, using logic to deduce the conclusions that their assumptions imply. Such a methodology is unscientific and, indeed, a relic of religious (pre-scientific) society (see [next section](#)) but, more importantly, can have negative effects on maximising liberty. This is because this "methodology" has distinct problems. Murray Bookchin argues:

*"Conventional reason rests on identity, not change; its fundamental principle is that A equals A, the famous 'principle of identity,' which means that any given phenomenon can be only itself and cannot be other than what we immediately perceive it to be at a given moment in time. It does not address the problem of change. A human being is an infant at one time, a child at another, an adolescent at still another, and finally a youth and an adult. When we analyse an infant by means of conventional reason, we are not exploring what it is **becoming** in the process of developing into a child." ["A Philosophical Naturalism", Society and Nature No.2, p. 64]*

In other words, right-Libertarian theory is based upon ignoring the fundamental aspect of life - namely **change** and **evolution**. Perhaps it will be argued that identity also accounts for change by including potentiality -- which means, that we have the strange situation that A can **potentially** be A! If A is not actually A, but only has the potential to be A, then A is not A. Thus to include change is to acknowledge that A does not equal A -- that individuals and humanity evolves and so what constitutes A also changes. To maintain identity and then to deny it seems strange.

That change is far from the "A is A" mentality can be seen from Murray Rothbard who goes so far as to state that *"one of the notable attributes of natural law" is "its applicability to all men [sic!], regardless of time or place. Thus ethical law takes its place alongside physical or 'scientific' natural laws."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 42] Apparently the "nature of man" is the only living thing in nature that does not evolve or change! Of course, it could be argued that by "natural law" Rothbard is only referring to his method of deducing his (and, we stress, they are just his -- not natural) "ethical laws" -- but his methodology starts by assuming certain things about "man." Whether these assumptions seem far or not is besides the point, by using the term "natural law" Rothbard is arguing that any actions that violate **his** ethical laws are somehow "against nature" (but if they were against nature, they could not occur -- see [section F.7](#) for more on this). Deductions from assumptions is a Procrustean bed for humanity (as Rothbard's ideology shows).

So, as can be seen, many leading right-Libertarians place great store by the axiom "A is A" or that "man" has certain rights simply because "he" is a "man". And as Bookchin points out, such conventional reason *"doubtless plays an indispensable role in mathematical thinking and mathematical sciences . . . and in the nuts-and-bolts of dealing with everyday life"* and so is essential to *"understand or design mechanical entities."* [**Ibid.**, p.67] But the question arises, is such reason useful when considering people and other forms of life?

Mechanical entities are but one (small) aspect of human life. Unfortunately for right-Libertarians (and fortunately for the rest of humanity), human beings are **not** mechanical entities but instead are living, breathing, feeling, hoping, dreaming, **changing** living organisms. They are not mechanical entities and any theory that uses reason based on such (non-living) entities will flounder when faced with living ones. In other words, right-Libertarian theory treats people as the capitalist system tries to -- namely as commodities, as things. Instead of human beings, whose ideas, ideals and ethics change, develop and grow, capitalism and capitalist ideologues try to reduce human life to the level of corn or iron (by emphasising the unchanging "nature" of man and their starting assumptions/rights).

This can be seen from their support for wage labour, the reduction of human activity to a commodity on the market. While paying lip service to liberty and life, right-libertarianism justifies the commodification of labour and life, which within a system of capitalist property rights can result in the treating of people as means to an end as opposed to an end in themselves (see sections [F.2](#) and [F.3.1](#)).

And as Bookchin points out, *"in an age of sharply conflicting values and emotionally charged ideals,*



*such a way of reasoning is often repellent. Dogmatism, authoritarianism, and fear seem all-pervasive.*" [Ibid., p. 68] Right-Libertarianism provides more than enough evidence for Bookchin's summary with its support for authoritarian social relationships, hierarchy and even slavery (see [section F.2](#)).

This mechanical viewpoint is also reflected in their lack of appreciation that social institutions and relationships evolve over time and, sometimes, fundamentally change. This can best be seen from property. Right-libertarians fail to see that over time (in the words of Proudhon) property "*changed its nature.*" Originally, "*the word **property** was synonymous with . . . **individual possession***" but it became more "*complex*" and turned into **private property** -- "*the right to use it by his neighbour's labour.*" The changing of use-rights to (capitalist) property rights created relations of domination and exploitation between people absent before. For the right-Libertarian, both the tools of the self-employed artisan and the capital of a transnational corporation are both forms of "property" and (so) basically identical. In practice, of course, the social relations they create and the impact they have on society are totally different. Thus the mechanical mind-set of right-Libertarianism fails to understand how institutions, like property, evolve and come to replace whatever freedom enhancing features they had with oppression (indeed, von Mises argued that "*[t]here may possibly be a difference of opinion about whether a particular institution is socially beneficial or harmful. But once it has been judged [by whom, we ask] beneficial, one can no longer contend that, for some inexplicable reason, it must be condemned as immoral*" [**Liberalism**, p. 34] So much for evolution and change!).

Anarchism, in contrast, is based upon the importance of critical thought informed by an awareness that life is in a constant process of change. This means that our ideas on human society must be informed by the facts, not by what we wish was true. For Bookchin, an evaluation of conventional wisdom (as expressed in "*the law of identity*") is essential and its conclusions have "*enormous importance for how we behave as ethical beings, the nature of nature, and our place in the natural world. Moreover. . . these issues directly affect the kind of society, sensibility, and lifeways we wish to foster.*" [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 69-70]

Bookchin is correct. While anarchists oppose hierarchy in the name of liberty, right-libertarians support authority and hierarchy, all of which deny freedom and restrict individual development. This is unsurprising because the right-libertarian ideology rejects change and critical thought based upon the scientific method and so is fundamentally **anti-life** in its assumptions and **anti-human** in its method. Far from being a libertarian set of ideas, right-Libertarianism is a mechanical set of dogmas that deny the fundamental nature of life (namely change) and of individuality (namely critical thought and freedom). Moreover, in practice their system of (capitalist) rights would soon result in extensive restrictions on liberty and authoritarian social relationships (see sections [F.2](#) and [F.3](#)) -- a strange result of a theory proclaiming itself "libertarian" but one consistent with its methodology.

From a wider viewpoint, such a rejection of liberty by right-libertarians is unsurprising. They do, after all, support capitalism. Capitalism produces an inverted set of ethics, one in which capital (dead labour) is more important than people (living labour). After all, workers are usually easier to replace than

investments in capital and the person who owns capital commands the person who "only" owns his life and productive abilities. And as Oscar Wilde once noted, crimes against property *"are the crimes that the English law, valuing what a man has more than what a man is, punishes with the harshest and most horrible severity."* [**The Soul of Man Under Socialism**]

This mentality is reflected in right-libertarianism when it claims that stealing food is a crime while starving to death (due to the action of market forces/power and property rights) is no infringement of your rights (see [section F.4.2](#) for a similar argument with regards to water). It can also be seen when right-libertarian's claim that the taxation *"of earnings from labour"* (e.g. of one dollar from a millionaire) is *"on a par with forced labour"* [Nozick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 169] while working in a sweatshop for 14 hours a day (enriching said millionaire) does not affect your liberty as you "consent" to it due to market forces (although, of course, many rich people have earned their money **without** labouring themselves -- their earnings derive from the wage labour of others so would taxing those, non-labour, earnings be "forced labour"?) Interestingly, the Individualist Anarchist Ben Tucker argued that an income tax was *"a recognition of the fact that industrial freedom and equality of opportunity no longer exist here [in the USA in the 1890s] even in the imperfect state in which they once did exist"* [quoted by James Martin, **Men Against the State**, p. 263] which suggests a somewhat different viewpoint on this matter than Nozick or Rothbard.

That capitalism produces an inverted set of ethics can be seen when the Ford produced the Pinto. The Pinto had a flaw in it which meant that if it was hit in a certain way in a crash the fuel tank exploded. The Ford company decided it was more "economically viable" to produce that car and pay damages to those who were injured or the relatives of those who died than pay to change the invested capital. The needs for the owners of capital to make a profit came before the needs of the living. Similarly, bosses often hire people to perform unsafe work in dangerous conditions and fire them if they protest. Right-libertarian ideology is the philosophical equivalent. Its dogma is "capital" and it comes before life (i.e. "labour").

As Bakunin once put it, *"you will always find the idealists in the very act of practical materialism, while you will see the materialists pursuing and realising the most grandly ideal aspirations and thoughts."* [**God and the State**, p. 49] Hence we see right "libertarians" supporting sweat shops and opposing taxation -- for, in the end, money (and the power that goes with it) counts far more in that ideology than ideals such as liberty, individual dignity, empowering, creative and productive work and so forth for all. The central flaw of right-libertarianism is that it does not recognise that the workings of the capitalist market can easily ensure that the majority end up becoming a resource for others in ways far worse than that associated with taxation. The legal rights of self-ownership supported by right-libertarians does not mean that people have the ability to avoid what is in effect enslavement to another (see sections [F.2](#) and [F.3](#)).

Right-Libertarian theory is not based upon a libertarian methodology or perspective and so it is hardly surprising it results in support for authoritarian social relationships and, indeed, slavery (see [section F.2.6](#)).

### F.1.3 Is right-Libertarian theory scientific in nature?

Usually, no. The scientific approach is **inductive**, much of the right-libertarian approach is **deductive**. The first draws generalisations from the data, the second applies preconceived generalisations to the data. A completely deductive approach is pre-scientific, however, which is why many right-Libertarians cannot legitimately claim to use a scientific method. Deduction does occur in science, but the generalisations are primarily based on other data, not *a priori* assumptions, and are checked against data to see if they are accurate. Anarchists tend to fall into the inductive camp, as Kropotkin put it:

*"Precisely this natural-scientific method applied to economic facts, enables us to prove that the so-called 'laws' of middle-class sociology, including also their political economy, are not laws at all, but simply guesses, or mere assertions which have never been verified at all."* [Kropotkin's **Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 153]

The idea that natural-scientific methods can be applied to economic and social life is one that many right-libertarians reject. Instead they favour the deductive (pre-scientific) approach (this we must note is not limited purely to Austrian economists, many more mainstream capitalist economists also embrace deduction over induction).

The tendency for right-Libertarianism to fall into dogmatism (or *a priori* theorems, as they call it) and its implications can best be seen from the work of Ludwig von Mises and other economists from the right-Libertarian "Austrian school." Of course, not all right-libertarians necessarily subscribe to this approach (Murray Rothbard for one did) but its use by so many leading lights of both schools of thought is significant and worthy of comment. And as we are concentrating on **methodology** it is not essential to discuss the starting assumptions. The assumptions (such as, to use Rothbard's words, the Austrian's "*fundamental axiom that individual human beings act*") may be correct, incorrect or incomplete -- but the method of using them advocated by von Mises ensures that such considerations are irrelevant.

Von Mises (a leading member of the Austrian school of economics) begins by noting that social and economic theory "*is not derived from experience; it is prior to experience...*" Which is back to front. It is obvious that experience of capitalism is necessary in order to develop a viable theory about how it works. Without the experience, any theory is just a flight of fantasy. The actual specific theory we develop is therefore derived from experience, informed by it and will have to get checked against reality to see if it is viable. This is the scientific method - any theory must be checked against the facts.

However, von Mises goes on to argue at length that "*no kind of experience can ever force us to discard or modify **a priori** theorems; they are logically prior to it and cannot be either proved by corroborative experience or disproved by experience to the contrary . . .*"

Von Mises makes a similar claim in his work **Human Action**, namely that experience "*can never . . . prove or disprove any particular theorem . . . The ultimate yardstick of an economic theorem's*

*correctness or incorrectness is solely reason unaided by experience.*" [p. 858]

And if this does not do justice to a full exposition of the phantasmagoria of von Mises' *a priorism*, the reader may take some joy (or horror) from the following statement:

*"If a contradiction appears between a theory and experience, we must always assume that a condition pre-supposed by the theory was not present, or else there is some error in our observation. The disagreement between the theory and the facts of experience frequently forces us to think through the problems of the theory again. But so long as a rethinking of the theory uncovers no errors in our thinking, we are not entitled to doubt its truth"* [emphasis added -- the quotes presented here are cited in **Ideology and Method in Economics** by Homa Katouzian, pp. 39-40]

In other words, if reality is in conflict with your ideas, do not adjust your views because reality must be at fault! The scientific method would be to revise the theory in light of the facts. It is not scientific to reject the facts in light of the theory!

Von Mises rejects the scientific approach as do all Austrian Economists. Murray Rothbard states approvingly that *"Mises indeed held not only that economic theory does not need to be 'tested' by historical fact but also that it cannot be so tested."* [*Praxeology: The Methodology of Austrian Economics* in **The Foundation of Modern Austrian Economics**, p. 32] Similarly, von Hayek wrote that economic theories can *"never be verified or falsified by reference to facts. All that we can and must verify is the presence of our assumptions in the particular case."* [**Individualism and Economic Order**, p. 73]

This may seem somewhat strange to non-Austrians. How can we ignore reality when deciding whether a theory is a good one or not? If we cannot evaluate our ideas, how can we consider them anything but dogma? The Austrians maintain that we cannot use historical evidence because every historical situation is unique. Thus we cannot use *"complex heterogeneous historical facts as if they were repeatable homogeneous facts"* like those in a scientist's experiment [Rothbard, **Op. Cit.**, p. 33]. While such a position **does** have an element of truth about it, the extreme *a priorism* that is drawn from this element is radically false (just as extreme empiricism is also false, but for different reasons).

Those who hold such a position ensure that their ideas cannot be evaluated beyond logical analysis. As Rothbard makes clear, *"since praxeology begins with a true axiom, A, all that can be deduced from this axiom must also be true. For if A implies B, and A is true, then B must also be true."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 19-20] But such an approach makes the search for truth a game without rules. The Austrian economists (and other right-libertarians) who use this method are free to theorise anything they want, without such irritating constrictions as facts, statistics, data, history or experimental confirmation. Their only guide is logic. But this is no different from what religions do when they assert the logical existence of God. Theories ungrounded in facts and data are easily spun into any belief a person wants. Starting assumptions and trains of logic may contain inaccuracies so small as to be undetectable, yet will yield

entirely false conclusions.

In addition, trains of logic may miss things which are only brought to light by actual experiences (after all, the human mind is not all knowing or all seeing). To ignore actual experience is to lose that input when evaluating a theory. Hence our comments on the irrelevance of the assumptions used -- the methodology is such that incomplete or incorrect assumptions or steps cannot be identified in light of experience. This is because one way of discovering if a given chain of logic requires checking is to test its conclusions against available evidence (although von Mises did argue that the "*ultimate yardstick*" was "*solely reason unaided by experience*"). If we **do** take experience into account and rethink a given theory in the light of contradictory evidence, the problem remains that a given logical chain may be correct, but incomplete or concentrate on or stress inappropriate factors. In other words, our logical deductions may be correct but our starting place or steps wrong and as the facts are to be rejected in the light of the deductive method, we cannot revise our ideas.

Indeed, this approach could result in discarding (certain forms of) human behaviour as irrelevant (which the Austrian system claims using empirical evidence does). For there are too many variables that can have an influence upon individual acts to yield conclusive results explaining human behaviour. Indeed, the deductive approach may ignore as irrelevant certain human motivations which have a decisive impact on an outcome. There could be a strong tendency to project "right-libertarian person" onto the rest of society and history, for example, and draw inappropriate insights into the way human society works or has worked. This can be seen, for example, in attempts to claim pre-capitalist societies as examples of "anarcho"-capitalism in action.

Moreover, deductive reasoning cannot indicate the relative significance of assumptions or theoretical factors. That requires empirical study. It could be that a factor considered important in the theory actually turns out to have little effect in practice and so the derived axioms are so weak as to be seriously misleading.

In such a purely ideal realm, observation and experience are distrusted (when not ignored) and instead theory is the lodestone. Given the bias of most theorists in this tradition, it is unsurprising that this style of economics can always be trusted to produce results proving free markets to be the finest principle of social organisation. And, as an added bonus, reality can be ignored as it is **never** "pure" enough according to the assumptions required by the theory. It could be argued, because of this, that many right-libertarians insulate their theories from criticism by refusing to test them or acknowledge the results of such testing (indeed, it could also be argued that much of right-libertarianism is more a religion than a political theory as it is set-up in such a way that it is either true or false, with this being determined not by evaluating facts but by whether you accept the assumptions and logical chains presented with them).

Strangely enough, while dismissing the "testability" of theories many right-Libertarians (including Murray Rothbard) **do** investigate historical situations and claim them as examples of how well their ideas work in practice. But why does historical fact suddenly become useful when it can be used to bolster the right-Libertarian argument? Any such example is just as "complex" as any other and the good

results indicated may not be accountable to the assumptions and steps of the theory but to other factors totally ignored by it. If economic (or other) theory is untestable then **no** conclusions can be drawn from history, including claims for the superiority of laissez-faire capitalism. You cannot have it both ways -- although we doubt that right-libertarians will stop using history as evidence that their ideas work.

Perhaps the Austrian desire to investigate history is not so strange after all. Clashes with reality make a-priori deductive systems implode as the falsifications run back up the deductive changes to shatter the structure built upon the original axioms. Thus the desire to find **some** example which proves their ideology must be tremendous. However, the deductive a-priori methodology makes them unwilling to admit to being mistaken -- hence their attempts to downplay examples which refute their dogmas. Thus we have the desire for historical examples while at the same time they have extensive ideological justifications that ensure reality only enters their world-view when it agrees with them. In practice, the latter wins as real-life refuses to be boxed into their dogmas and deductions.

Of course it is sometimes argued that it is **complex** data that is the problem. Let us assume that this is the case. It is argued that when dealing with complex information it is impossible to use aggregate data without first having more simple assumptions (i.e. that "humans act"). Due to the complexity of the situation, it is argued, it is impossible to aggregate data because this hides the individual activities that creates it. Thus "complex" data cannot be used to invalidate assumptions or theories. Hence, according to Austrians, the axioms derived from the "simple fact" that "humans act" are the only basis for thinking about the economy.

Such a position is false in two ways.

Firstly, the aggregation of data **does** allow us to understand complex systems. If we look at a chair, we cannot find out whether it is comfortable, its colour, whether it is soft or hard by looking at the atoms that make it up. To suggest that you can is to imply the existence of green, soft, comfortable atoms. Similarly with gases. They are composed to countless individual atoms but scientists do not study them by looking at those atoms and their actions. Within limits, this is also valid for human action. For example, it would be crazy to maintain from historical data that interest rates will be a certain percentage a week but it is valid to maintain that interest rates are known to be related to certain variables in certain ways. Or that certain experiences will tend to result in certain forms of psychological damage. General tendencies and "rules of thumb" can be evolved from such study and these can be used to **guide** current practice and theory. By aggregating data you can produce valid information, rules of thumb, theories and evidence which would be lost if you concentrated on "simple data" (such as "humans act"). Therefore, empirical study produces facts which vary across time and place, and yet underlying and important patterns can be generated (patterns which can be evaluated against **new** data and improved upon).

Secondly, the simple actions themselves influence and are influenced in turn by overall (complex) facts. People act in different ways in different circumstances (something we can agree with Austrians about, although we refuse to take it to their extreme position of rejecting empirical evidence as such). To use simple acts to understand complex systems means to miss the fact that these acts are not independent of

their circumstances. For example, to claim that the capitalist market is "just" the resultant of bilateral exchanges ignores the fact that the market activity shapes the nature and form of these bilateral exchanges. The "simple" data is dependent on the "complex" system -- and so the complex system **cannot** be understood by looking at the simple actions in isolation. To do so would be to draw incomplete and misleading conclusions (and it is due to these interrelations that we argue that aggregate data should be used critically). This is particularly important when looking at capitalism, where the "simple" acts of exchange in the labour market are dependent upon and shaped by circumstances outside these acts.

So to claim that (complex) data cannot be used to evaluate a theory is false. Data can be useful when seeing whether a theory is confirmed by reality. This is the nature of the scientific method -- you compare the results expected by your theory to the facts and if they do not match you check your facts **and** check your theory. This may involve revising the assumptions, methodology and theories you use if the evidence is such as to bring them into question. For example, if you claim that capitalism is based on freedom but that the net result of capitalism is to produce relations of domination between people then it would be valid to revise, for example, your definition of freedom rather than deny that domination restricts freedom (see [section F.2](#) on this). But if actual experience is to be distrusted when evaluating theory, we effectively place ideology above people -- after all, how the ideology affects people in **practice** is irrelevant as experiences cannot be used to evaluate the (logically sound but actually deeply flawed) theory.

As we indicated above (in [section F.1.2](#)) and will discuss in more depth later (in [section F.7](#)) most of the leading right-Libertarian theorists base themselves on such deductive methodologies, starting from assumptions and "logically" drawing conclusions from them. The religious undertones of such methodology can best be seen from the roots of right-Libertarian "Natural law" theory.

Carole Pateman, in her analysis of Liberal contract theory, indicates the religious nature of the "Natural Law" argument so loved by the theorists of the "Radical Right." She notes that for Locke (the main source of the Libertarian Right's Natural Law cult) "*natural law*" was equivalent of "*God's Law*" and that "*God's law exists externally to and independently of individuals.*" [**The Problem of Political Obligation**, p. 154] No role for critical thought there, only obedience. Most modern day "Natural Law" supporters forget to mention this religious undercurrent and instead talk of about "Nature" (or "the market") as the deity that creates Law, not God, in order to appear "rational." So much for science.

Such a basis in dogma and religion can hardly be a firm foundation for liberty and indeed "Natural Law" is marked by a deep authoritarianism:

*"Locke's traditional view of natural law provided individual's with an external standard which they could recognise, but which they did not voluntarily choose to order their political life."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 79]

In [section F.7](#) we discuss the authoritarian nature of "Natural Law" and will not do so here. However,

here we must point out the political conclusions Locke draws from his ideas. Pateman summary is worth repeating at length:

Locke believed that *"obedience lasts only as long as protection. His individuals are able to take action themselves to remedy their political lot. . . but this does not mean, as is often assumed, that Locke's theory gives direct support to present-day arguments for a right of civil disobedience. . . His theory allows for two alternatives only: either people go peacefully about their daily affairs under the protection of a liberal, constitutional government, or they are in revolt against a government which has ceased to be 'liberal' and has become arbitrary and tyrannical, so forfeiting its right to obedience."* [Op. Cit., p. 77]

Locke's "rebellion" exists purely to reform a **new** 'liberal' government, not to change the existing socio-economic structure which the 'liberal' government exists to protect. His theory, therefore, indicates the results of a priorism, namely a denial of any form of social dissent which may change the "natural law" as defined by Locke.

So, von Mises, von Hayek and most right-libertarians reject the scientific method in favour of ideological correctness -- if the facts contradict your theory then they can be dismissed as too "complex" or "unique". Facts, however, should inform theory and any theory's methodology should take this into account. To dismiss facts out of hand is to promote dogma. This is not to suggest that a theory should be modified very time new data comes along -- that would be crazy as unique situations **do** exist, data can be wrong and so forth -- but it does suggest that if your theory **continually** comes into conflict with reality, its time to rethink the theory and not assume that facts cannot invalidate it. A true libertarian would approach a contradiction between reality and theory by evaluating the facts available and changing the theory if this is required, not by ignoring reality or dismissing it as "complex".

Thus, much of right-Libertarian theory is neither libertarian nor scientific. Much of right-libertarian thought is highly axiomatic, being logically deduced from such starting axioms as *"self-ownership"* or *"no one should initiate force against another"*. Hence the importance of our discussion of von Mises as this indicates the dangers of this approach, namely the tendency to ignore/dismiss the consequences of these logical chains and, indeed, to justify them in terms of these axioms rather than from the facts. In addition, the methodology used is such as that it would be fair to argue that right-libertarians get to critique reality but reality can never be used to critique right-libertarianism -- for any empirical data presented as evidence as be dismissed as "too complex" or "unique" and so irrelevant (unless it can be used to support their claims, of course).

Hence W. Duncan Reekie's argument (quoting leading Austrian economist Israel Kirzner) that *"empirical work 'has the function of establishing the **applicability** of particular theorems, and thus **illustrating** their operation' . . . Confirmation of theory is not possible because there is no constants in human action, nor is it necessary because theorems themselves describe relationships logically developed from hypothesised conditions. Failure of a logically derived axiom to fit the facts does not render it invalid, rather it 'might merely indicate inapplicability' to the circumstances of the*



case.'" [Markets, Entrepreneurs and Liberty, p. 31]

So, if facts confirm your theory, your theory is right. If facts do not confirm your theory, it is still right but just not applicable in this case! Which has the handy side effect of ensuring that facts can **only** be used to support the ideology, **never** to refute it (which is, according to this perspective, impossible anyway). As Karl Popper argued, a *"theory which is not refutable by any conceivable event is non-scientific."* [Conjectures and Refutations, p. 36] In other words (as we noted above), if reality contradicts your theory, ignore reality!

Kropotkin hoped *"that those who believe in [current economic doctrines] will themselves become convinced of their error as soon as they come to see the necessity of verifying their quantitative deductions by quantitative investigation."* [Op. Cit., p. 178] However, the Austrian approach builds so many barriers to this that it is doubtful that this will occur. Indeed, right-libertarianism, with its focus on exchange rather than its consequences, seems to be based upon justifying domination in terms of their deductions than analysing what freedom actually means in terms of human existence (see [section F.2](#) for a fuller discussion).

The real question is why are such theories taken seriously and arouse such interest. Why are they not simply dismissed out of hand, given their methodology and the authoritarian conclusions they produce? The answer is, in part, that feeble arguments can easily pass for convincing when they are on the same side as the prevailing sentiment and social system. And, of course, there is the utility of such theories for ruling elites - *"[a]n ideological defence of privileges, exploitation, and private power will be welcomed, regardless of its merits."* [Noam Chomsky, **The Chomsky Reader**, p. 188]

# Section F - Is "anarcho"-capitalism a type of anarchism?

Anyone who has followed political discussion on the net has probably come across people calling themselves libertarians but arguing from a right-wing, pro-capitalist perspective. For most Europeans this is weird, as in Europe the term "*libertarian*" is almost always used in conjunction with "*socialist*" or "*communist*." In the US, though, the Right has partially succeeded in appropriating this term for itself. Even stranger, however, is that a few of these right-wingers have started calling themselves "anarchists" in what must be one of the finest examples of an oxymoron in the English language: 'Anarcho-capitalist'!!

Arguing with fools is seldom rewarded, but to allow their foolishness to go unchallenged risks allowing them to deceive those who are new to anarchism. That's what this section of the anarchist FAQ is for, to show why the claims of these "anarchist" capitalists are false. Anarchism has always been anti-capitalist and any "anarchism" that claims otherwise cannot be part of the anarchist tradition. So this section of the FAQ does not reflect some kind of debate within anarchism, as many of these types like to pretend, but a debate between anarchism and its old enemy, capitalism. In many ways this debate mirrors the one between Peter Kropotkin and Herbert Spencer, an English pro-capitalist, minimal statist, at the turn the 19th century and, as such, it is hardly new.

The "anarcho"-capitalist argument hinges on using the dictionary definition of "anarchism" and/or "anarchy" - they try to define anarchism as being "opposition to government," and nothing else. However, dictionaries are hardly politically sophisticated and their definitions rarely reflect the wide range of ideas associated with political theories and their history. Thus the dictionary "definition" is anarchism will tend to ignore its consistent views on property, exploitation, property and capitalism (ideas easily discovered if actual anarchist texts are read). And, of course, many dictionaries "define" anarchy as "chaos" or "disorder" but we never see "anarcho"-capitalists use that particular definition!

And for this strategy to work, a lot of "inconvenient" history and ideas from all branches of anarchism must be ignored. From individualists like Spooner and Tucker to communists like Kropotkin and Malatesta, anarchists have always been anti-capitalist (see [section G](#) for more on the anti-capitalist nature of individualist anarchism). Therefore "anarcho"-capitalists are not anarchists in the same sense that rain is not dry.

Of course, we cannot stop the "anarcho"-capitalists using the words "anarcho", "anarchism" and "anarchy" to describe their ideas. The democracies of the west could not stop the Chinese Stalinist state calling itself the People's Republic of China. Nor could the social democrats stop the fascists in Germany calling themselves "National Socialists". Nor could the Italian anarcho-syndicalists stop the fascists using the expression "National Syndicalism". This does not mean that any of these movements actual name reflected their content -- China is a dictatorship, not a democracy, the Nazi's were not

socialists (capitalists made fortunes in Nazi Germany because it crushed the labour movement), and the Italian fascist state had nothing in common with anarcho-syndicalists ideas of decentralised, "from the bottom up" unions and the abolition of the state and capitalism.

Therefore, just because someone uses a label it does not mean that they support the ideas associated with that label. And this is the case with "anarcho"-capitalism -- its ideas are at odds with the key ideas associated with all forms of traditional anarchism (even individualist anarchism which is often claimed as being a forefather of the ideology).

All we can do is indicate **why** "anarcho"-capitalism is not part of the anarchist tradition and so has falsely appropriated the name. This section of the FAQ aims to do just that -- present the case why "anarcho"-capitalists are not anarchists. We do this, in part, by indicating where they differ from genuine anarchists (on such essential issues as private property, equality, exploitation and opposition to hierarchy) In addition, we take the opportunity to present a general critique of right-libertarian claims from an anarchist perspective. In this way we show up why anarchists reject that theory as being opposed to liberty and anarchist ideals.

We are covering this topic in an anarchist FAQ for only one reason -- the high number of "libertarian" and "anarcho"-capitalists on the net (likely a class-based phenomenon, based on ownership of computers!) As we have extensively documented in earlier sections, anarchist theory has always been anti-capitalist. There is no relationship between anarchism and capitalism, in any form. Therefore, there is a need for this section in order to indicate exactly why "anarcho"-capitalism is not anarchist. We have, in earlier sections (see [section B](#) in particular), indicated why the idea of a "libertarian" capitalism is itself nonsense and will not repeat ourselves here.

So this section of the FAQ does not, as we noted above, represent some kind of "debate" within anarchism. It reflects the attempt by anarchists to reclaim the history and meaning of anarchism from those who are attempting to steal its name (just as right-wingers in America have attempted to appropriate the name "libertarian" for their pro-capitalist views, and by so doing ignore over 100 years of anti-capitalist usage). However, this section also serves two other purposes. Firstly, critiquing right-libertarian and "anarcho"-capitalist theories allows us to explain anarchist ones at the same time and indicate why they are better. Secondly, and more importantly, the "ideas" and "ideals" that underlie "anarcho"-capitalism are usually identical (or, at the very least, similar) to those of neo-liberalism (as Bob Black points out, a *"wing of the Reaganist Right has obviously appropriated, with suspect selectivity, such libertarian themes as deregulation and voluntarism. Ideologues indignant that Reagan has travestied their principles. Tough shit! I notice that it's their principles, not mine, that he found suitable to travesty"* [**The Libertarian As Conservative**]). And as neo-liberalism is being used as the ideological basis of the current attack on the working class, critiquing "anarcho" capitalism and right-libertarianism also allows use to build theoretical weapons to use to resist this attack and aid the class struggle.

A few more points before beginning. When debating with "libertarian" or "anarchist" capitalists it's

necessary to remember that while they claim "real capitalism" does not exist (because all existing forms of capitalism are statist), they will claim that all the good things we have -- advanced medical technology, consumer choice of products, etc. -- are nevertheless due to "capitalism." Yet if you point out any problems in modern life, these will be blamed on "statism." Since there has never been and never will be a capitalist system without some sort of state, it's hard to argue against this "logic." Many actually use the example of the Internet as proof of the power of "capitalism," ignoring the fact that the state paid for its development before turning it over to companies to make a profit from it. Similar points can be made about numerous other products of "capitalism" and the world we live in. To artificially separate one aspect of a complex evolution fails to understand the nature and history of the capitalist system.

In addition to this ability to be selective about the history and results of capitalism, their theory has a great "escape clause." If wealthy employers abuse their power or the rights of the working class (as they have always done), then they have (according to "libertarian" ideology) ceased to be capitalists! This is based upon the misperception that an economic system that relies on force **cannot** be capitalistic. This is **very** handy as it can absolve the ideology from blame for any (excessive) oppression which results from its practice. Thus individuals are always to blame, **not** the system that generated the opportunities for abuse they freely used.

Anarchism has always been aware of the existence of "free market" capitalism, particularly its extreme (minimal statist) wing, and has always rejected it. For example, Proudhon noted that *"the disciples of Malthus and of Say, who oppose with all their might any intervention of the State in matters commercial or industrial, do not fail to avail themselves of this seemingly liberal attitude, and to show themselves more revolutionary than the Revolution. More than one honest searcher has been deceived thereby."* However, this apparent "libertarian" attitude of supporters of capitalism is false as pure free market capitalism cannot solve the social question, which arises because of capitalism itself. Thus *"this inaction of Power in economic matters [celebrated by the "free market" right] was the foundation of government. What need should we have of a political organisation, if Power once permitted us to enjoy economic order?"* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 226] Instead of capitalism, Proudhon advocated the *"constitution of Value,"* the *"organisation of credit,"* the elimination of interest, the *"establishment of workingmen's associations"* and *"the use of a just price."* [**Ibid.**, p. 233]

Thus anarchists have evaluated "free market" capitalism and rejected it as non-anarchist over 150 years ago. Attempts by "anarcho"-capitalism to say that their system is "anarchist" flies in the face of this long history of anarchist analysis.

More generally, we must stress that most (if not all) anarchists do not want to live in a society **just like this one** but without state coercion and (the initiation of) force. Anarchists do not confuse "freedom" with the "right" to govern and exploit others nor with being able to change masters. It is not enough to say we can start our own (co-operative) business in such a society. We want the abolition of the capitalist system of authoritarian relationships, not just a change of bosses or the possibility of little islands of liberty within a sea of capitalism (islands which are always in danger of being flooded and our activity destroyed). Thus, in this section of the FAQ, we analysis many "anarcho"-capitalist claims on

their own terms (for example, the importance of equality in the market or why capitalism cannot be reformed away by exchanges on the capitalist market) but that does not mean we desire a society nearly identical to the current one. Far from it, we want to transform this society into one more suited for developing and enriching individuality and freedom. But before we can achieve that we must critically evaluate the current society and point out its basic limitations.

Finally, we dedicate this section of the FAQ to those who have seen the real face of "free market" capitalism at work: the working men and women (anarchist or not) murdered in the jails and concentration camps or on the streets by the hired assassins of capitalism.

# **Section G - Is individualist anarchism capitalistic?**

## **Introduction**

### **G.1 Are individualist anarchists anti-capitalist?**

**G.1.1 Why is the social context important in evaluating Individualist Anarchism?**

### **G.2 Why does individualist anarchism imply socialism?**

**G.2.1 What about their support of the free market?**

**G.2.2 What about their support of "private property"?**

### **G.3 What about "anarcho"-capitalism's support of Tucker's "defence associations"?**

### **G.4 Why do social anarchists reject individualist anarchism's ideas?**

### **G.5 Benjamin Tucker - capitalist or anarchist?**

### **G.6 What are the ideas of Max Stirner?**

### **G.7 Lysander Spooner - right-Libertarian or libertarian socialist?**

# Section G - Is individualist anarchism capitalistic?

The short answer is, no, it is not. All the individualist anarchists were opposed to the exploitation of labour and all forms of non-labour income (such as profits, interest and rent) and property. As such it is deeply **anti**-capitalist and many individualist anarchists, including Benjamin Tucker, considered themselves as socialists (indeed, Tucker often called his theory "*Anarchistic-Socialism*").

So, in this section of our anarchist FAQ we indicate why the individualist anarchists cannot be classified as "ancestors" of the bogus libertarians of the "anarcho"-capitalist school. Instead they must be (due to their opposition to wage slavery, capitalist property, interest, rent and profit as well as their concern for equality and co-operation) classified as libertarian **socialists**, albeit being on the liberal wing of anarchist thought. So while **some** of their ideas do overlap with those of the "anarcho"-capitalist school they are not capitalistic, no more than the overlap between their ideas and anarcho-communism makes them communistic.

In this context, the creation of "anarcho"-capitalism may be regarded as yet another tactic by capitalists to reinforce the public's perception that there are no viable alternatives to capitalism, i.e. by claiming that "even anarchism implies capitalism." In order to justify this claim, they have searched the history of anarchism in an effort to find some thread in the movement that can be used for this purpose. They think that with the individualist anarchists they have found such a thread.

However, as we've already seen, by its very definition -- as opposition to hierarchical authority -- **all** threads of anarchism are **incompatible** with capitalism. As Malatesta argued, *"anarchy, as understood by the anarchists and as only they can interpret it, is based on socialism. Indeed were it not for those schools of socialism which artificially divide the natural unity of the social question, and consider some aspects out of context . . . we could say straight out that anarchy is synonymous with socialism, for both stand for the abolition of the domination and exploitation of man by man, whether exercised at bayonet point or by a monopoly of the means of life."* Without socialism, liberty (i.e. liberalism) is purely *"liberty . . . for the strong and the property owners to oppress and exploit the weak, those who have nothing . . . [so] lead[ing] to exploitation and domination, in other words, to authority . . . for freedom is not possible without equality, and real anarchy cannot exist without solidarity, without socialism."* [**Anarchy**, p. 47 and p. 46]

Nevertheless, in the individualists we find anarchism coming closest to "classical" liberalism and being influenced by the ideas of Herbert Spencer, a classical liberal and proto-libertarian capitalist. This influence, as was noted by Peter Kropotkin at the time (e.g. in **Modern Science and Anarchism**), led individualist anarchists like Benjamin Tucker to support contract theory in the name of freedom, apparently without being aware of the authoritarian social relationships that could be implied by it, as can be seen under capitalism. Therefore, this section can also be considered, in part, as a continuation of the discussion begun in [section A.3](#).

Few thinkers are completely consistent. Given Tucker's adamant anti-statism and anti-capitalism, it is likely that had he realised the statism implicit in contract theory, he would have modified his views in such a way as to eliminate the contradiction. It is understandable why he failed to do so, however; for he viewed individualist anarchism as a society of workers, not one of capitalists and workers. His opposition to usury logically implies artisan and co-operative labour -- people selling the products of their labour, as opposed to the labour itself -- which itself implies self-management in production (and so society), not authoritarianism. Nevertheless, it is this inconsistency -- the non-anarchist aspect of individualist anarchism -- which right "libertarians" like Murray Rothbard select and concentrate on, ignoring the anti-capitalist context in which this aspect of individualist thought exists within. As David Wieck points out:

*"Out of the history of anarchist thought and action Rothbard has pulled forth a single thread, the thread of individualism, and defines that individualism in a way alien even to the spirit of a Max Stirner or a Benjamin Tucker, whose heritage I presume he would claim -- to say nothing of how alien is his way to the spirit of Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, and the historically anonymous persons who through their thoughts and action have tried to give anarchism a living meaning. Out of this thread Rothbard manufactures one more bourgeois ideology." ["Anarchist Justice", **Nomos XIX**, pp. 227-228]*

It is with this in mind that we discuss the ideas of people like Tucker. As this section of the FAQ will indicate, even at its most liberal, individualist, extreme anarchism was fundamentally **anti**-capitalist. Any concepts which "anarcho"-capitalism imports from the individualist tradition ignore both the theoretical underpinnings of their ideas as well as the social context of self-employment and artisan production within which those concepts arose, thus turning them into something radically different from what was intended by their originators.

Needless to say, "anarcho"-capitalists are well aware of the fact that individualist anarchists were extremely hostile to capitalism while supporting the "free market." Unsurprisingly, they tend to downplay this opposition, often arguing that the anarchists who point out the anti-capitalist positions of the likes of Tucker and Spooner are quoting them out of context. The truth is different. In fact, it is the "anarcho"-capitalist who takes the ideas of the individualist anarchists from both the historical and theoretical context.

It is not a fitting tribute to the individualist anarchists that their ideas are today being associated with the capitalism that they so clearly despised and wished to abolish. As one modern day Individualist Anarchist argues:

*"It is time that anarchists recognise the valuable contributions of . . . individualist anarchist theory and take advantage of its ideas. It would be both futile and criminal to leave it to the capitalist libertarians, whose claims on Tucker and the others can be made only by ignoring the violent opposition they had to capitalist exploitation and*



*monopolistic 'free enterprise' supported by the state."* [J.W. Baker, "*Native American Anarchism*," **The Raven**, pp. 43-62, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 61-2]

## A.3 What types of anarchism are there?

Anarchists, while all sharing a few key ideas, can be grouped into broad categories, depending on the economic arrangements that they consider to be most suitable to human freedom. However, all types of anarchists share a basic approach. To quote Rudolf Rocker:

*"In common with the founders of Socialism, Anarchists demand the abolition of all economic monopolies and the common ownership of the soil and all other means of production, the use of which must be available to all without distinction; for personal and social freedom is conceivable only on the basis of equal economic advantages for everybody. Within the Socialist movement itself the Anarchists represent the viewpoint that the war against capitalism must be at the same time a war against all institutions of political power, for in history economic exploitation has always gone hand in hand with political and social oppression. The exploitation of man by man and the domination of man over man are inseparable, and each is the condition of the other."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, pp. 62-3]

It is within this general context that anarchists disagree. The main differences are between *"individualist"* and *"social"* anarchists, although the economic arrangements each desire are not mutually exclusive. Of the two, social anarchists (communist-anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and so on) have always been the vast majority, with individualist anarchism being restricted mostly to the United States. In this section we indicate the differences between these main trends within the anarchist movement. As will soon become clear, while social and individualist anarchists both oppose the state and capitalism, they disagree on the nature of a free society (and how to get there). In a nutshell, social anarchists prefer communal solutions to social problems and a communal vision of the good society (i.e. a society that protects and encourages individual freedom). Individualist anarchists, as their name suggests, prefer individual solutions and have a more individualistic vision of the good society. However, we must not let these difference cloud what both schools have in common, namely a desire to maximise individual freedom and end state and capitalist domination and exploitation.

In addition to this major disagreement, anarchists also disagree over such issues as syndicalism, pacifism, "lifestylism," animal rights and a whole host of other ideas, but these, while important, are only different aspects of anarchism. Beyond a few key ideas, the anarchist movement (like life itself) is in a constant state of change, discussion and thought -- as would be expected in a movement that values freedom so highly.

To put our cards on the table, the writers of this FAQ place themselves firmly in the "social" strand of anarchism. This does not mean that we ignore the many important ideas associated with individualist anarchism, only that we think social anarchism is more appropriate for modern society, that it creates a stronger base for individual freedom, and that it more closely reflects the sort of society we would like to live in.

## A.3.1 What are the differences between individualist and social anarchists?

While there is a tendency for individuals in both camps to claim that the proposals of the other camp would lead to the creation of some kind of state, the differences between individualists and social anarchists are not very great. Both are anti-state, anti-authority and anti-capitalist. The major differences are twofold.

The first is in regard to the means of action in the here and now (and so the manner in which anarchy will come about). Individualists generally prefer education and the creation of alternative institutions, such as mutual banks, unions, communes, etc. They usually support strikes and other non-violent forms of social protest (such as rent strikes, the non-payment of taxes and so on). Such activity, they argue, will ensure that present society will gradually develop out of government into an anarchist one. They are primarily evolutionists, not revolutionists, and dislike social anarchists' use of direct action to create revolutionary situations. They consider revolution as being in contradiction to anarchist principles as it involves the expropriation of capitalist property and, therefore, authoritarian means. Rather they seek to return to society the wealth taken out of society by property by means of a new, alternative, system of economics (based around mutual banks and co-operatives). In this way a general "social liquidation" would be rendered easy, with anarchism coming about by reform and not by expropriation.

Most social anarchists recognise the need for education and to create alternatives (such as libertarian unions), but most disagree that this is enough in itself. They do not think capitalism can be reformed piece by piece into anarchy, although they do not ignore the importance of reforms by social struggle that increase libertarian tendencies within capitalism. Nor do they think revolution is in contradiction with anarchist principles as it is not authoritarian to destroy authority (be it state or capitalist). Thus the expropriation of the capitalist class and the destruction of the state by social revolution is a libertarian, not authoritarian, act by its very nature as it is directed against those who govern and exploit the vast majority. In short, social anarchists are usually evolutionists **and** revolutionists, trying to strengthen libertarian tendencies within capitalism while trying to abolish that system by social revolution. However, as some social anarchists are purely evolutionists too, this difference is not the most important one dividing social anarchists from individualists.

The second major difference concerns the form of anarchist economy proposed. Individualists prefer a market-based system of distribution to the social anarchists need-based system. Both agree that the current system of capitalist property rights must be abolished and that use rights must replace property rights in the means of life (i.e. the abolition of rent, interest and profits -- "*usury*," to use the individualist anarchists' preferred term for this unholy trinity). In effect, both schools follow Proudhon's classic work **What is Property?** and argue that possession must replace property in a free society (see [section B.3](#) for a discussion of anarchist viewpoints on property).

However, within this use-rights framework, the two schools of anarchism propose different systems. The social anarchist generally argues for communal (or social) ownership and use. This would involve social ownership of the means of production and distribution, with personal possessions remaining for things you use, but not what was used to create them. Thus *"your watch is your own, but the watch factory belongs to the people."* *"Actual use,"* continues Berkman, *"will be considered the only title -- not to ownership but to possession. The organisation of the coal miners, for example, will be in charge of the coal mines, not as owners but as the operating agency . . . Collective possession, co-operatively managed in the interests of the community, will take the place of personal ownership privately conducted for profit."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 217]

This system would be based on workers' self-management of their work and (for most social anarchists) the free sharing of the product of that labour (i.e. an economic system without money). This is because *"in the present state of industry, when everything is interdependent, when each branch of production is knit up with all the rest, the attempt to claim an individualist origin for the products of industry is untenable."* Given this, it is impossible to *"estimate the share of each in the riches which **all** contribute to amass"* and, moreover, the *"common possession of the instruments of labour must necessarily bring with it the enjoyment in common of the fruits of common labour."* [Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 45 and p. 46] By this social anarchists simply mean that the social product which is produced by all would be available to all and each individual who has contributed productively to society can take what they need (how quickly we can reach such an ideal is a moot point, as we discuss in [section I.2.2](#)). Some social anarchists, like mutualists for example, are against such a system of libertarian (or free) communism, but, in general, the vast majority of social anarchists look forward to the end of money and, therefore, of buying and selling. All agree, however, that anarchy will see *"Capitalistic and proprietary exploitation stopped everywhere"* and *"the wage system abolished"* whether by *"equal and just exchange"* (like Proudhon) or by the free sharing (like Kropotkin). [Proudhon, **The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 281]

In contrast, the individualist anarchist (like the mutualist) denies that this system of use-rights should include the product of the workers labour. Instead of social ownership, individualist anarchists propose a more market based system in which workers would possess their own means of production and exchange the product of their labour freely with other workers. They argue that capitalism is not, in fact, a truly free market. Rather, by means of the state, capitalists have placed fetters on the market to create and protect their economic and social power (market discipline for the working class, state aid for the ruling class in other words). These state created monopolies (of money, land, tariffs and patents) and state enforcement of capitalist property rights are the source of economic inequality and exploitation. With the abolition of government, **real** free competition would result and ensure the end of capitalism and capitalist exploitation (see Benjamin Tucker's essay **State Socialism and Anarchism** for an excellent summary of this argument).

The Individualist anarchists argue that the means of production (bar land) are the product of individual labour and so they accept that people should be able to sell the means of production they use, if they so desire. However, they reject capitalist property rights and instead favour an *"occupancy and use"* system. If the means of production, say land, is not in use, it reverts back to common ownership and is

available to others for use. They think this system, called mutualism, will result in workers control of production and the end of capitalist exploitation and usury. This is because, logically and practically, a regime of "occupancy and use" cannot be squared with wage labour. If a workplace needs a group to operate it then it must be owned by the group who use it. If one individual claims to own it and it is, in fact, used by more than that person then, obviously, "occupancy and use" is violated. Equally, if an owner employs others to use the workplace then the boss can appropriate the product of the workers' labour, so violating the maxim that labour should receive its full product. Thus the principles of individualist anarchism point to anti-capitalist conclusions (see [section G.3](#)).

This second difference is the most important. The individualist fears being forced to join a community and thus losing his or her freedom (including the freedom to exchange freely with others). Max Stirner puts this position well when he argues that *"Communism, by the abolition of all personal property, only presses me back still more into dependence on another, to wit, on the generality or collectivity . . . [which is] a condition hindering my free movement, a sovereign power over me. Communism rightly revolts against the pressure that I experience from individual proprietors; but still more horrible is the might that it puts in the hands of the collectivity."* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 257] Proudhon also argued against communism, stating that the community becomes the proprietor under communism and so capitalism and communism are based on property and so authority (see the section *"Characteristics of communism and of property"* in **What is Property?**). Thus the Individualist anarchist argues that social ownership places the individual's freedom in danger as any form of communism subjects the individual to society or the commune. They fear that as well as dictating individual morality, socialisation would effectively eliminate workers' control as "society" would tell workers what to produce and take the product of their labour. In effect, they argue that communism (or social ownership in general) would be similar to capitalism, with the exploitation and authority of the boss replaced with that of "society."

Needless to say, social anarchists disagree. They argue that Stirner's and Proudhon's comments are totally correct -- but only about authoritarian communism. As Kropotkin argued, *"before and in 1848, the theory [of communism] was put forward in such a shape as to fully account for Proudhon's distrust as to its effect upon liberty. The old idea of Communism was the idea of monastic communities under the severe rule of elders or of men of science for directing priests. The last vestiges of liberty and of individual energy would be destroyed, if humanity ever had to go through such a communism."* [**Act for Yourselves**, p. 98] Kropotkin always argued that communist-anarchism was a **new** development and given that it dates from the 1870s, Proudhon's and Stirner's remarks cannot be considered as being directed against it as they could not be familiar with it.

Rather than subject the individual to the community, social anarchists argue that communal ownership would provide the necessary framework to protect individual liberty in all aspects of life by abolishing the power of the property owner, in whatever form it takes. In addition, rather than abolish **all** individual "property," communist anarchism acknowledges the importance of individual possessions and individual space. Thus we find Kropotkin arguing against forms of communism that *"desire to manage the community after the model of a family . . . [to live] all in the same house and . . . thus forced to continuously meet the same 'brethren and sisters' . . . [it is] a fundamental error to impose on all the 'great family' instead of trying, on the contrary, to guarantee as much freedom and home life to each*

*individual.*" [**Small Communal Experiments and Why They Fail**, pp. 8-9] The aim of anarchist-communism is, to again quote Kropotkin, to place *"the product reaped or manufactured at the disposal of all, leaving to each the liberty to consume them as he pleases in his own home."* [**The Place of Anarchism in the Evolution of Socialist Thought**, p. 7] This ensures individual expression of tastes and desires and so individuality -- both in consumption **and** in production, as social anarchists are firm supporters of workers' self-management.

Thus, for social anarchists, the Individualist Anarchist opposition to communism is only valid for state or authoritarian communism and ignores the fundamental nature of communist-anarchism. Communist anarchists do not replace individuality with community but rather use community to defend individuality. Rather than have "society" control the individual, as the Individualist Anarchist fears, social anarchism is based on importance of individuality and individual expression:

*"Anarchist Communism maintains that most valuable of all conquests -- individual liberty -- and moreover extends it and gives it a solid basis -- economic liberty -- without which political liberty is delusive; it does not ask the individual who has rejected god, the universal tyrant, god the king, and god the parliament, to give unto himself a god more terrible than any of the proceeding -- god the Community, or to abdicate upon its altar his [or her] independence, his [or her] will, his [or her] tastes, and to renew the vow of asceticism which he formally made before the crucified god. It says to him, on the contrary, 'No society is free so long as the individual is not so! . . .'"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 14-15]

In addition, social anarchists have always recognised the need for voluntary collectivisation. If people desire to work by themselves, this is not seen as a problem (see Kropotkin's **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 61 and **Act for Yourselves**, pp. 104-5 as well as Malatesta's **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 99 and p. 103). This, social anarchists, stress does not in any way contradict their principles or the communist nature of their desired society as such exceptions are rooted in the "use rights" system both are based in (see [section I.6.2](#) for a full discussion). In addition, for social anarchists an association exists solely for the benefit of the individuals that compose it; it is the means by which people cooperate to meet their common needs. Therefore, **all** anarchists emphasise the importance of free agreement as the basis of an anarchist society. Thus all anarchists agree with Bakunin:

*"Collectivism could only imposed only on slaves, and this kind of collectivism would then be the negation of humanity. In a free community, collectivism can only come about through the pressure of circumstances, not by imposition from above but by a free spontaneous movement from below."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 200]

If individualists desire to work for themselves and exchange goods with others, social anarchists have no objection. Hence our comments that the two forms of anarchism are not mutually exclusive. Social anarchists support the right of individuals **not** to join a commune while Individualist Anarchists support the rights of individuals to pool their possessions as they see fit, including communistic associations. However, if, in the name of freedom, an individual wished to claim property rights so as to exploit the

labour of others, social anarchists would quickly resist this attempt to recreate statism in the name of "liberty." Anarchists do not respect the "freedom" to be a ruler! In the words of Luigi Galleani:

*"No less sophisticated is the tendency of those who, under the comfortable cloak of anarchist individualism, would welcome the idea of domination . . . But the heralds of domination presume to practice individualism in the name of their ego, over the obedient, resigned, or inert ego of others."* [**The End of Anarchism?**, p. 40]

Moreover, for social anarchists, the idea that the means of production can be sold implies that private property could be reintroduced in an anarchist society. In a free market, some succeed and others fail. As Proudhon argued, in competition victory goes to the strongest. When one's bargaining power is weaker than another then any "free exchange" will benefit the stronger party. Thus the market, even a non-capitalist one, will tend to magnify inequalities of wealth and power over time rather than equalising them. Under capitalism this is more obvious as those with only their labour power to sell are in a weaker position than those with capital but individualist anarchism would also be affected.

Thus, social anarchists argue, much against its will an individualist anarchist society would evolve away from fair exchanges back into capitalism. If, as seems likely, the "unsuccessful" competitors are forced into unemployment they may have to sell their labour to the "successful" in order to survive. This would create authoritarian social relationships and the domination of the few over the many via "free contracts." The enforcement of such contracts (and others like them), in all likelihood, *"opens . . . the way for reconstituting under the heading of 'defence' all the functions of the State."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, p. 297]

Benjamin Tucker, the anarchist most influenced by liberalism and free market ideas, also faced the problems associated with all schools of abstract individualism -- in particular, the acceptance of authoritarian social relations as an expression of "liberty." This is due to the similarity of property to the state. Tucker argued that the state was marked by two things, aggression and *"the assumption of authority over a given area and all within it, exercised generally for the double purpose of more complete oppression of its subjects and extension of its boundaries."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 22] However, the boss and landlord also has authority over a given area (the property in question) and all within it (workers and tenants). The former control the actions of the latter just as the state rules the citizen or subject. In other words, individual ownership produces the same social relationships as that created by the state, as it comes from the same source (monopoly of power over a given area and those who use it).

Social anarchists argue that the Individualist Anarchists acceptance of individual ownership and their individualistic conception of individual freedom can lead to the denial of individual freedom by the creation of social relationships which are essentially authoritarian/statist in nature. *"The individualists,"* argued Malatesta, *"give the greatest importance to an abstract concept of freedom and fail to take into account, or dwell on the fact that real, concrete freedom is the outcome of solidarity and voluntary co-operation."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 16] Thus wage labour, for example, places the worker in the

same relationship to the boss as citizenship places the citizen to the state, namely of one of domination and subjection. Similarly with the tenant and the landlord.

Such a social relationship cannot help but produce the other aspects of the state. As Albert Meltzer points out, this can have nothing but statist implications, because *"the school of Benjamin Tucker -- by virtue of their individualism -- accepted the need for police to break strikes so as to guarantee the employer's 'freedom.'* All this school of so-called Individualists accept . . . the necessity of the police force, hence for government, and the prime definition of anarchism is **no government.**" [**Anarchism: Arguments For and Against**, p. 8] It is partly for this reason social anarchists support social ownership as the best means of protecting individual liberty.

Accepting individual ownership this problem can only be "got round" by accepting, along with Proudhon (the source of Tucker's economic ideas), the need for co-operatives to run workplaces that require more than one worker. This naturally complements their support for *"occupancy and use"* for land, which would effectively abolish landlords. Only when the people who use a resource own it can individual ownership not result in hierarchical authority (i.e. statism/capitalism). This solution, as we argue in [section G](#), is the one Individualist Anarchists **do** seem to accept. For example, we find Joseph Labadie writing to his son urging him to get away from wage earning and *"the dominion of others."* [quoted by Carlotta Abderson, **All American Anarchist**, p. 222] As Wm. Gary Kline correctly points out, the US Individualist anarchists *"expected a society of largely self-employed workmen with no significant disparity of wealth between any of them."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 104] It is this vision of a self-employed society that ensures that their ideas are truly anarchist.

Moreover, while the individualists attack *"usury,"* they usually ignore the problem of capital accumulation, which results in **natural** barriers of entry into markets and so recreates usury in new forms (see section C.4 ["Why does the market become dominated by big business?"](#)). Hence a "free market" in banks, as advocated by Tucker and other Individualist Anarchists, could result in a few big banks dominating, with a direct economic interest in supporting capitalist rather than co-operative investment (as they would ensure higher returns than co-operatives). The only real solution to this problem would be to ensure community ownership and management of banks, as originally desired by Proudhon.

It is this recognition of the developments within the capitalist economy which make social anarchists reject individualist anarchism in favour of communalising, and so decentralising, production by freely associated and co-operative labour. (For more discussion on the ideas of the Individualist anarchists, see section G - ["Is individualist anarchism capitalistic?"](#))

## A.3.2 Are there different types of social anarchism?

Yes. Social anarchism has four major trends -- mutualism, collectivism, communism and syndicalism. The differences are not great and simply involve differences in strategy. The one major difference that does exist is between mutualism and the other kinds of social anarchism. Mutualism is based around a



form of market socialism -- workers' co-operatives exchanging the product of their labour via a system of community banks. This mutual bank network would be *"formed by the whole community, not for the especial advantage of any individual or class, but for the benefit of all . . . [with] no interest . . . exacted on loans, except enough to cover risks and expenses."* Such a system would end capitalist exploitation and oppression for by *"introducing mutualism into exchange and credit we introduce it everywhere, and labour will assume a new aspect and become truly democratic."* [Charles A. Dana, **Proudhon and his "Bank of the People"**, pp. 44-45 and p. 45]

The social anarchist version of mutualism differs from the individualist form by having the mutual banks owned by the local community (or commune) instead of being independent co-operatives. This would ensure that they provided investment funds to co-operatives rather than to capitalistic enterprises. Another difference is that some social anarchist mutualists support the creation of what Proudhon termed an *"agro-industrial federation"* to complement the federation of libertarian communities (called communes by Proudhon). This is a *"confederation . . . intended to provide reciprocal security in commerce and industry"* and large scale developments such as roads, railways and so on. The purpose of *"specific federal arrangements is to protect the citizens of the federated states [sic!] from capitalist and financial feudalism, both within them and from the outside."* This is because *"political right requires to be buttressed by economic right."* Thus the agro-industrial federation would be required to ensure the anarchist nature of society from the destabilising effects of market exchanges (which can generate increasing inequalities in wealth and so power). Such a system would be a practical example of solidarity, as *"industries are sisters; they are parts of the same body; one cannot suffer without the others sharing in its suffering. They should therefore federate, not to be absorbed and confused together, but in order to guarantee mutually the conditions of common prosperity . . . Making such an agreement will not detract from their liberty; it will simply give their liberty more security and force."* [**The Principle of Federation**, p. 70, p. 67 and p. 72]

The other forms of social anarchism do not share the mutualists support for markets, even non-capitalist ones. Instead they think that freedom is best served by communalising production and sharing information and products freely between co-operatives. In other words, the other forms of social anarchism are based upon common (or social) ownership by federations of producers' associations and communes rather than mutualism's system of individual co-operatives. In Bakunin's words, the *"future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal"* and *"the land, the instruments of work and all other capital may become the collective property of the whole of society and be utilised only by the workers, in other words by the agricultural and industrial associations."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 206 and p. 174] Only by extending the principle of co-operation beyond individual workplaces can individual liberty be maximised and protected (see [section I.1.3](#) for why most anarchists are opposed to markets). In this they share some ground with Proudhon, as can be seen. The industrial confederations would *"guarantee the mutual use of the tools of production which are the property of each of these groups and which will by a reciprocal contract become the collective property of the whole . . . federation. In this way, the federation of groups will be able to . . . regulate the rate of production to meet the fluctuating needs of society."* [James Guillaume, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 376]

These anarchists share the mutualists support for workers' self-management of production within co-operatives but see confederations of these associations as being the focal point for expressing mutual aid, not a market. Workplace autonomy and self-management would be the basis of any federation, for *"the workers in the various factories have not the slightest intention of handing over their hard-won control of the tools of production to a superior power calling itself the 'corporation.'"* [Guillaume, **Op. Cit.**, p. 364] In addition to this industry-wide federation, there would also be cross-industry and community confederations to look after tasks which are not within the exclusive jurisdiction or capacity of any particular industrial federation or are of a social nature. Again, this has similarities to Proudhon's mutualist ideas.

Social anarchists share a firm commitment to common ownership of the means of production (excluding those used purely by individuals) and reject the individualist idea that these can be "sold off" by those who use them. The reason, as noted earlier, is because if this could be done, capitalism and statism could regain a foothold in the free society. In addition, other social anarchists do not agree with the mutualist idea that capitalism can be reformed into libertarian socialism by introducing mutual banking. For them capitalism can only be replaced by a free society by social revolution.

The major difference between collectivists and communists is over the question of "money" after a revolution. Anarcho-communists consider the abolition of money to be essential, while anarcho-collectivists consider the end of private ownership of the means of production to be the key. As Kropotkin noted, collectivist anarchism *"express[es] a state of things in which all necessities for production are owned in common by the labour groups and the free communes, while the ways of retribution [i.e. distribution] of labour, communist or otherwise, would be settled by each group for itself."* [**Anarchism**, p. 295] Thus, while communism and collectivism both organise production in common via producers' associations, they differ in how the goods produced will be distributed. Communism is based on free consumption of all while collectivism is more likely to be based on the distribution of goods according to the labour contributed. However, most anarcho-collectivists think that, over time, as productivity increases and the sense of community becomes stronger, money will disappear. Both agree that, in the end, society would be run along the lines suggested by the communist maxim: *"From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs."* They just disagree on how quickly this will come about (see [section I.2.2](#)).

For anarcho-communists, they think that *"communism -- at least partial -- has more chances of being established than collectivism"* after a revolution. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 298] They think that moves towards communism are essential as collectivism *"begins by abolishing private ownership of the means of production and immediately reverses itself by returning to the system of remuneration according to work performed which means the re-introduction of inequality."* [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 230] The quicker the move to communism, the less chances of new inequalities developing. Needless to say, these positions are **not** that different and, in practice, the necessities of a social revolution and the level of political awareness of those introducing anarchism will determine which system will be applied in each area.

Syndicalism is the other major form of social anarchism. Anarcho-syndicalists, like other syndicalists, want to create an industrial union movement based on anarchist ideas. Therefore they advocate decentralised, federated unions that use direct action to get reforms under capitalism until they are strong enough to overthrow it. In many ways anarcho-syndicalism can be considered as a new version of collectivist-anarchism, which also stressed the importance of anarchists working within the labour movement and creating unions which prefigure the future free society.

Thus, even under capitalism, anarcho-syndicalists seek to create "*free associations of free producers.*" They think that these associations would serve as "*a practical school of anarchism*" and they take very seriously Bakunin's remark that the workers' organisations must create "*not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself*" in the pre-revolutionary period.

Anarcho-syndicalists, like all social anarchists, "*are convinced that a Socialist economic order cannot be created by the decrees and statutes of a government, but only by the solidaric collaboration of the workers with hand and brain in each special branch of production; that is, through the taking over of the management of all plants by the producers themselves under such form that the separate groups, plants, and branches of industry are independent members of the general economic organism and systematically carry on production and the distribution of the products in the interest of the community on the basis of free mutual agreements.*" [Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-syndicalism**, p. 55]

Again, like all social anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists see the collective struggle and organisation implied in unions as the school for anarchism. As Eugene Varlin (an anarchist active in the First International who was murdered at the end of the Paris Commune) put it, unions have "*the enormous advantage of making people accustomed to group life and thus preparing them for a more extended social organisation. They accustom people not only to get along with one another and to understand one another, but also to organise themselves, to discuss, and to reason from a collective perspective.*" Moreover, as well as mitigating capitalist exploitation and oppression in the here and now, the unions also "*form the natural elements of the social edifice of the future; it is they who can be easily transformed into producers associations; it is they who can make the social ingredients and the organisation of production work.*" [quoted by Julian P. W. Archer, **The First International in France, 1864-1872**, p. 196]

The difference between syndicalists and other revolutionary social anarchists is slight and purely revolves around the question of anarcho-syndicalist unions. Collectivist anarchists agree that building libertarian unions is important and that work within the labour movement is essential in order to ensure "*the development and organisation . . . of the social (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses.*" [Bakunin, **Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 197] Communist anarchists usually also acknowledge the importance of working in the labour movement but they generally think that syndicalistic organisations will be created by workers in struggle, and so consider encouraging the "*spirit of revolt*" as more important than creating syndicalist unions and hoping workers will join them (of course, anarcho-syndicalists support such autonomous struggle and organisation, so the differences are not great). Communist-anarchists also do not place as great an emphasis on the workplace,

considering struggles within it to be equal in importance to other struggles against hierarchy and domination outside the workplace (most anarcho-syndicalists would agree with this, however, and often it is just a question of emphasis). A few communist-anarchists reject the labour movement as hopelessly reformist in nature and so refuse to work within it, but these are a small minority.

Both communist and collectivist anarchists recognise the need for anarchists to unite together in purely anarchist organisations. They think it is essential that anarchists work together as anarchists to clarify and spread their ideas to others. Syndicalists often deny the importance of anarchist groups and federations, arguing that revolutionary industrial and community unions are enough in themselves. Syndicalists think that the anarchist and union movements can be fused into one, but most other anarchists disagree. Non-syndicalists point out the reformist nature of unionism and urge that to keep syndicalist unions revolutionary, anarchists must work within them as part of an anarchist group or federation. Most non-syndicalists consider the fusion of anarchism and unionism a source of potential **confusion** that would result in the two movements failing to do their respective work correctly. For more details on anarcho-syndicalism see [section J.3.8](#) (and [section J.3.9](#) on why many anarchists reject aspects of it). It should be stressed that non-syndicalist anarchists do **not** reject the need for collective struggle and organisation by workers (see [section H.2.8](#) on that particular Marxist myth).

In practice, few anarcho-syndicalists totally reject the need for an anarchist federation, while few anarchists are totally anti-syndicalist. For example, Bakunin inspired both anarcho-communist and anarcho-syndicalist ideas, and anarcho-communists like Kropotkin, Malatesta, Berkman and Goldman were all sympathetic to anarcho-syndicalist movements and ideas.

For further reading on the various types of social anarchism, we would recommend the following: mutualism is usually associated with the works of Proudhon, collectivism with Bakunin's, communism with Kropotkin's, Malatesta's, Goldman's and Berkman's. Syndicalism is somewhat different, as it was far more the product of workers' in struggle than the work of a "famous" name (although this does not stop academics calling George Sorel the father of syndicalism, even though he wrote about a syndicalist movement that already existed. The idea that working class people can develop their own ideas, by themselves, is usually lost on them). However, Rudolf Rocker is often considered a leading anarcho-syndicalist theorist and the works of Fernand Pelloutier and Emile Pouget are essential reading to understand anarcho-syndicalism. For an overview of the development of social anarchism and key works by its leading lights, Daniel Guerin's excellent anthology **No Gods No Masters** cannot be bettered.

### A.3.3 What kinds of green anarchism are there?

An emphasis on anarchist ideas as a solution to the ecological crisis is a common thread in most forms of anarchism today. The trend goes back to the late nineteenth century and the works of Peter Kropotkin and Elisee Reclus. The latter, for example, argued that a "*secret harmony exists between the earth and the people whom it nourishes, and when imprudent societies let themselves violate this harmony, they always end up regretting it.*" Similarly, no contemporary ecologist would disagree with his comments

that the *"truly civilised man [and women] understands that his [or her] nature is bound up with the interest of all and with that of nature. He [or she] repairs the damage caused by his predecessors and works to improve his domain."* [quoted by George Woodcock, "Introduction", Marie Fleming, **The Geography of Freedom**, p. 15]

With regards Kropotkin, he argued that an anarchist society would be based on a confederation of communities that would integrate manual and brain work as well as decentralising and integrating industry and agriculture (see his classic work **Fields, Factories, and Workshops**). This idea of an economy in which *"small is beautiful"* (to use the title of E.F. Schumacher's Green classic) was proposed nearly 70 years before it was taken up by what was to become the green movement. In addition, in **Mutual Aid** Kropotkin documented how co-operation within species and between them and their environment is usually of more benefit to them than competition. Kropotkin's work, combined with that of William Morris, the Reclus brothers (both of whom, like Kropotkin, were world-renowned geographers), and many others laid the foundations for the current anarchist interest in ecological issues.

However, while there are many themes of an ecological nature within classical anarchism, it is only relatively recently that the similarities between ecological thought and anarchism has come to the fore (essentially from the publication of Murray Bookchin's classic essay *"Ecology and Revolutionary Thought"* in 1965). Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to state that it is the ideas and work of Murray Bookchin that has placed ecology and ecological issues at the heart of anarchism and anarchist ideals and analysis into many aspects of the green movement.

Before discussing the types of green anarchism (also called eco-anarchism) it would be worthwhile to explain exactly **what** anarchism and ecology have in common. To quote Murray Bookchin, *"both the ecologist and the anarchist place a strong emphasis on spontaneity"* and *"to both the ecologist and the anarchist, an ever-increasing unity is achieved by growing differentiation. **An expanding whole is created by the diversification and enrichment of its parts.**"* Moreover, *"[j]ust as the ecologist seeks to expand the range of an eco-system and promote free interplay between species, so the anarchist seeks to expand the range of social experiments and remove all fetters to its development."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 72 and p. 78]

Thus the anarchist concern with free development, decentralisation, diversity and spontaneity is reflected in ecological ideas and concerns. Hierarchy, centralisation, the state and concentrations of wealth reduce diversity and the free development of individuals and their communities by their very nature, and so weakens the social eco-system as well as the actual eco-systems human societies are part of. As Bookchin argues, *"the reconstructive message of ecology. . . [is that] we must conserve and promote variety"* but within modern capitalist society *"[a]ll that is spontaneous, creative and individuated is circumscribed by the standardised, the regulated and the massified."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 76 and p. 65] So, in many ways, anarchism can be considered the application of ecological ideas to society, as anarchism aims to empower individuals and communities, decentralise political, social and economic power so ensuring that individuals and social life develops freely and so becomes increasingly diverse in nature. It is for this reason Brian Morris argues that "the only political tradition that complements and, as it were, integrally connects with ecology -- in a genuine and authentic way -- is that of

anarchism." [**Ecology and Anarchism**, p. 132]

So what kinds of green anarchism are there? While almost all forms of modern anarchism consider themselves to have an ecological dimension, the specifically eco-anarchist thread within anarchism has two main focal points, *Social Ecology* and "*primitivist*". In addition, some anarchists are influenced by *Deep Ecology*, although not many. Undoubtedly Social Ecology is the most influential and numerous current. Social Ecology is associated with the ideas and works of Murray Bookchin, who has been writing on ecological matters since the 1950's and, from the 1960s, has combined these issues with revolutionary social anarchism. His works include **Post-Scarcity Anarchism, Toward an Ecological Society, The Ecology of Freedom** and a host of others.

Social Ecology locates the roots of the ecological crisis firmly in relations of domination between people. The domination of nature is seen as a product of domination within society, but this domination only reaches crisis proportions under capitalism. In the words of Murray Bookchin:

*"The notion that man must dominate nature emerges directly from the domination of man by man. . . . But it was not until organic community relations. . . dissolved into market relationships that the planet itself was reduced to a resource for exploitation. This centuries-long tendency finds its most exacerbating development in modern capitalism. Owing to its inherently competitive nature, bourgeois society not only pits humans against each other, it also pits the mass of humanity against the natural world. Just as men are converted into commodities, so every aspect of nature is converted into a commodity, a resource to be manufactured and merchandised wantonly . . . . The plundering of the human spirit by the market place is paralleled by the plundering of the earth by capital."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 63]

*"Only insofar,"* Bookchin stresses, *"as the ecology consciously cultivates an anti-hierarchical and a non-domineering sensibility, structure, and strategy for social change can it retain its very identity as the voice for a new balance between humanity and nature and its goal for a truly ecological society."* Social ecologists contrast this to what Bookchin labels "*environmentalism*" for while social ecology "*seeks to eliminate the concept of the domination of nature by humanity by eliminating domination of human by human, environmentalism reflects an 'instrumentalist' or technical sensibility in which nature is viewed merely as a passive habit, an agglomeration of external objects and forces, that must be made more 'serviceable' for human use, irrespective of what these uses may be. Environmentalism . . . does not bring into question the underlying notions of the present society, notably that man must dominate nature. On the contrary, it seeks to facilitate that domination by developing techniques for diminishing the hazards caused by domination.*" [Murray Bookchin, **Towards an Ecological Society**, p. 77]

Social ecology offers the vision of a society in harmony with nature, one which "*involves a fundamental reversal of all the trends that mark the historic development of capitalist technology and bourgeois society -- the minute specialisation of machines and labour, the concentration of resources and people in gigantic industrial enterprises and urban entities, the stratification and bureaucratisation of nature*

*and human beings." Such an ecotopia "establish entirely new eco-communities that are artistically moulded to the eco-systems in which they are located." Echoing Kropotkin, Bookchin argues that "[s]uch an eco-community . . . would heal the split between town and country, between mind and body by fusing intellectual with physical work, industry with agricultural in a rotation or diversification of vocational tasks." This society would be based on the use of appropriate and green technology, a "new kind of technology -- or eco-technology -- one composed of flexible, versatile machinery whose productive applications would emphasise durability and quality, not built in obsolescence, and insensate quantitative output of shoddy goods, and a rapid circulation of expendable commodities . . . Such an eco-technology would use the inexhaustible energy capacities of nature -- the sun and wind, the tides and waterways, the temperature differentials of the earth and the abundance of hydrogen around us as fuels -- to provide the eco-community with non-polluting materials or wastes that could be recycled." [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 68-9]*

However, this is not all. As Bookchin stresses an ecological society *"is more than a society that tries to check the mounting disequilibrium that exists between humanity and the natural world. Reduced to simple technical or political issues, this anaemic view of such a society's function degrades the issues raised by an ecological critique and leads them to purely technical and instrumental approaches to ecological problems. Social ecology is, first of all, a **sensibility** that includes not only a critique of hierarchy and domination but a reconstructive outlook . . . guided by an ethics that emphasises variety without structuring differences into a hierarchical order . . . the precepts for such an ethics . . . [are] participation and differentiation."* [**The Modern Crisis**, pp. 24-5]

Therefore social ecologists consider it essential to attack hierarchy and capitalism, not civilisation as such as the root cause of ecological problems. This is one of the key areas in which they disagree with "Primitivist" Anarchist ideas, who tend to be far more critical of **all** aspects of modern life, with some going so far as calling for *"the end of civilisation"* including, apparently, all forms of technology and large scale organisation. We discuss these ideas in [section A.3.9](#).

We must note here that other anarchists, while generally agreeing with its analysis and suggestions, are deeply critical of Social Ecology's support for running candidates in municipal elections. While Social Ecologists see this as a means of creating popular self-managing assemblies and creating a counter power to the state, few anarchists agree. Rather they see it as inherently reformist as well as being hopelessly naive about the possibilities of using elections to bring about social change (see [section J.5.14](#) for a fuller discussion of this). Instead they propose direct action as the means to forward anarchist and ecological ideas, rejecting electioneering as a dead-end which ends up watering down radical ideas and corrupting the people involved (see section J.2 -- [What is Direct Action?](#)).

Lastly, there is "deep ecology," which, because of its bio-centric nature, many anarchists reject as anti-human. There are few anarchists who think that **people**, as people, are the cause of the ecological crisis, which many deep ecologists seem to suggest. Murray Bookchin, for example, has been particularly outspoken in his criticism of deep ecology and the anti-human ideas that are often associated with it (see **Which Way for the Ecology Movement?**, for example). David Watson has also argued against Deep

Ecology (see his **How Deep is Deep Ecology?** written under the name George Bradford). Most anarchists would argue that it is not people but the current system which is the problem, and that only people can change it. In the words of Murray Bookchin:

*"[Deep Ecology's problems] stem from an authoritarian streak in a crude biologism that uses 'natural law' to conceal an ever-diminishing sense of humanity and papers over a profound ignorance of social reality by ignoring the fact it is **capitalism** we are talking about, not an abstraction called 'Humanity' and 'Society.'"* [**The Philosophy of Social Ecology**, p. 160]

Thus, as Morris stresses, *"by focusing entirely on the category of 'humanity' the Deep Ecologists ignore or completely obscure the social origins of ecological problems, or alternatively, biologise what are essentially social problems."* To submerge ecological critique and analysis into a simplistic protest against the human race ignores the real causes and dynamics of ecological destruction and, therefore, ensures an end to this destruction cannot be found. Simply put, it is hardly "people" who are to blame when the vast majority have no real say in the decisions that affect their lives, communities, industries and eco-systems. Rather, it is an economic and social system that places profits and power above people and planet. By focusing on "Humanity" (and so failing to distinguish between rich and poor, men and women, whites and people of colour, exploiters and exploited, oppressors and oppressed) the system we live under is effectively ignored, and so are the institutional causes of ecological problems. This can be *"both reactionary and authoritarian in its implications, and substitutes a naive understanding of 'nature' for a critical study of real social issues and concerns."* [Morris, Op. Cit., p. 135]

Faced with a constant anarchist critique of certain of their spokes-persons ideas, many Deep Ecologists have turned away from the anti-human ideas associated with their movement. Deep ecology, particularly the organisation **Earth First!** (EF!), has changed considerably over time, and EF! now has a close working relationship with the **Industrial Workers of the World** (IWW), a syndicalist union. While deep ecology is not a thread of eco-anarchism, it shares many ideas and is becoming more accepted by anarchists as EF! rejects its few misanthropic ideas and starts to see that hierarchy, not the human race, is the problem (for a discussion between Murray Bookchin and leading Earth Firster! Dave Foreman see the book **Defending the Earth**).

### A.3.4 Is anarchism pacifistic?

A pacifist strand has long existed in anarchism, with Leo Tolstoy being one of its major figures. This strand is usually called *"anarcho-pacifism"* (the term *"non-violent anarchist"* is sometimes used, but this term is unfortunate because it implies the rest of the movement are "violent," which is not the case!). The union of anarchism and pacifism is not surprising given the fundamental ideals and arguments of anarchism. After all, violence, or the threat of violence or harm, is a key means by which individual freedom is destroyed. As Peter Marshall points out, *"[g]iven the anarchist's respect for the sovereignty of the individual, in the long run it is non-violence and not violence which is implied by anarchist values."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p.637] Malatesta is even more explicit when he wrote that the



*"main plank of anarchism is the removal of violence from human relations"* and that anarchists *"are opposed to violence."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 53]

However, although many anarchists reject violence and proclaim pacifism, the movement, in general, is not essentially pacifistic (in the sense of opposed all forms of violence at all times). Rather, it is anti-militarist, being against the organised violence of the state but recognising that there are important differences between the violence of the oppressor and the violence of the oppressed. This explains why the anarchist movement has always placed a lot of time and energy in opposing the military machine and capitalist wars while, at the same time, supporting and organising armed resistance against oppression (as in the case of the Makhnovist army during the Russian Revolution which resisted both Red and White armies and the militias the anarchists organised to resist the fascists during the Spanish Revolution -- see sections [A.5.4](#) and [A.5.6](#), respectively).

On the question of non-violence, as a rough rule of thumb, the movement divides along Individualist and Social lines. Most Individualist anarchists support purely non-violent tactics of social change, as do the Mutualists. However, Individualist anarchism is not pacifist as such, as many support the idea of violence in self-defence against aggression. Most social anarchists, on the other hand, do support the use of revolutionary violence, holding that physical force will be required to overthrow entrenched power and to resist state and capitalist aggression (although it was an anarcho-syndicalist, Bart de Ligt, who wrote the pacifist classic, **The Conquest of Violence**). As Malatesta put it, violence, while being *"in itself an evil,"* is *"justifiable only when it is necessary to defend oneself and others from violence"* and that a *"slave is always in a state of legitimate defence and consequently, his violence against the boss, against the oppressor, is always morally justifiable."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 55 and pp. 53-54] Moreover, they stress that, to use the words of Bakunin, since social oppression *"stems far less from individuals than from the organisation of things and from social positions"* anarchists aim to *"ruthlessly destroy positions and things"* rather than people, since the aim of an anarchist revolution is to see the end of privileged classes *"not as individuals, but as classes."* [quoted by Richard B. Saltman, **The Social and Political Thought of Michael Bakunin** p. 121, p. 124 and p. 122]

Indeed, the question of violence is relatively unimportant to most anarchists, as they do not glorify it and think that it should be kept to a minimum during any social struggle or revolution. All anarchists would agree with the Dutch pacifist anarcho-syndicalist Bart de Ligt when he argued that *"the violence and warfare which are characteristic conditions of the capitalist world do not go with the liberation of the individual, which is the historic mission of the exploited classes. The greater the violence, the weaker the revolution, even where violence has deliberately been put at the service of the revolution."* [**The Conquest of Violence**, p. 75]

Similarly, all anarchists would agree with de Ligt on, to use the name of one of his book's chapters, *"the absurdity of bourgeois pacifism."* For de Ligt, and all anarchists, violence is inherent in the capitalist system and any attempt to make capitalism pacifistic is doomed to failure. This is because, on the one hand, war is often just economic competition carried out by other means. Nations often go to war when they face an economic crisis, what they cannot gain in economic struggle they attempt to get by conflict.

On the other hand, *"violence is indispensable in modern society. . . [because] without it the ruling class would be completely unable to maintain its privileged position with regard to the exploited masses in each country. The army is used first and foremost to hold down the workers. . . when they become discontented."* [Bart de Ligt, **Op. Cit.**, p. 62] As long as the state and capitalism exist, violence is inevitable and so, for anarcho-pacifists, the consistent pacifist must be an anarchist just as the consistent anarchist must be a pacifist.

For those anarchists who are non-pacifists, violence is seen as an unavoidable and unfortunate result of oppression and exploitation as well as the only means by which the privileged classes will renounce their power and wealth. Those in authority rarely give up their power and so must be forced. Hence the need for *"transitional" violence "to put an end to the far greater, and permanent, violence which keeps the majority of mankind in servitude."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 55] To concentrate on the issue of violence versus non-violence is to ignore the real issue, namely how do we change society for the better. As Alexander Berkman pointed out, those anarchists who are pacifists confuse the issue, like those who think *"it's the same as if rolling up your sleeves for work should be considered the work itself."* To the contrary, *"[t]he fighting part of revolution is merely rolling up your sleeves. The real, actual task is ahead."* [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 183] And, indeed, most social struggle and revolutions start relatively peaceful (via strikes, occupations and so on) and only degenerate into violence when those in power try to maintain their position (a classic example of this is in Italy, in 1920, when the occupation of factories by their workers was followed by fascist terror -- see [section A.5.5](#)).

As noted above, all anarchists are anti-militarists and oppose both the military machine (and so the "defence" industry) as well as statist/capitalist wars (although a few anarchists, like Rudolf Rocker and Sam Dolgoff, supported the anti-fascist capitalist side during the second world war as the lesser evil). The anti-war machine message of anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists was propagated long before the start of the first world war, with syndicalists and anarchists in Britain and North America reprinting a French CGT leaflet urging soldiers not to follow orders and repress their striking fellow workers. Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman were both arrested and deported from America for organising a *"No-Conscription League"* in 1917 while many anarchists in Europe were jailed for refusing to join the armed forces in the first and second world wars. The anarcho-syndicalist influenced IWW was crushed by a ruthless wave of government repression due to the threat its organising and anti-war message presented to the powerful elites who favoured war. More recently, anarchists, (including people like Noam Chomsky and Paul Goodman) have been active in the peace movement as well as contributing to the resistance to conscription where it still exists. Anarchists took an active part in opposing such wars as the Vietnam War, the Falklands war as well as the Gulf wars of 1991 and 2003 (including, in Italy and Spain, helping to organise strikes in protest against it). And it was during the 1991 Gulf War when many anarchists raised the slogan *"No war but the class war"* which nicely sums up the anarchist opposition to war -- namely an evil consequence of any class system, in which the oppressed classes of different countries kill each other for the power and profits of their rulers. Rather than take part in this organised slaughter, anarchists urge working people to fight for their own interests, not those of their masters:

*"More than ever we must avoid compromise; deepen the chasm between capitalists and*

*wage slaves, between rulers and ruled; preach expropriation of private property and the destruction of states such as the only means of guaranteeing fraternity between peoples and Justice and Liberty for all; and we must prepare to accomplish these things.*" [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 251]

We must note here that Malatesta's words were written in part against Peter Kropotkin who, for reasons best known to himself, rejected everything he had argued for decades and supported the allies in the First World War as a lesser evil against German authoritarianism and Imperialism. Of course, as Malatesta pointed out, "*all Governments and all capitalist classes*" do "*misdeeds . . . against the workers and rebels of their own countries.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 246] He, along with Berkman, Goldman and a host of other anarchists, put their name to International Anarchist Manifesto against the First World War. It expressed the opinion of the bulk of the anarchist movement (at the time and consequently) on war and how to stop it. It is worth quoting from:

*"The truth is that the cause of wars . . . rests solely in the existence of the State, which is the form of privilege . . . Whatever the form it may assume, the State is nothing but organised oppression for the advantage of a privileged minority . . .*

*"The misfortune of the peoples, who were deeply attached to peace, is that, in order to avoid war, they placed their confidence in the State with its intriguing diplomatists, in democracy, and in political parties . . . This confidence has been deliberately betrayed, and continues to be so, when governments, with the aid of the whole of the press, persuade their respective people that this war is a war of liberation.*

*"We are resolutely against all wars between peoples, and . . . have been, are, and ever will be most energetically opposed to war.*

*"The role of the Anarchists . . . is to continue to proclaim that there is only one war of liberation: that which in all countries is waged by the oppressed against the oppressors, by the exploited against the exploiters. Our part is to summon the slaves to revolt against their masters.*

*"Anarchist action and propaganda should assiduously and perseveringly aim at weakening and dissolving the various States, at cultivating the spirit of revolt, and arousing discontent in peoples and armies. . .*

*"We must take advantage of all the movements of revolt, of all the discontent, in order to foment insurrection, and to organise the revolution which we look to put end to all social wrongs. . . Social justice realised through the free organisation of producers: war and militarism done away with forever; and complete freedom won, by the abolition of the State and its organs of destruction." ["International Anarchist Manifesto on the War," **Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth**, pp. 386-8]*

Thus, the attraction of pacifism to anarchists is clear. Violence is authoritarian and coercive, and so its use does contradict anarchist principles. That is why anarchists would agree with Malatesta when he argues that "*[w]e are on principle opposed to violence and for this reason wish that the social struggle should be conducted as humanely as possible.*" [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 57] Most, if not all, anarchists who are not strict pacifists agree with pacifist-anarchists when they argue that violence can often be counterproductive, alienating people and giving the state an excuse to repress both the anarchist movement and popular movements for social change. All anarchists support non-violent direct action and civil disobedience, which often provide better roads to radical change.

So, to sum up, anarchists who are pure pacifists are rare. Most accept the use of violence as a necessary evil and advocate minimising its use. All agree that a revolution which **institutionalises** violence will just recreate the state in a new form. They argue, however, that it is not authoritarian to destroy authority or to use violence to resist violence. Therefore, although most anarchists are not pacifists, most reject violence except in self-defence and even then kept to the minimum.

### A.3.5 What is Anarcha-Feminism?

Although opposition to the state and all forms of authority had a strong voice among the early feminists of the 19th century, the more recent feminist movement which began in the 1960's was founded upon anarchist practice. This is where the term anarcha-feminism came from, referring to women anarchists who act within the larger feminist and anarchist movements to remind them of their principles.

The modern anarcha-feminists built upon the feminist ideas of previous anarchists, both male and female. Indeed, anarchism and feminism have always been closely linked. Many outstanding feminists have also been anarchists, including the pioneering Mary Wollstonecraft (author of **A Vindication of the Rights of Woman**), the Commune Louise Michel, and the American anarchists Voltairine de Cleyre and the tireless champion of women's freedom, Emma Goldman (see her famous essays "*The Traffic in Women*", "*Woman Suffrage*", "*The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation*", "*Marriage and Love*" and "*Victims of Morality*", for example). **Freedom**, the world's oldest anarchist newspaper, was founded by Charlotte Wilson in 1886. Anarchist women like Virgilia D'Andrea and Rose Pesota played important roles in both the libertarian and labour movements. The "**Mujeres Libres**" ("*Free Women*") movement in Spain during the Spanish revolution is a classic example of women anarchists organising themselves to defend their basic freedoms and create a society based on women's freedom and equality (see **Free Women of Spain** by Martha Ackelsberg for more details on this important organisation). In addition, all the male major anarchist thinkers (bar Proudhon) were firm supporters of women's equality. For example, Bakunin opposed patriarchy and how the law "*subjects [women] to the absolute domination of the man.*" He argued that "*[e]qual rights must belong to men and women*" so that women can "*become independent and be free to forge their own way of life.*" He looked forward to the end of "*the authoritarian juridical family*" and "*the full sexual freedom of women.*" [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 396 and p. 397]

Thus anarchism has since the 1860s combined a radical critique of capitalism and the state with an equally powerful critique of patriarchy (rule by men). Anarchists, particularly female ones, recognised that modern society was dominated by men. As Ana Maria Mozzoni (an Italian anarchist immigrant in Buenos Aires) put it, women "*will find that the priest who damns you is a man; that the legislator who oppresses you is a man, that the husband who reduces you to an **object** is a man; that the libertine who harasses you is a man; that the capitalist who enriches himself with your ill-paid work and the speculator who calmly pockets the price of your body, are men.*" Little has changed since then. Patriarchy still exists and, to quote the anarchist paper **La Questione Sociale**, it is still usually the case that women "*are slaves both in social and private life. If you are a proletarian, you have two tyrants: the man and the boss. If bourgeois, the only sovereignty left to you is that of frivolity and coquetry.*" [quoted by Jose Moya, **Italians in Buenos Aires's Anarchist Movement**, pp. 197-8 and p. 200]

Anarchism, therefore, is based on an awareness that fighting patriarchy is as important as fighting against the state or capitalism. To quote Louise Michel:

*"The first thing that must change is the relationship between the sexes. Humanity has two parts, men and women, and we ought to be walking hand in hand; instead there is antagonism, and it will last as long as the 'stronger' half controls, or think its controls, the 'weaker' half."* [**The Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel**, p. 139]

Thus anarchism, like feminism, fights patriarchy and for women's equality. Both share much common history and a concern about individual freedom, equality and dignity for members of the female sex (although, as we will explain in more depth below, anarchists have always been very critical of mainstream/liberal feminism as not going far enough). Therefore, it is unsurprising that the new wave of feminism of the sixties expressed itself in an anarchistic manner and drew much inspiration from anarchist figures such as Emma Goldman. Cathy Levine points out that, during this time, "*independent groups of women began functioning without the structure, leaders, and other factotums of the male left, creating, independently and simultaneously, organisations similar to those of anarchists of many decades and regions. No accident, either.*" ["*The Tyranny of Tyranny*," **Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader**, p. 66] It is no accident because, as feminist scholars have noted, women were among the first victims of hierarchical society, which is thought to have begun with the rise of patriarchy and ideologies of domination during the late Neolithic era. Marilyn French argues (in **Beyond Power**) that the first major social stratification of the human race occurred when men began dominating women, with women becoming in effect a "lower" and "inferior" social class.

The links between anarchism and modern feminism exist in both ideas and action. Leading feminist thinker Carole Pateman notes that her "discussion [on contract theory and its authoritarian and patriarchal basis] owes something to" libertarian ideas, that is the "*anarchist wing of the socialist movement.*" [**The Sexual Contract**, p. 14] Moreover, she noted in the 1980s how the "*major locus of criticism of authoritarian, hierarchical, undemocratic forms of organisation for the last twenty years has been the women's movement . . . After Marx defeated Bakunin in the First International, the prevailing form of organisation in the labour movement, the nationalised industries and in the left sects has mimicked the hierarchy of the state . . . The women's movement has rescued and put into practice the*

*long-submerged idea [of anarchists like Bakunin] that movements for, and experiments in, social change must 'prefigure' the future form of social organisation.*" [**The Disorder of Women**, p. 201]

Peggy Kornegger has drawn attention to these strong connections between feminism and anarchism, both in theory and practice. *"The radical feminist perspective is almost pure anarchism,"* she writes. *"The basic theory postulates the nuclear family as the basis of all authoritarian systems. The lesson the child learns, from father to teacher to boss to god, is to **obey** the great anonymous voice of Authority. To graduate from childhood to adulthood is to become a full-fledged automaton, incapable of questioning or even of thinking clearly."* ["Anarchism: The Feminist Connection," **Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader**, p. 26] Similarly, the Zero Collective argues that Anarcha-feminism *"consists in recognising the anarchism of feminism and consciously developing it."* ["Anarchism/Feminism," pp. 3-7, **The Raven**, no. 21, p. 6]

Anarcha-feminists point out that authoritarian traits and values, for example, domination, exploitation, aggressiveness, competitiveness, desensitisation etc., are highly valued in hierarchical civilisations and are traditionally referred to as "masculine." In contrast, non-authoritarian traits and values such as co-operation, sharing, compassion, sensitivity, warmth, etc., are traditionally regarded as "feminine" and are devalued. Feminist scholars have traced this phenomenon back to the growth of patriarchal societies during the early Bronze Age and their conquest of co-operatively based "organic" societies in which "feminine" traits and values were prevalent and respected. Following these conquests, however, such values came to be regarded as "inferior," especially for a man, since men were in charge of domination and exploitation under patriarchy. (See e.g. Riane Eisler, **The Chalice and the Blade**; Elise Boulding, **The Underside of History**). Hence anarcha-feminists have referred to the creation of a non-authoritarian, anarchist society based on co-operation, sharing, mutual aid, etc. as the "feminisation of society."

Anarcha-feminists have noted that "feminising" society cannot be achieved without both self-management and decentralisation. This is because the patriarchal-authoritarian values and traditions they wish to overthrow are embodied and reproduced in hierarchies. Thus feminism implies decentralisation, which in turn implies self-management. Many feminists have recognised this, as reflected in their experiments with collective forms of feminist organisations that eliminate hierarchical structure and competitive forms of decision making. Some feminists have even argued that directly democratic organisations are specifically female political forms. [see e.g. Nancy Hartsock *"Feminist Theory and the Development of Revolutionary Strategy,"* in Zeila Eisenstein, ed., **Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism**, pp. 56-77] Like all anarchists, anarcha-feminists recognise that self-liberation is the key to women's equality and thus, freedom. Thus Emma Goldman:

*"Her development, her freedom, her independence, must come from and through herself. First, by asserting herself as a personality, and not as a sex commodity. Second, by refusing the right of anyone over her body; by refusing to bear children, unless she wants them, by refusing to be a servant to God, the State, society, the husband, the family, etc., by making her life simpler, but deeper and richer. That is, by trying to learn the meaning and substance of life in all its complexities; by freeing herself from the fear of public*

*opinion and public condemnation.*" [**Anarchism and Other Essays**, p. 211]

Anarcha-feminism tries to keep feminism from becoming influenced and dominated by authoritarian ideologies of either the right or left. It proposes direct action and self-help instead of the mass reformist campaigns favoured by the "official" feminist movement, with its creation of hierarchical and centralist organisations and its illusion that having more women bosses, politicians, and soldiers is a move towards "equality." Anarcha-feminists would point out that the so-called "management science" which women have to learn in order to become managers in capitalist companies is essentially a set of techniques for controlling and exploiting wage workers in corporate hierarchies, whereas "feminising" society requires the elimination of capitalist wage-slavery and managerial domination altogether. Anarcha-feminists realise that learning how to become an effective exploiter or oppressor is not the path to equality (as one member of the *Mujeres Libres* put it, "[w]e did not want to substitute a feminist hierarchy for a masculine one" [quoted by Martha A. Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, p. 2] -- also see [section B.1.4](#) for a further discussion on patriarchy and hierarchy).

Hence anarchism's traditional hostility to liberal (or mainstream) feminism, while supporting women's liberation and equality. Federica Montseny (a leading figure in the Spanish Anarchist movement) argued that such feminism advocated equality for women, but did not challenge existing institutions. She argued that (mainstream) feminism's *"only ambition is to give to women of a particular class the opportunity to participate more fully in the existing system of privilege"* and if these institutions *"are unjust when men take advantage of them, they will still be unjust if women take advantage of them."* [quoted by Martha A. Ackelsberg, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 90-91 and p. 91] Thus, for anarchists, women's freedom did not mean an equal chance to become a boss or a wage slave, a voter or a politician, but rather to be a free and equal individual co-operating as equals in free associations. *"Feminism,"* stressed Peggy Kornegger, *"doesn't mean female corporate power or a women President; it means no corporate power and no Presidents. The Equal Rights Amendment will not transform society; it only gives women the 'right' to plug into a hierarchical economy. Challenging sexism means challenging all hierarchy -- economic, political, and personal.. And that means an anarcha-feminist revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 27]

Anarchism, as can be seen, included a class and economic analysis which is missing from mainstream feminism while, at the same time, showing an awareness to domestic and sex-based power relations which eluded the mainstream socialist movement. This flows from our hatred of hierarchy. As Mozzoni put it, *"Anarchy defends the cause of all the oppressed, and because of this, and in a special way, it defends your [women's] cause, oh! women, doubly oppressed by present society in both the social and private spheres."* [quoted by Moya, **Op. Cit.**, p. 203] This means that, to quote a Chinese anarchist, what anarchists *"mean by equality between the sexes is not just that the men will no longer oppress women. We also want men to no longer to be oppressed by other men, and women no longer to be oppressed by other women."* Thus women should *"completely overthrow rulership, force men to abandon all their special privileges and become equal to women, and make a world with neither the oppression of women nor the oppression of men."* [He Zhen, quoted by Peter Zarrow, **Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture**, p. 147]

So, in the historic anarchist movement, as Martha Ackelsberg notes, liberal/mainstream feminism was considered as being *"too narrowly focused as a strategy for women's emancipation; sexual struggle could not be separated from class struggle or from the anarchist project as a whole."* [Op. Cit., p. 91] Anarcha-feminism continues this tradition by arguing that all forms of hierarchy are wrong, not just patriarchy, and that feminism is in conflict with its own ideals if it desires simply to allow women to have the same chance of being a boss as a man does. They simply state the obvious, namely that they *"do not believe that power in the hands of women could possibly lead to a non-coercive society"* nor do they *"believe that anything good can come out of a mass movement with a leadership elite."* The *"central issues are always power and social hierarchy"* and so people *"are free only when they have power over their own lives."* [Carole Ehrlich, *"Socialism, Anarchism and Feminism"*, **Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader**, p. 44] For if, as Louise Michel put it, *"a proletarian is a slave; the wife of a proletarian is even more a slave"* ensuring that the wife experiences an equal level of oppression as the husband misses the point. [Op. Cit., p. 141]

Anarcha-feminists, therefore, like all anarchists oppose capitalism as a denial of liberty. The ideal that an "equal opportunity" capitalism would free women ignores the fact that any such system would still see working class women oppressed by bosses (be they male or female). For anarcha-feminists, the struggle for women's liberation cannot be separated from the struggle against hierarchy **as such**. As L. Susan Brown puts it:

*"Anarchist-feminism, as an expression of the anarchist sensibility applied to feminist concerns, takes the individual as its starting point and, in opposition to relations of domination and subordination, argues for non-instrumental economic forms that preserve individual existential freedom, for both men and women."* [**The Politics of Individualism**, p. 144]

Anarcha-feminists have much to contribute to our understanding of the origins of the ecological crisis in the authoritarian values of hierarchical civilisation. For example, a number of feminist scholars have argued that the domination of nature has paralleled the domination of women, who have been identified with nature throughout history (See, for example, Caroline Merchant, **The Death of Nature**, 1980). Both women and nature are victims of the obsession with control that characterises the authoritarian personality. For this reason, a growing number of both radical ecologists and feminists are recognising that hierarchies must be dismantled in order to achieve their respective goals.

In addition, anarcha-feminism reminds us of the importance of treating women equally with men while, at the same time, respecting women's differences from men. In other words, that recognising and respecting diversity includes women as well as men. Too often many male anarchists assume that, because they are (in theory) opposed to sexism, they are not sexist in practice. Such an assumption is false. Anarcha-feminism brings the question of consistency between theory and practice to the front of social activism and reminds us all that we must fight not only external constraints but also internal ones.

This means that anarcha-feminism urges us to practice what we preach. Faced with the sexism of male



anarchists who spoke of sexual equality, women anarchists in Spain organised themselves into the **Mujeres Libres** organisation to combat it. They did not believe in leaving their liberation to some day after the revolution. Their liberation was an integral part of that revolution and had to be started today. In this they repeated the conclusions of anarchist women in Illinois Coal towns who grew tired of hearing their male comrades "*shout in favour*" of sexual equality "*in the future society*" while doing nothing about it in the here and now. They used a particularly insulting analogy, comparing their male comrades to priests who "*make false promises to the starving masses . . . [that] there will be rewards in paradise.*" They argued that mothers should make their daughters "*understand that the difference in sex does not imply inequality in rights*" and that as well as being "*rebels against the social system of today,*" they "*should fight especially against the oppression of men who would like to retain women as their moral and material inferior.*" [Ersilia Grandi, quoted by Caroline Waldron Merithew, **Anarchist Motherhood**, p. 227] They formed the "**Luisa Michel**" group to fight against capitalism and patriarchy in the upper Illinois valley coal towns over three decades before their Spanish comrades organised themselves.

For anarcho-feminists, combating sexism is a key aspect of the struggle for freedom. It is not, as many Marxist socialists argued before the rise of feminism, a diversion from the "real" struggle against capitalism which would somehow be automatically solved after the revolution. It is an essential part of the struggle:

*"We do not need any of your titles . . . We want none of them. What we do want is knowledge and education and liberty. We know what our rights are and we demand them. Are we not standing next to you fighting the supreme fight? Are you not strong enough, men, to make part of that supreme fight a struggle for the rights of women? And then men and women together will gain the rights of all humanity."* [Louise Michel, **Op. Cit.**, p. 142]

A key part of this revolutionising modern society is the transformation of the current relationship between the sexes. Marriage is a particular evil for "*the old form of marriage, based on the Bible, 'till death doth part, ' . . . [is] an institution that stands for the sovereignty of the man over the women, of her complete submission to his whims and commands.*" Women are reduced "*to the function of man's servant and bearer of his children.*" [Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 220-1] Instead of this, anarchists proposed "**free love**," that is couples and families based on free agreement between equals than one partner being in authority and the other simply obeying.. Such unions would be without sanction of church or state for "*two beings who love each other do not need permission from a third to go to bed.*" [Mozzoni, quoted by Moya, **Op. Cit.**, p. 200]

Equality and freedom apply to more than just relationships. Neither men nor state should say what a woman does with her body. This means that a woman should control her own body and, of course, also means control over her own reproductive organs. Thus anarcho-feminists, like anarchists in general, are pro-choice and pro-reproductive rights (i.e. the right of a woman to control her own reproductive decisions). This is a long standing position. Emma Goldman was persecuted and incarcerated because of her public advocacy of birth control methods and the extremist notion that women should decide when they become pregnant (as feminist writer Margaret Anderson put it, "*In 1916, Emma Goldman was sent*

to prison for advocating that 'women need not always keep their mouth shut and their wombs open.'").

Anarcha-feminism does not stop there. Like anarchism in general, it aims at changing **all** aspects of society not just what happens in the home. For, as Goldman asked, "*how much independence is gained if the narrowness and lack of freedom of the home is exchanged for the narrowness and lack of freedom of the factory, sweat-shop, department store, or office?*" Thus women's equality and freedom had to be fought everywhere and defended against all forms of hierarchy. Nor can they be achieved by voting. Real liberation, argue anarcha-feminists, is only possible by direct action and anarcha-feminism is based on women's self-activity and self-liberation for while the "*right to vote, or equal civil rights, may be good demands . . . true emancipation begins neither at the polls nor in the courts. It begins in woman's soul . . . her freedom will reach as far as her power to achieve freedom reaches.*" [Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 216 and p. 224]

The history of the women's movement proves this. Every gain has come from below, by the action of women themselves. As Louise Michel put it, "*[w]e women are not bad revolutionaries. Without begging anyone, we are taking our place in the struggles; otherwise, we could go ahead and pass motions until the world ends and gain nothing.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 139] If women waited for others to act for them their social position would never have changed. This includes getting the vote in the first place. Faced with the militant suffrage movement for women's votes, British anarchist Rose Witcop recognised that it was "*true that this movement shows us that women who so far have been so submissive to their masters, the men, are beginning to wake up at last to the fact they are not inferior to those masters.*" Yet she argued that women would not be freed by votes but "*by their own strength.*" [quoted by Sheila Rowbotham, **Hidden from History**, pp. 100-1 and p. 101] The women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s showed the truth of that analysis. In spite of equal voting rights, women's social place had remained unchanged since the 1920s.

Ultimately, as Anarchist Lily Gair Wilkinson stressed, the "*call for 'votes' can never be a call to freedom. For what is it to vote? To vote is to register assent to being ruled by one legislator or another?*" [quoted by Sheila Rowbotham, **Op. Cit.**, p. 102] It does not get to the heart of the problem, namely hierarchy and the authoritarian social relationships it creates of which patriarchy is only a subset of. Only by getting rid of all bosses, political, economic, social and sexual can **genuine** freedom for women be achieved and "*make it possible for women to be human in the truest sense. Everything within her that craves assertion and activity should reach its fullest expression; all artificial barriers should be broken, and the road towards greater freedom cleared of every trace of centuries of submission and slavery.*" [Emma Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 214]

## A.3.6 What is Cultural Anarchism?

For our purposes, we will define cultural anarchism as the promotion of anti-authoritarian values through those aspects of society traditionally regarded as belonging to the sphere of "culture" rather than "economics" or "politics" -- for example, through art, music, drama, literature, education, child-rearing practices, sexual morality, technology, and so forth.

Cultural expressions are anarchistic to the extent that they deliberately attack, weaken, or subvert the tendency of most traditional cultural forms to promote authoritarian values and attitudes, particularly domination and exploitation. Thus a novel that portrays the evils of militarism can be considered as cultural anarchism if it goes beyond the simple "war-is-hell" model and allows the reader to see how militarism is connected with authoritarian institutions (e.g. capitalism and statism) or methods of authoritarian conditioning (e.g. upbringing in the traditional patriarchal family). Or, as John Clark expresses it, cultural anarchism implies *"the development of arts, media, and other symbolic forms that expose various aspects of the system of domination and contrast them with a system of values based on freedom and community."* This **"cultural struggle"** would be part of a general struggle *"to combat the material and ideological power of all dominating classes, whether economic, political, racial, religious, or sexual, with a multi-dimensional practice of liberation."* In other words, an *"expanded conception of class analysis"* and *"an amplified practice of class struggle"* which includes, but is not limited to, *"economic actions like strikes, boycotts, job actions, occupation, organisations of direct action groups and federations of libertarian workers' groups and development of workers' assemblies, collectives and co-operatives"* and *"political activity"* like the *"active interference with implementation of repressive governmental policies,"* the *"non-compliance and resistance against regimentation and bureaucratisation of society"* and *"participation in movements for increasing direct participation in decision-making and local control."* [**The Anarchist Moment**, p. 31]

Cultural anarchism is important -- indeed essential -- because authoritarian values are embedded in a total system of domination with many aspects besides the political and economic. Hence those values cannot be eradicated even by a combined economic and political revolution if there it is not also accompanied by profound psychological changes in the majority of the population. For mass acquiescence in the current system is rooted in the psychic structure of human beings (their *"character structure,"* to use Wilhelm Reich's expression), which is produced by many forms of conditioning and socialisation that have developed with patriarchal-authoritarian civilisation during the past five or six thousand years.

In other words, even if capitalism and the state were overthrown tomorrow, people would soon create new forms of authority in their place. For authority -- a strong leader, a chain of command, someone to give orders and relieve one of the responsibility of thinking for oneself -- are what the submissive/authoritarian personality feels most comfortable with. Unfortunately, the majority of human beings fear real freedom, and indeed, do not know what to do with it -- as is shown by a long string of failed revolutions and freedom movements in which the revolutionary ideals of freedom, democracy, and equality were betrayed and a new hierarchy and ruling class were quickly created. These failures are generally attributed to the machinations of reactionary politicians and capitalists, and to the perfidy of revolutionary leaders; but reactionary politicians only attract followers because they find a favourable soil for the growth of their authoritarian ideals in the character structure of ordinary people.

Hence the prerequisite of an anarchist revolution is a period of consciousness-raising in which people gradually become aware of submissive/authoritarian traits within themselves, see how those traits are reproduced by conditioning, and understand how they can be mitigated or eliminated through new forms

of culture, particularly new child-rearing and educational methods. We will explore this issue more fully in section B.1.5 ([What is the mass-psychological basis for authoritarian civilisation?](#)), J.6 ([What methods of child rearing do anarchists advocate?](#)), and J.5.13 ([What are Modern Schools?](#))

Cultural anarchist ideas are shared by almost all schools of anarchist thought and consciousness-raising is considered an essential part of any anarchist movement. For anarchists, its important to *"build the new world in the shell of the old"* in all aspects of our lives and creating an anarchist culture is part of that activity. Few anarchists, however, consider consciousness-raising as enough in itself and so combine cultural anarchist activities with organising, using direct action and building libertarian alternatives in capitalist society. The anarchist movement is one that combines practical self-activity with cultural work, with both activities feeding into and supporting the other.

### A.3.7 Are there religious anarchists?

Yes, there are. While most anarchists have opposed religion and the idea of God as deeply anti-human and a justification for earthly authority and slavery, a few believers in religion have taken their ideas to anarchist conclusions. Like all anarchists, these religious anarchists have combined an opposition to the state with a critical position with regards to private property and inequality. In other words, anarchism is not necessarily atheistic. Indeed, according to Jacques Ellul, *"biblical thought leads directly to anarchism, and that this is the only 'political anti-political' position in accord with Christian thinkers."* [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 75]

There are many different types of anarchism inspired by religious ideas. As Peter Marshall notes, the *"first clear expression of an anarchist sensibility may be traced back to the Taoists in ancient China from about the sixth century BC"* and *"Buddhism, particularly in its Zen form, . . . has . . . a strong libertarian spirit."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 53 and p. 65] Some, like the anti-globalisation activist Starhawk, combine their anarchist ideas with Pagan and Spiritualist influences. However, religious anarchism usually takes the form of Christian Anarchism, which we will concentrate on here.

Christian Anarchists take seriously Jesus' words to his followers that *"kings and governors have domination over men; let there be none like that among you."* Similarly, Paul's dictum that there *"is no authority except God"* is taken to its obvious conclusion with the denial of state authority within society. Thus, for a true Christian, the state is usurping God's authority and it is up to each individual to govern themselves and discover that (to use the title of Tolstoy's famous book) **The Kingdom of God is within you.**

Similarly, the voluntary poverty of Jesus, his comments on the corrupting effects of wealth and the Biblical claim that the world was created for humanity to be enjoyed in common have all been taken as the basis of a socialistic critique of private property and capitalism. Indeed, the early Christian church (which could be considered as a liberation movement of slaves, although one that was later co-opted into a state religion) was based upon communistic sharing of material goods, a theme which has continually appeared within radical Christian movements (indeed, the Bible would have been used to express radical

libertarian aspirations of the oppressed, which, in later times, would have taken the form of anarchist or Marxist terminology). Thus clergyman's John Ball's egalitarian comments (as quoted by Peter Marshall [Op. Cit., p. 89]) during the Peasant Revolt in 1381 in England:

*"When Adam delved and Eve span,  
Who was then a gentleman?"*

The history of Christian anarchism includes the *Heresy of the Free Spirit* in the Middle Ages, numerous Peasant revolts and the *Anabaptists* in the 16th century. The libertarian tradition within Christianity surfaced again in the 18th century in the writings of William Blake and the American Adam Ballou reached anarchist conclusions in his **Practical Christian Socialism** in 1854. However, Christian anarchism became a clearly defined thread of the anarchist movement with the work of the famous Russian author Leo Tolstoy.

Tolstoy took the message of the Bible seriously and came to consider that a true Christian must oppose the state. From his reading of the Bible, Tolstoy drew anarchist conclusions:

*"ruling means using force, and using force means doing to him whom force is used, what he does not like and what he who uses force would certainly not like done to himself. Consequently ruling means doing to others what we would not they should do unto us, that is, doing wrong."* [**The Kingdom of God is Within You**, p. 242]

Thus a true Christian must refrain from governing others. From this anti-statist position he naturally argued in favour of a society self-organised from below:

*"Why think that non-official people could not arrange their life for themselves, as well as Government people can arrange it nor for themselves but for others?"* [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 306]

Tolstoy urged non-violent action against oppression, seeing a spiritual transformation of individuals as the key to creating an anarchist society. As Max Nettlau argues, the *"great truth stressed by Tolstoy is that the recognition of the power of the good, of goodness, of solidarity - and of all that is called love - lies within ourselves, and that it can and must be awakened, developed and exercised in our own behaviour."* [**A Short History of Anarchism**, pp. 251-2]

Like all anarchists, Tolstoy was critical of private property and capitalism. Like Henry George (whose ideas, like those of Proudhon, had a strong impact on him) he opposed private property in land, arguing that *"were it not for the defence of landed property, and its consequent rise in price, people would not be crowded into such narrow spaces, but would scatter over the free land of which there is still so much in the world."* Moreover, *"in this struggle [for landed property] it is not those who work in the land, but always those who take part in government violence, who have the advantage."* [Op. Cit., p. 307] Thus Tolstoy recognised that property rights in anything beyond use require state violence to protect them

(possession is "always protected by custom, public opinion, by feelings of justice and reciprocity, and they do not need to be protected by violence." [**Ibid.**]). Indeed, he argues that:

*"Tens of thousands of acres of forest lands belonging to one proprietor -- while thousands of people close by have no fuel -- need protection by violence. So, too, do factories and works where several generations of workmen have been defrauded and are still being defrauded. Yet more do the hundreds of thousands of bushels of grain, belonging to one owner, who has held them back to sell at triple price in time of famine." [Op. Cit., p. 307]*

Tolstoy argued that capitalism morally and physically ruined individuals and that capitalists were "slave-drivers." He considered it impossible for a true Christian to be a capitalist, for a "manufacturer is a man whose income consists of value squeezed out of the workers, and whose whole occupation is based on forced, unnatural labour" and therefore, "he must first give up ruining human lives for his own profit." [**The Kingdom Of God is Within You**, p. 338 and p. 339] Unsurprisingly, Tolstoy argued that co-operatives were the "only social activity which a moral, self-respecting person who doesn't want to be a party of violence can take part in." [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Op. Cit.**, p. 378]

From his opposition to violence, Tolstoy rejects both state and private property and urged pacifist tactics to end violence within society and create a just society. In Nettlau's words, he "asserted . . . **resistance to evil; and to one of the ways of resistance - by active force - he added another way: resistance through disobedience, the passive force.**" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 251] In his ideas of a free society, Tolstoy was clearly influenced by rural Russian life **and** the works of Peter Kropotkin (such as **Fields, Factories and Workshops**), P-J Proudhon and the non-anarchist Henry George.

Tolstoy's ideas had a strong influence on Gandhi, who inspired his fellow country people to use non-violent resistance to kick Britain out of India. Moreover, Gandhi's vision of a free India as a federation of peasant communes is similar to Tolstoy's anarchist vision of a free society (although we must stress that Gandhi was not an anarchist). The **Catholic Worker Group** in the United States was also heavily influenced by Tolstoy (and Proudhon), as was Dorothy Day a staunch Christian pacifist and anarchist who founded it in 1933. The influence of Tolstoy and religious anarchism in general can also be found in **Liberation Theology** movements in Latin and South America who combine Christian ideas with social activism amongst the working class and peasantry (although we should note that Liberation Theology is more generally inspired by state socialist ideas rather than anarchist ones).

So there is a minority tradition within anarchism which draws anarchist conclusions from religion. However, as we noted in [section A.2.20](#), most anarchists disagree, arguing that anarchism implies atheism and it is no coincidence that the biblical thought has, historically, been associated with hierarchy and defence of earthly rulers. Thus the vast majority of anarchists have been and are atheists, for "to worship or revere any being, natural or supernatural, will always be a form of self-subjugation and servitude that will give rise to social domination. As [Bookchin] writes: 'The moment that human beings fall on their knees before anything that is 'higher' than themselves, hierarchy will have made its first triumph over freedom.'" [Brian Morris, **Ecology and Anarchism**, p. 137] This means that most

anarchists agree with Bakunin that if God existed it would be necessary, for human freedom and dignity, to abolish it. Given what the Bible says, few anarchists think it can be used to justify libertarian ideas rather than support authoritarian ones.

Atheist anarchists point to the fact that the Bible is notorious for advocating all kinds of abuses. How does the Christian anarchist reconcile this? Are they a Christian first, or an anarchist? Equality, or adherence to the Scripture? For a believer, it seems no choice at all. If the Bible is the word of God, how can an anarchist support the more extreme positions it takes while claiming to believe in God, his authority and his laws?

For example, no capitalist nation would implement the no working on the Sabbath law which the Bible expounds. Most Christian bosses have been happy to force their fellow believers to work on the seventh day in spite of the Biblical penalty of being stoned to death (*"Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the Lord: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death."* Exodus 35:2). Would a Christian anarchist advocate such a punishment for breaking God's law? Equally, a nation which allowed a woman to be stoned to death for not being a virgin on her wedding night would, rightly, be considered utterly evil. Yet this is the fate specified in the "good book" (Deuteronomy 22:13-21). Would premarital sex by women be considered a capital crime by a Christian anarchist? Or, for that matter, should *"a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother"* also suffer the fate of having *"all the men of his city . . . stone him with stones, that he die"*? (Deuteronomy 21:18-21) Or what of the Bible's treatment of women: *"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands."* (Colossians 3:18) They are also ordered to *"keep silence in the churches."* (I Corinthians 14:34-35). Male rule is explicitly stated: *"I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God."* (I Corinthians 11:3)

Clearly, a Christian anarchist would have to be as highly selective as non-anarchist believers when it comes to applying the teachings of the Bible. The rich rarely proclaim the need for poverty (at least for themselves) and seem happy to forget (like the churches) the difficulty a rich man apparently has entering heaven, for example. They seem happy to ignore Jesus' admonition that *"If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me."* (Matthew 19:21). The followers of the Christian right do not apply this to their political leaders, or, for that matter, their spiritual ones. Few apply the maxim to *"Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again."* (Luke 6:30, repeated in Matthew 5:42) Nor do they hold *"all things common"* as practised by the first Christian believers. (Acts 4:32) So if non-anarchist believers are to be considered as ignoring the teachings of the Bible by anarchist ones, the same can be said of them by those they attack.

Moreover idea that Christianity is basically anarchism is hard to reconcile with its history. The Bible has been used to defend injustice far more than it has been to combat it. In countries where Churches hold **de facto** political power, such as in Ireland, in parts of South America, in nineteenth and early twentieth century Spain and so forth, typically anarchists are strongly anti-religious because the Church has the power to suppress dissent and class struggle. Thus the actual role of the Church belies the claim that the

Bible is an anarchist text.

In addition, most social anarchists consider Tolstoyian pacifism as dogmatic and extreme, seeing the need (sometimes) for violence to resist greater evils. However, most anarchists would agree with Tolstoyians on the need for individual transformation of values as a key aspect of creating an anarchist society and on the importance of non-violence as a general tactic (although, we must stress, that few anarchists totally reject the use of violence in self-defence, when no other option is available).

### A.3.8 What is "*anarchism without adjectives*"?

In the words of historian George Richard Esenwein, "*anarchism without adjectives*" in its broadest sense "*referred to an unhyphenated form of anarchism, that is, a doctrine without any qualifying labels such as communist, collectivist, mutualist, or individualist. For others, . . . [it] was simply understood as an attitude that tolerated the coexistence of different anarchist schools.*" [**Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain, 1868-1898**, p. 135]

The originator of the expression was Cuban born Fernando Tarrida del Marmol who used it in November, 1889, in Barcelona. He directed his comments towards the communist and collectivist anarchists in Spain who at the time were having an intense debate over the merits of their two theories. "Anarchism without adjectives" was an attempt to show greater tolerance between anarchist tendencies and to be clear that anarchists should not impose a preconceived economic plan on anyone -- even in theory. Thus the economic preferences of anarchists should be of "*secondary importance*" to abolishing capitalism and the state, with free experimentation the one rule of a free society.

Thus the theoretical perspective known as "*anarquismo sin adjetivos*" ("anarchism without adjectives") was one of the by-products of a intense debate within the movement itself. The roots of the argument can be found in the development of Communist Anarchism after Bakunin's death in 1876. While not entirely dissimilar to Collectivist Anarchism (as can be seen from James Guillaume's famous work "*On Building the New Social Order*" within **Bakunin on Anarchism**, the collectivists did see their economic system evolving into free communism), Communist Anarchists developed, deepened and enriched Bakunin's work just as Bakunin had developed, deepened and enriched Proudhon's. Communist Anarchism was associated with such anarchists as Elisee Reclus, Carlo Cafiero, Errico Malatesta and (most famously) Peter Kropotkin.

Quickly Communist-Anarchist ideas replaced Collectivist Anarchism as the main anarchist tendency in Europe, except in Spain. Here the major issue was not the question of communism (although for Ricardo Mella this played a part) but a question of the modification of strategy and tactics implied by Communist Anarchism. At this time (the 1880s), the Communist Anarchists stressed local (pure) cells of anarchist militants, generally opposed trade unionism (although Kropotkin was not one of these as he saw the importance of militant workers organisations) as well as being somewhat anti-organisation as well. Unsurprisingly, such a change in strategy and tactics came in for a lot of discussion from the Spanish Collectivists who strongly supported working class organisation and struggle.



This conflict soon spread outside of Spain and the discussion found its way into the pages of **La Revolte** in Paris. This provoked many anarchists to agree with Malatesta's argument that "*[i]t is not right for us, to say the least, to fall into strife over mere hypotheses.*" [quoted by Max Nettlau, **A Short History of Anarchism**, pp. 198-9] Over time, most anarchists agreed (to use Nettlau's words) that "*we cannot foresee the economic development of the future*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 201] and so started to stress what they had in common (opposition to capitalism and the state) rather than the different visions of how a free society would operate. As time progressed, most Communist-Anarchists saw that ignoring the labour movement ensured that their ideas did not reach the working class while most Collectivist-Anarchists stressed their commitment to communist ideals and their arrival sooner, rather than later, after a revolution. Thus both groups of anarchists could work together as there was "*no reason for splitting up into small schools, in our eagerness to overemphasise certain features, subject to variation in time and place, of the society of the future, which is too remote from us to permit us to envision all its adjustments and possible combinations.*" Moreover, in a free society "*the methods and the individual forms of association and agreements, or the organisation of labour and of social life, will not be uniform and we cannot, at this moment, make and forecasts or determinations concerning them.*" [Malatesta, quoted by Nettlau, **Op. Cit.**, p. 173]

Thus, Malatesta continued, "*[e]ven the question as between anarchist-collectivism and anarchist-communism is a matter of qualification, of method and agreement*" as the key is that, no matter the system, "*a new moral conscience will come into being, which will make the wage system repugnant to men [and women] just as legal slavery and compulsion are now repugnant to them.*" If this happens then, "*whatever the specific forms of society may turn out to be, the basis of social organisation will be communist.*" As long as we "*hold to fundamental principles and . . . do our utmost to instil them in the masses*" we need not "*quarrel over mere words or trifles but give post-revolutionary society a direction towards justice, equality and liberty.*" [quoted by Nettlau, **Op. Cit.**, p. 173 and p. 174]

Similarly, in the United States there was also an intense debate at the same time between Individualist and Communist anarchists. There Benjamin Tucker was arguing that Communist-Anarchists were not anarchists while John Most was saying similar things about Tucker's ideas. Just as people like Mella and Tarrida put forward the idea of tolerance between anarchist groups, so anarchists like Voltairine de Cleyre "*came to label herself simply 'Anarchist,' and called like Malatesta for an 'Anarchism without Adjectives,' since in the absence of government many different experiments would probably be tried in various localities in order to determine the most appropriate form.*" [Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 393] In her own words, a whole range of economic systems would be "*advantageously tried in different localities. I would see the instincts and habits of the people express themselves in a free choice in every community; and I am sure that distinct environments would call out distinct adaptations.*" Ultimately, only "*[l]iberty and experiment alone can determine the best forms of society*" and therefore "*I no longer label myself otherwise than 'Anarchist' simply.*" [quoted by Paul Avrich, **An American Anarchist**, pp. 153-4]

These debates had a lasting impact on the anarchist movement, with such noted anarchists as de Cleyre, Malatesta, Nettlau and Reclus adopting the tolerant perspective embodied in the expression "anarchism

without adjectives" (see Nettlau's **A Short History of Anarchism**, pages 195 to 201 for an excellent summary of this). It is also, we add, the dominant position within the anarchist movement today with most anarchists recognising the right of other tendencies to the name "anarchist" while, obviously, having their own preferences for specific types of anarchist theory and their own arguments why other types are flawed. However, we must stress that the different forms of anarchism (communism, syndicalism, religious etc) are not mutually exclusive and you do not have to support one and hate the others. This tolerance is reflected in the expression "anarchism without adjectives."

One last point, some "anarcho"-capitalists have attempted to use the tolerance associated with "anarchism without adjectives" to argue that their ideology should be accepted as part of the anarchist movement. After all, they argue, anarchism is just about getting rid of the state, economics is of secondary importance. However, such a use of "*anarchism without adjectives*" is bogus as it was commonly agreed at the time that the types of economics that were being discussed were **anti-capitalist** (i.e. socialistic). For Malatesta, for example, there were "*anarchists who foresee and propose other solution, other future forms of social organisation*" than communist anarchism, but they "*desire, just as we do, to destroy political power and private property.*" "*Let us do away,*" he argued, "*with all exclusivism of schools of thinking*" and let us "*come to an understanding on ways and means, and go forwards.*" [quoted by Nettlau, **Op. Cit.**, p. 175] In other words, it was agreed that capitalism had to be abolished along with the state and once this was the case free experimentation would develop. Thus the struggle against the state was just one part of a wider struggle to end oppression and exploitation and could not be isolated from these wider aims. As "anarcho"-capitalists do not seek the abolition of capitalism along with the state they are not anarchists and so "anarchism without adjectives" does not apply to the so-called "anarchist" capitalists (see [section F](#) on why "anarcho"-capitalism is not anarchist).

This is not to say that after a revolution "anarcho"-capitalist communities would not exist. Far from it. If a group of people wanted to form such a system then they could, just as we would expect a community which supported state socialism or theocracy to live under that regime. Such enclaves of hierarchy would exist simply because it is unlikely that everyone on the planet, or even in a given geographical area, will become anarchists all at the same time. The key thing to remember is that no such system would be anarchist and, consequently, is not "*anarchism without adjectives.*"

### A.3.9 What is anarcho-primitivism?

As discussed in [section A.3.3](#), most anarchists would agree with Situationist Ken Knabb in arguing that "*in a liberated world computers and other modern technologies could be used to eliminate dangerous or boring tasks, freeing everyone to concentrate on more interesting activities.*" Obviously "*[c]ertain technologies -- nuclear power is the most obvious example -- are indeed so insanely dangerous that they will no doubt be brought to a prompt halt. Many other industries which produce absurd, obsolete or superfluous commodities will, of course, cease automatically with the disappearance of their commercial rationales. But many technologies . . . , however they may presently be misused, have few if any **inherent** drawbacks. It's simply a matter of using them more sensibly, bringing them under popular*

*control, introducing a few ecological improvements, and redesigning them for human rather than capitalistic ends.*" [Public Secrets, p. 79 and p. 80] Thus most eco-anarchists see the use of appropriate technology as the means of creating a society which lives in balance with nature.

However, a (very) small but vocal minority of self-proclaimed Green anarchists disagree. Writers such as John Zerzan, John Moore and David Watson have expounded a vision of anarchism which, they claim, aims to critique every form of power and oppression. This is often called "*anarcho-primitivism*," which according to Moore, is simply "*a shorthand term for a radical current that critiques the totality of civilisation from an anarchist perspective, and seeks to initiate a comprehensive transformation of human life.*" [Primitivist Primer]

How this current expresses itself is diverse, with the most extreme elements seeking the end of all forms of technology, division of labour, domestication, "Progress", industrialism, what they call "*mass society*" and, for some, even symbolic culture (i.e. numbers, language, time and art). They tend to call any system which includes these features "*civilisation*" and, consequently, aim for "*the destruction of civilisation*". How far back they wish to go is a moot point. Some see the technological level that existed before the Industrial Revolution as acceptable, many go further and reject agriculture and all forms of technology beyond the most basic. For them, a return to the wild, to a hunter-gatherer mode of life, is the only way for anarchy to exist and dismiss out of hand the idea that appropriate technology can be used to create an anarchist society based on industrial production which minimises its impact on ecosystems.

Thus we find the primitivist magazine "**Green Anarchy**" arguing that those, like themselves, "*who prioritise the values of personal autonomy or wild existence have reason to oppose and reject all large-scale organisations and societies on the grounds that they necessitate imperialism, slavery and hierarchy, regardless of the purposes they may be designed for.*" They oppose capitalism as it is "*civilisation's current dominant manifestation.*" However, they stress that it is "*Civilisation, not capitalism per se, was the genesis of systemic authoritarianism, compulsory servitude and social isolation. Hence, an attack upon capitalism that fails to target civilisation can never abolish the institutionalised coercion that fuels society. To attempt to collectivise industry for the purpose of democratising it is to fail to recognise that all large-scale organisations adopt a direction and form that is independent of its members' intentions.*" Thus, they argue, genuine anarchists must oppose industry and technology for "*[h]ierarchical institutions, territorial expansion, and the mechanisation of life are all required for the administration and process of mass production to occur.*" For primitivists, "*[o]nly small communities of self-sufficient individuals can coexist with other beings, human or not, without imposing their authority upon them.*" Such communities would share essential features with tribal societies, "*[f]or over 99% of human history, humans lived within small and egalitarian extended family arrangements, while drawing their subsistence directly from the land.*" [Against Mass Society]

While such tribal communities, which lived in harmony with nature and had little or no hierarchies, are seen as inspirational, primitivists look (to use the title of a John Zerzan book) forward to seeing the "*Future Primitive.*" As John Moore puts it, "*the future envisioned by anarcho-primitivism . . . is without precedent. Although primitive cultures provide intimations of the future, and that future may well incorporate elements derived from those cultures, an anarcho-primitivist world would likely be quite*

*different from previous forms of anarchy.*" [Op. Cit.]

For the primitivist, other forms of anarchism are simply self-managed alienation within essentially the same basic system we now endure, minus its worse excesses. Hence John Moore's comment that *"classical anarchism" wants "to take over civilisation, rework its structures to some degree, and remove its worst abuses and oppressions. However, 99% of life in civilisation remains unchanged in their future scenarios, precisely because the aspects of civilisation they question are minimal . . . overall life patterns wouldn't change too much."* Thus *"[f]rom the perspective of anarcho-primitivism, all other forms of radicalism appear as reformist, whether or not they regard themselves as revolutionary."* [Op. Cit.]

In reply, "classical anarchists" point out three things. Firstly, to claim that the *"worst abuses and oppressions"* account for 1% of capitalist society is simply nonsense and, moreover, something an apologist of that system would happily agree with. Secondly, it is obvious from reading any "classical" anarchist text that Moore's assertions are nonsense. "Classical" anarchism aims to transform society radically from top to bottom, not tinker with minor aspects of it. Do primitivists really think that people who went to the effort to abolish capitalism would simply continue doing 99% of the same things they did before hand? Of course not. In other words, it is not enough to get rid of the boss, although this is a necessary first step! Thirdly, and most importantly, Moore's argument ensures that his vision of a good society would never be achieved without genocide on an unimaginable scale.

So, as can be seen, primitivism has little or no bearing to the traditional anarchist movement and its ideas. The visions of both are simply incompatible, with the ideas of the latter dismissed as authoritarian by the former. Unsurprisingly, the ideas of primitivism and other anarchists are hard to reconcile. Equally unsurprisingly, other anarchists question whether primitivism is practical in the short term or even desirable in the long. While supporters of primitivism like to portray it as the most advanced and radical form of anarchism, other anarchists are less convinced. They consider it as a confused ideology which draws its followers into absurd positions and, moreover, is utterly impractical. They would agree with Ken Knabb comments that primitivism is rooted in *"fantasies [which] contain so many obvious self-contradictions that it is hardly necessary to criticise them in any detail. They have questionable relevance to actual past societies and virtually no relevance to present possibilities. Even supposing that life was better in one or another previous era, we have to begin from where we are now. Modern technology is so interwoven with all aspects of our life that it could not be abruptly discontinued without causing a global chaos that would wipe out billions of people."* [Op. Cit., p. 79]

The reason for this is simply that we live in a highly industrialised and interconnected system in which most people do not have the skills required to live in a hunter-gatherer or even agricultural society. Moreover, it is extremely doubtful that six billion people **could** survive as hunter-gatherers even if they had the necessary skills. As Brian Morris notes, *"[t]he future we are told is 'primitive.' How this is to be achieved in a world that presently sustains almost six billion people (for evidence suggests that the hunter-gatherer lifestyle is only able to support 1 or 2 people per sq. mile)"* primitivists like Zerzan do not tell us. ["*Anthropology and Anarchism*," pp. 35-41, **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed**, no. 45, p. 38]

This means that any "primitivist" rebellion has two options. Either it produces a near instant transformation into a primitivist system and, as a consequence, kills billions of people by hunger as well as causing extensive ecological destruction or it involves a lengthy transition period during which "civilisation" and its industrial legacies are decommissioned safely, population levels drop naturally to an appropriate level and people regain the necessary skills required for their new existence.

Sadly, option one, namely an almost overnight transformation, is what appears to be implied by most primitivist writers. Moore, for example, talks about "*when civilisation collapses*" ("*through its own volition, through our efforts, or a combination of the two*"). This implies an extremely speedy process, over which mere mortals have little say or control. This is confirmed when he talks about the need for "*positive alternatives*" to be built now as "*the social disruption caused by collapse could easily create the psychological insecurity and social vacuum in which fascism and other totalitarian dictatorships could flourish.*" [Op. Cit.] A revolution based on "*collapse*," "*insecurity*" and "*social disruption*" does not sound like a recipe for a successful social revolution based on mass participation and social experimentation.

Then there is the anti-organisation dogmas expounded by primitivism. Moore is typical, asserting that "*[o]rganisations, for anarcho-primitivists, are just rackets, gangs for putting a particular ideology in power*" and reiterates the point by saying primitivists stand for "*the abolition of all power relations, including the State . . . and any kind of party or organisation.*" [Op. Cit.] Yet without organisation, no modern society could function. There would be a total and instant collapse which would see not only mass starvation but also ecological destruction as nuclear power stations meltdown, industrial waste seeps into the surrounding environment, cities and towns decay and hordes of starving people fighting over what vegetables, fruits and animals they could find in the countryside. Clearly an anti-organisation dogma can only be reconciled with the idea of a near overnight "*collapse*" of civilisation, not with a steady progress towards a long term goal. Equally, how many "*positive alternatives*" could exist without organisation?

Faced with the horrors that such a "*collapse*" would entail, those few primitivists who have thought the issue through end up accepting the need for a transition period. However, to do so exposes the contradictions within primitivism. For if you accept that there is a need for a transition from 'here' to 'there' then primitivism automatically excludes itself from the anarchist tradition. The reason is simple. Moore asserts that "*mass society*" involves "*people working, living in artificial, technologised environments, and [being] subject to forms of coercion and control.*" [Op. Cit.] If this is true then any primitivist transition would, by definition, not be libertarian. For it is an obvious fact that the human population size cannot be reduced significantly by voluntary means in a short period of time. This means that agriculture and most industries will have to continue for some time. Similarly with large cities and towns as an instant and general exodus from the cities would be impossible. Then there is the legacy of industrial society which simply cannot be left to decay on its own. To take just one obvious example, leaving nuclear power plants to melt down would hardly be eco-friendly. Moreover, it is doubtful that the ruling elite will just surrender its power without resistance and, consequently, any social revolution

would need to defend itself against attempts to reintroduce hierarchy. Needless to say, a revolution which shunned all organisation and industry as inherently authoritarian would not be able to do this (it would have been impossible to produce the necessary military supplies to fight Franco's fascist forces during the Spanish Revolution if the workers had not converted and used their workplaces to do so, to note another obvious example).

As such, "*mass society*" will have to remain for some time after a successful revolution and, consequently from a primitivist perspective, be based on "*forms of coercion and control.*" There is an ideology which proclaims the need for a transitional system which will be based on coercion, control and hierarchy which will, in time, disappear into a stateless society. It also, like primitivism, stresses that industry and large scale organisation is impossible without hierarchy and authority. That ideology is Marxism. Thus it seems ironic to "classical" anarchists to hear self-proclaimed anarchists repeating Engels arguments against Bakunin as arguments for "anarchy" (see [section H.4](#) for a discussion of Engels' claims that industry excludes autonomy).

Thus the key problem with primitivism can be seen. It offers no practical means of achieving its goals in a libertarian manner. As Knabb summarises, "*[w]hat begins as a valid questioning of excessive faith in science and technology ends up as a desperate and even less justified faith in the return of a primeval paradise, accompanied by a failure to engage the present system in any but an abstract, apocalyptical way.*" To avoid this, it is necessary to take into account where we are now and, consequently, we will have to "*seriously consider how we will deal with all the practical problems that will be posed in the interim.*" [Knabb, **Op. Cit.**, p. 80 and p. 79] Sadly, primitivist ideology excludes this possibility by dismissing the starting point any real revolution would begin from as being inherently authoritarian. As any transition period towards primitivism would involve people working and living in "*mass society,*" it condemns itself as utterly impractical.

Given that a hierarchical society will misuse many technologies, it is understandable that some people can come see "technology" as the main problem and seek its end. However, those who talk about simply abolishing all forms of injustice and oppression overnight without discussing how it will be achieved may sound extremely radical, but, in reality, they are not. In fact they are building blocks to genuine social change by ensuring that no mass movement would ever be revolutionary enough to satisfy their critique and, as such, there is no point even trying. As Ken Knabb puts it:

*"Those who proudly proclaim their 'total opposition' to all compromise, all authority, all organisation, all theory, all technology, etc., usually turn out to have no **revolutionary** perspective whatsoever -- no practical conception of how the present system might be overthrown or how a post-revolutionary society might work. Some even attempt to justify this lack by declaring that a mere revolution could never be radical enough to satisfy their eternal ontological rebelliousness. Such all-or-nothing bombast may temporarily impress a few spectators, but its ultimate effect is simply to make people blasé."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 31-32]

Then there is the question of the means suggested for achieving primitivism. Moore argues that the *"kind of world envisaged by anarcho-primitivism is one unprecedented in human experience in terms of the degree and types of freedom anticipated ... so there can't be any limits on the forms of resistance and insurgency that might develop."* [Op. Cit.] Non-primitivists reply by saying that this implies primitivists don't know what they want nor how to get there. Equally, they stress that there **must be** limits on what are considered acceptable forms of resistance. This is because means shape the ends created and so authoritarian means will result in authoritarian ends. Tactics are not neutral and support for certain tactics betray an authoritarian perspective.

This can be seen from the UK magazine "**Green Anarchist**," part of the extreme end of "Primitivism" and which argued in favour of a return to "Hunter-Gatherer" forms of human society, opposing technology as being hierarchical by its very nature. Due to the inherent unattractiveness of such "primitivist" ideas for most people, it could never come about by libertarian means (i.e. by the free choice of individuals who create it by their own acts) and so cannot be anarchist as very few people would actually voluntarily embrace such a situation. This led to "**Green Anarchist**" developing a form of eco-vanguardism in order, to use Rousseau's expression, to "force people to be free." This reached its logical conclusion when the magazine supported the actions and ideas of the (non-anarchist) Unabomber and published an article ("*The Irrationalists*") by one of the then two editors stating that *"the Oklahoma bombers had the right idea. The pity was that they did not blast any more government offices . . . The Tokyo sarin cult had the right idea. The pity was that in testing the gas a year prior to the attack they gave themselves away."* [Green Anarchist, no. 51, p. 11] A defence of these remarks was published in the next issue and a subsequent exchange of letters in the US-based **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed** magazine (numbers 48 to 52) saw the other "**Green Anarchist**" editor (at the time) justify this sick, authoritarian nonsense as simply nonsense as simply examples of *"unmediated resistance"* conducted *"under conditions of extreme repression."* Whatever happened to the anarchist principle that means shape the ends? This means there **are** "limits" on tactics, as some tactics are not and can never be libertarian.

However, few eco-anarchists take such an extreme position. Most "primitivist" anarchists rather than being anti-technology and anti-civilisation as such instead (to use David Watson's expression) believe it is a case of the *"affirmation of aboriginal lifeways"* and of taking a far more critical approach to issues such as technology, rationality and progress than that associated with Social Ecology. These eco-anarchists reject *"a dogmatic primitivism which claims we can return in some linear way to our primordial roots"* just as much as the idea of "progress," *"superseding both Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment"* ideas and traditions. For these eco-anarchists, Primitivism *"reflects not only a glimpse at life before the rise of the state, but also a legitimate response to real conditions of life under civilisation"* and so we should respect and learn from *"palaeolithic and neolithic wisdom traditions"* (such as those associated with Native American tribes and other aboriginal peoples). While we *"cannot, and would not want to abandon secular modes of thinking and experiencing the world. . . we cannot reduce the experience of life, and the fundamental, inescapable questions why we live, and how we live, to secular terms. . . Moreover, the boundary between the spiritual and the secular is not so clear. A dialectical understanding that we are our history would affirm an inspired reason that honours not only atheistic Spanish revolutionaries who died for el ideal, but also religious pacifist prisoners of conscience, Lakota*

*ghost dancers, taoist hermits and executed sufi mystics.*" [David Watson, **Beyond Bookchin: Preface for a future social ecology**, p. 240, p. 103, p. 240 and pp. 66-67]

Such "primitivist" anarchism is associated with a range of magazines, mostly US-based, like **Fifth Estate**. For example, on the question of technology, such eco-anarchists argue that "*[w]hile market capitalism was a spark that set the fire, and remains at the centre of the complex, it is only part of something larger: the forced adaptation of organic human societies to an economic-instrumental civilisation and its mass technics, which are not only hierarchical and external but increasingly 'cellular' and internal. It makes no sense to layer the various elements of this process in a mechanistic hierarchy of first cause and secondary effects.*" [David Watson, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 127-8] For this reason "Primitivist" anarchists are more critical of all aspects of technology, including calls by social ecologists for the use of **appropriate** technology essential in order to liberate humanity and the planet. As Watson argues:

*"To speak of technological society is in fact to refer to **the technics generated within capitalism**, which in turn generate new forms of capital. The notion of a distinct realm of social relations that determine this technology is not only ahistorical and undialectical, it reflects a kind of simplistic base/superstructure schema."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 124]

Thus it is not a case of who **uses** technology which determines its effects, rather the effects of technology are determined to a large degree by the society that creates it. In other words, technology is selected which tends to re-enforce hierarchical power as it is those in power who generally select which technology is introduced within society (saying that, oppressed people have this excellent habit of turning technology against the powerful and technological change and social struggle are inter-related -- see [section D.10](#)). Thus even the use of appropriate technology involves more than selecting from the range of available technology at hand, as these technologies have certain effects regardless of who uses them. Rather it is a question of critically evaluating all aspects of technology and modifying and rejecting it as required to maximise individual freedom, empowerment and happiness. Few Social Ecologists would disagree with this approach, though, and differences are usually a question of emphasis rather than a deep political point.

However, few anarchists are convinced by an ideology which, as Brian Morris notes, dismisses the "*last eight thousand years or so of human history*" as little more than a source "*of tyranny, hierarchical control, mechanised routine devoid of any spontaneity. All those products of the human creative imagination -- farming, art, philosophy, technology, science, urban living, symbolic culture -- are viewed negatively by Zerzan -- in a monolithic sense.*" While there is no reason to worship progress, there is just as little need to dismiss all change and development out of hand as oppressive. Nor are they convinced by Zerzan's "*selective culling of the anthropological literature.*" [Morris, **Op. Cit.**, p. 38] In addition, a position of "turning back the clock" is deeply flawed, for while aboriginal societies are generally very anarchistic, certain of these societies did develop into statist, proprietarian ones implying that a future anarchist society that are predominantly inspired by and seek to reproduce key elements of prehistoric forms of anarchy is not the answer.



Primitivism confuses two radically different positions, namely support for a literal return to primitive lifeways and the use of examples from primitive life as a tool for social critique. Few anarchists would disagree with the second position as they recognise that current does not equal better and, consequently, past cultures and societies can have positive (as well as negative) aspects to them which can shed light on what a genuinely human society can be like. Similarly if "primitivism" simply involved questioning technology along with authority, few would disagree. However, this sensible position is, in the main, subsumed within the first one, the idea that an anarchist society would be a literal return to hunter-gatherer society. That this is the case can be seen from primitivist writings. Some primitivists stress that they are not suggesting the Stone Age as a model for their desired society nor a return to gathering and hunting, yet they seem to exclude any other options by their critique.

So to suggest that primitivism is simply a critique or some sort of "*anarchist speculation*" (to use John Moore's term) seems incredulous. If you demonise technology, organisation, "mass society" and "civilisation" as inherently authoritarian, you cannot turn round and advocate their use in a transition period or even in a free society. As such, the critique points to a mode of action and a vision of a free society and to suggest otherwise is simply incredulous. Equally, if you praise foraging bands and shifting horticultural communities of past and present as examples of anarchy then critics are entitled to conclude that primitivists desire a similar system for the future. This is reinforced by the critiques of industry, technology, "mass society" and agriculture.

Until such time as "primitivists" clearly state which of the two forms of primitivism they subscribe to, other anarchists will not take their ideas that seriously. Given that they fail to answer such basic questions of how they plan to deactivate industry safely and avoid mass starvation without the workers' control, international links and federal organisation they habitually dismiss out of hand as new forms of "governance," other anarchists do not hold much hope that it will happen soon. Ultimately, we are faced with the fact that a revolution will start in society as it is. Anarchism recognises this and suggests a means of transforming it. Primitivism shies away from such minor problems and, consequently, has little to recommend it. It is for this reason that most anarchists actually argue that such forms of "primitivism" are not anarchist at all, as the return to a "Hunter-Gatherer" society would result in mass starvation in almost all countries as the social infrastructure collapses so that the "lucky" few that survive can be "wild" and free from such tyrannies as hospitals, books and electricity.

This is not to suggest, of course, that non-primitivist anarchists think that everyone in a free society must have the same level of technology. Far from it. An anarchist society would be based on free experimentation. Different individuals and groups will pick the way of life that best suits them. Those who seek less technological ways of living will be free to do so as will those who want to apply the benefits of (appropriate) technologies. Similarly, all anarchists support the struggles of those in the developing world against the onslaught of (capitalist) civilisation and the demands of (capitalist) progress.

For more on "primitivist" anarchism see John Zerzan's **Future Primitive** as well as David Watson's **Beyond Bookchin** and **Against the Mega-Machine**. Ken Knabb's essay **The Poverty of Primitivism** is

an excellent critique of primitivism as is Brian Oliver Sheppard's **Anarchism vs. Primitivism**.

## F.8 What role did the state take in the creation of capitalism?

If the "anarcho"-capitalist is to claim with any plausibility that "real" capitalism is non-statist or that it can exist without a state, it must be shown that capitalism evolved naturally, in opposition to state intervention. However, in reality, the opposite is the case. Capitalism was born from state intervention and, in the words of Kropotkin, *"the State . . . and capitalism . . . developed side by side, mutually supporting and re-enforcing each other."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 181]

Numerous writers have made this point. For example, in Karl Polanyi's flawed masterpiece **The Great Transformation** we read that *"the road to the free market was opened and kept open by an enormous increase in continuous, centrally organised and controlled interventionism"* by the state [p. 140]. This intervention took many forms -- for example, state support during "mercantilism," which allowed the "manufactures" (i.e. industry) to survive and develop, enclosures of common land, and so forth. In addition, the slave trade, the invasion and brutal conquest of the Americas and other "primitive" nations, and the looting of gold, slaves, and raw materials from abroad also enriched the European economy, giving the development of capitalism an added boost. Thus Kropotkin:

*"The history of the genesis of capital has already been told by socialists many times. They have described how it was born of war and pillage, of slavery and serfdom, of modern fraud and exploitation. They have shown how it is nourished by the blood of the worker, and how little by little it has conquered the whole world."* [**Op. Cit.**,p. 207]

Or, if Kropotkin seems too committed to be fair, we have John Stuart Mill's statement that:

*"The social arrangements of modern Europe commenced from a distribution of property which was the result, not of just partition, or acquisition by industry, but of conquest and violence. . . "* [**Principles of Political Economy**, p. 15]

Therefore, when supporters of "libertarian" capitalism say they are against the "initiation of force," they mean only **new** initiations of force; for the system they support was born from numerous initiations of force in the past. And, as can be seen from the history of the last 100 years, it also requires state intervention to keep it going (section D.1, ["Why does state intervention occur?"](#), addresses this point in some detail). Indeed, many thinkers have argued that it was precisely this state support and coercion (particularly the separation of people from the land) that played the **key** role in allowing capitalism to develop rather than the theory that *"previous savings"* did so. As the noted German thinker Franz Oppenheimer argued, *"the concept of a 'primitive accumulation,' or an original store of wealth, in land and in movable property, brought about by means of purely economic forces" while "seem[ing] quite plausible" is in fact "utterly mistaken; it is a 'fairly tale,' or it is a class theory used to justify the privileges of the upper classes."* [**The State**, pp. 5-6]

This thesis will be discussed in the following sections. It is, of course, ironic to hear right-wing libertarians sing the praises of a capitalism that never existed and urge its adoption by all nations, in spite of the historical evidence suggesting that only state intervention made capitalist economies viable -- even in that Mecca of "free enterprise," the United States. As Noam Chomsky argues, *"who but a lunatic could have opposed the development of a textile industry in New England in the early nineteenth century, when British textile production was so much more efficient that half the New England industrial sector would have gone bankrupt without very high protective tariffs, thus terminating industrial development in the United States? Or the high tariffs that radically undermined economic efficiency to allow the United States to develop steel and other manufacturing capacities? Or the gross distortions of the market that created modern electronics?"* [**World Orders, Old and New**, p. 168]. To claim, therefore, that "mercantilism" is not capitalism makes little sense. Without mercantilism, "proper" capitalism would never have developed, and any attempt to divorce a social system from its roots is ahistoric and makes a mockery of critical thought.

Similarly, it is somewhat ironic when "anarcho"-capitalists and right libertarians claim that they support the freedom of individuals to choose how to live. After all, the working class was not given **that** particular choice when capitalism was developing. Indeed, their right to choose their own way of life was constantly violated and denied. So to claim that **now** (after capitalism has been created) we get the chance to try and live as we like is insulting in the extreme. The available options we have are not independent of the society we live in and are decisively shaped by the past. To claim we are "free" to live as we like (within the laws of capitalism) is basically to argue that we are able to "buy" the freedom that every individual is due from those who have stolen it from us in the first place!

Needless to say, some right-libertarians recognise that the state played a massive role in encouraging industrialisation (more correct to say "proletarianisation" as it created a working class which did not own the tools they used, although we stress that this process started on the land and not in industry). So they contrast "bad" business people (who took state aid) and "good" ones. Thus Rothbard's comment that Marxists have *"made no particular distinction between 'bourgeoisie' who made use of the state, and bourgeoisie who acted on the free market."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 72]

But such an argument is nonsense as it ignores the fact that the "free market" is a network (and defined by the state by the property rights it enforces). For example, the owners of the American steel and other companies who grew rich and their companies big behind protectionist walls are obviously "bad" bourgeoisie. But are the bourgeoisie who supplied the steel companies with coal, machinery, food, "defence" and so on not also benefiting from state action? And the suppliers of the luxury goods to the wealthy steel company owners, did they not benefit from state action? Or the suppliers of commodities to the workers that laboured in the steel factories that the tariffs made possible, did they not benefit? And the suppliers to these suppliers? And the suppliers to these suppliers? Did not the users of technology first introduced into industry by companies protected by state orders also not benefit? Did not the capitalists who had a large and landless working class to select from benefit from the "land monopoly" even though they may not have, unlike other capitalists, directly advocated it? It increased the pool of

wage labour for **all** capitalists and increased their bargaining position/power in the labour market at the expense of the working class. In other words, such a policy helped maintain capitalist market power, irrespective of whether individual capitalists encouraged politicians to vote to create/maintain it. And, similarly, **all** capitalists benefited from the changes in common law to recognise and protect capitalist private property and rights that the state enforced during the 19th century (see section [B.2.5](#)).

It appears that, for Rothbard, the collusion between state and business is the fault, not of capitalism, but of particular capitalists. The system is pure; only individuals are corrupt. But, for anarchists, the origins of the modern state-capitalist system lies not in the individual qualities of capitalists as such but in the dynamic and evolution of capitalism itself -- a complex interaction of class interest, class struggle, social defence against the destructive actions of the market, individual qualities and so forth. In other words, Rothbard's claims are flawed -- they fail to understand capitalism as a **system** and its dynamic nature.

Indeed, if we look at the role of the state in creating capitalism we could be tempted to rename "anarcho"-capitalism "marxian-capitalism". This is because, given the historical evidence, a political theory can be developed by which the "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie" is created and that this capitalist state "withers away" into anarchy. That this means rejecting the economic and social ideas of Marxism and their replacement by their direct opposite should not mean that we should reject the idea (after all, that is what "anarcho"-capitalism has done to Individualist Anarchism!). But we doubt that many "anarcho"-capitalists will accept such a name change (even though this would reflect their politics far better; after all they do not object to past initiations of force, just current ones and many do seem to think that the modern state **will** wither away due to market forces).

But this is beside the point. The fact remains that state action was required to create and maintain capitalism. Without state support it is doubtful that capitalism would have developed at all.

So, when the right suggests that "we" be "left alone," what they mean by "we" comes into clear focus when we consider how capitalism developed. Artisans and peasants were only "left alone" to starve, and the working classes of industrial capitalism were only "left alone" outside work and for only as long as they respected the rules of their "betters." As for the other side of the class divide, they desire to be "left alone" to exercise their power over others, as we will see. That modern "capitalism" is, in effect, a kind of "corporate mercantilism," with states providing the conditions that allow corporations to flourish (e.g. tax breaks, subsidies, bailouts, anti-labour laws, etc.) says more about the statist roots of capitalism than the ideologically correct definition of capitalism used by its supporters.

## F.8.1 What social forces lay behind the rise of capitalism?

Capitalist society is a relatively recent development. As Murray Bookchin points out, for a *"long era, perhaps spanning more than five centuries,"* capitalism *"coexisted with feudal and simple commodity relationships"* in Europe. He argues that this period *"simply cannot be treated as 'transitional' without reading back the present into the past."* [**From Urbanisation to Cities**, p. 179] In other words, capitalism was not a inevitable outcome of "history" or social evolution.

He goes on to note that capitalism existed *"with growing significance in the mixed economy of the West from the fourteenth century up to the seventeenth"* but that it *"literally exploded into being in Europe, particularly England, during the eighteenth and especially nineteenth centuries."* [Op. Cit., p. 181] The question arises, what lay behind this *"growing significance"*? Did capitalism *"explode"* due to its inherently more efficient nature or were there other, non-economic, forces at work? As we will show, it was most definitely the later one -- capitalism was born not from economic forces but from the political actions of the social elites which its usury enriched. Unlike artisan (simple commodity) production, wage labour generates inequalities and wealth for the few and so will be selected, protected and encouraged by those who control the state in their own economic and social interests.

The development of capitalism in Europe was favoured by two social elites, the rising capitalist class within the degenerating medieval cities and the absolutist state. The medieval city was *"thoroughly changed by the gradual increase in the power of commercial capital, due primarily to foreign trade. . . . By this the inner unity of the commune was loosened, giving place to a growing caste system and leading necessarily to a progressive inequality of social interests. The privileged minorities pressed ever more definitely towards a centralisation of the political forces of the community. . . . Mercantilism in the perishing city republics led logically to a demand for larger economic units [i.e. to nationalise the market]; and by this the desire for stronger political forms was greatly strengthened. . . . Thus the city gradually became a small state, paving the way for the coming national state."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Nationalism and Culture**, p. 94]

The rising economic power of the proto-capitalists conflicted with that of the feudal lords, which meant that the former required help to consolidate their position. That aid came in the form of the monarchical state. With the force of absolutism behind it, capital could start the process of increasing its power and influence by expanding the "market" through state action.

As far as the absolutist state was concerned, it *"was dependent upon the help of these new economic forces, and vice versa. . . ."* *"The absolutist state,"* Rocker argues, *"whose coffers the expansion of commerce filled . . . , at first furthered the plans of commercial capital. Its armies and fleets . . . contributed to the expansion of industrial production because they demanded a number of things for whose large-scale production the shops of small tradesmen were no longer adapted. Thus gradually arose the so-called manufactures, the forerunners of the later large industries."* [Op. Cit., p. 117-8]

Some of the most important state actions from the standpoint of early industry were the so-called Enclosure Acts, by which the "commons" -- the free farmland shared communally by the peasants in most rural villages -- was "enclosed" or incorporated into the estates of various landlords as private property (see section [E.8.3](#)). This ensured a pool of landless workers who had no option but to sell their labour to capitalists. Indeed, the widespread independence caused by the possession of the majority of households of land caused the rising class of merchants to complain *"that men who should work as wage-labourers cling to the soil, and in the naughtiness of their hearts prefer independence as squatters to employment by a master."* [R.H Tawney, cited by Allan Elgar in **The Apostles of Greed**, p. 12]

In addition, other forms of state aid ensured that capitalist firms got a head start, so ensuring their dominance over other forms of work (such as co-operatives). A major way of creating a pool of resources that could be used for investment was the use of mercantilist policies which used protectionist measures to enrich capitalists and landlords at the expense of consumers and their workers. For example, one of the most common complaints of early capitalists was that workers could not turn up to work regularly. Once they had worked a few days, they disappeared as they had earned enough money to live on. With higher prices for food, caused by protectionist measures, workers had to work longer and harder and so became accustomed to factory labour. In addition, mercantilism allowed native industry to develop by barring foreign competition and so allowed industrialists to reap excess profits which they could then use to increase their investments. In the words of Marxist-socialist economic historian Maurice Dobbs:

*"In short, the Mercantile System was a system of State-regulated exploitation through trade which played a highly important role in the adolescence of capitalist industry: it was essentially the economic policy of an age of primitive accumulation."* [**Studies in Capitalism Development**, p. 209]

As Rocker summarises, *"when absolutism had victoriously overcome all opposition to national unification, but its furthering of mercantilism and economic monopoly it gave the whole social evolution a direction which could only lead to capitalism."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 116-7]

This process of state aid in capitalist development was also seen in the United States of America. As Edward Herman points out, the *"level of government involvement in business in the United States from the late eighteenth century to the present has followed a U-shaped pattern: There was extensive government intervention in the pre-Civil War period (major subsidies, joint ventures with active government participation and direct government production), then a quasi-laissez faire period between the Civil War and the end of the nineteenth century [a period marked by "the aggressive use of tariff protection" and state supported railway construction, a key factor in capitalist expansion in the USA], followed by a gradual upswing of government intervention in the twentieth century, which accelerated after 1930."* [**Corporate Control, Corporate Power**, p. 162]

Such intervention ensured that income was transferred from workers to capitalists. Under state protection, America industrialised by forcing the consumer to enrich the capitalists and increase their capital stock. *"According to one study, of the tariff had been removed in the 1830s 'about half the industrial sector of New England would have been bankrupted' . . . the tariff became a near-permanent political institution representing government assistance to manufacturing. It kept price levels from being driven down by foreign competition and thereby shifted the distribution of income in favour of owners of industrial property to the disadvantage of workers and customers."* [Richard B. Du Boff, **Accumulation and Power**, p. 56]

This protection was essential, for as Du Boff notes, the *"end of the European wars in 1814 . . . reopened the United States to a flood of British imports that drove many American competitors out of business."*

*Large portions of the newly expanded manufacturing base were wiped out, bringing a decade of near-stagnation." Unsurprisingly, the "era of protectionism began in 1816, with northern agitation for higher tariffs. . . "* [Op. Cit., p. 14, p. 55]

Combined with ready repression of the labour movement and government "homesteading" acts (see section [F.8.5](#)), tariffs were the American equivalent of mercantilism (which, after all, was above all else a policy of protectionism, i.e. the use of government to stimulate the growth of native industry). Only once America was at the top of the economic pile did it renounce state intervention (just as Britain did, we must note).

This is **not** to suggest that government aid was limited to tariffs. The state played a key role in the development of industry and manufacturing. As John Zerzan notes, the *"role of the State is tellingly reflected by the fact that the 'armoury system' now rivals the older 'American system of manufactures' term as the more accurate to describe the new system of production methods"* developed in the early 1800s. [Elements of Refusal, p. 100] Moreover, the *"lead in technological innovation [during the US Industrial Revolution] came in armaments where assured government orders justified high fixed-cost investments in special-pursue machinery and managerial personnel. Indeed, some of the pioneering effects occurred in government-owned armouries."* [William Lazonick, **Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, p. 218] The government also *"actively furthered this process [of "commercial revolution"] with public works in transportation and communication."* [Richard B. Du Boff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 15]

In addition to this "physical" aid, *"state government provided critical help, with devices like the chartered corporation"* [Ibid.] and, as we noted in section [B.2.5](#), changes in the legal system which favoured capitalist interests over the rest of society.

Interestingly, there was increasing inequality between 1840 and 1860 in the USA This coincided with the victory of wage labour and industrial capitalism -- the 1820s *"constituted a watershed in U.S. life. By the end of that decade . . . industrialism assured its decisive American victory, by the end of the 1830s all of its cardinal features were definitely present."* [John Zerzan, **Op. Cit.**, p. 99] This is unsurprising, for as we have argued many times, the capitalist market tends to increase, not reduce, inequalities between individuals and classes. Little wonder the Individualist Anarchists at the time denounced the way that property had been transformed into *"a power [with which] to accumulate an income"* (to use the words of J.K. Ingalls).

Over all, as Paul Ormerod puts it, the *"advice to follow pure free-market polices seems . . . to be contrary to the lessons of virtually the whole of economic history since the Industrial Revolution . . . every country which has moved into . . . strong sustained growth . . . has done so in outright violation of pure, free-market principles."* *"The model of entrepreneurial activity in the product market, with judicious state support plus repression in the labour market, seems to be a good model of economic development."* [The Death of Economics, p. 63]

Thus the social forces at work creating capitalism was a combination of capitalist activity and state



action. But without the support of the state, it is doubtful that capitalist activity would have been enough to generate the initial accumulation required to start the economic ball rolling. Hence the necessity of Mercantilism in Europe and its modified cousin of state aid, tariffs and "homestead acts" in America.

## F.8.2 What was the social context of the statement "laissez-faire?"

The honeymoon of interests between the early capitalists and autocratic kings did not last long. *"This selfsame monarchy, which for weighty reasons sought to further the aims of commercial capital and was. . . itself aided in its development by capital, grew at last into a crippling obstacle to any further development of European industry."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Nationalism and Culture**, p. 117]

This is the social context of the expression "*laissez-faire*" -- a system which has outgrown the supports that protected it in its early stages of growth. Just as children eventually rebel against the protection and rules of their parents, so the capitalists rebelled against the over-bearing support of the absolutist state. Mercantilist policies favoured some industries and harmed the growth of industrial capitalism in others. The rules and regulations imposed upon those it did favour reduced the flexibility of capitalists to changing environments. As Rocker argues, *"no matter how the absolutist state strove, in its own interest, to meet the demands of commerce, it still put on industry countless fetters which became gradually more and more oppressive . . . [it] became an unbearable burden . . . which paralysed all economic and social life."* [*Op. Cit.*, p. 119] All in all, mercantilism became more of a hindrance than a help and so had to be replaced. With the growth of economic and social power by the capitalist class, this replacement was made easier.

Errico Malatesta notes, *"[t]he development of production, the vast expansion of commerce, the immeasurable power assumed by money . . . have guaranteed this supremacy [of economic power over the political power] to the capitalist class which, no longer content with enjoying the support of the government, demanded that government arise from its own ranks. A government which owed its origin to the right of conquest . . . though subject by existing circumstances to the capitalist class, went on maintaining a proud and contemptuous attitude towards its now wealthy former slaves, and had pretensions to independence of domination. That government was indeed the defender, the property owners' gendarme, but the kind of gendarmes who think they are somebody, and behave in an arrogant manner towards the people they have to escort and defend, when they don't rob or kill them at the next street corner; and the capitalist class got rid of it . . . [and replaced it] by a government [and state] . . . at all times under its control and specifically organised to defend that class against any possible demands by the disinherited."* [**Anarchy**, pp. 19-20]

Malatesta here indicates the true meaning of "*leave us alone*," or "*laissez-faire*." The **absolutist** state (not "the state" per se) began to interfere with capitalists' profit-making activities and authority, so they determined that it had to go -- as happened, for example, in the English, French and American revolutions. However, in other ways, state intervention in society was encouraged and applauded by capitalists. *"It is ironic that the main protagonists of the State, in its political and administrative*

authority, were the middle-class Utilitarians, on the other side of whose Statist banner were inscribed the doctrines of economic *Laissez Faire*" [E.P. Thompson, **The Making of the English Working Class**, p. 90]. Capitalists simply wanted **capitalist** states to replace monarchical states, so that heads of government would follow state economic policies regarded by capitalists as beneficial to their class as a whole. And as development economist Lance Taylor argues:

*"In the long run, there are no laissez-faire transitions to modern economic growth. The state has always intervened to create a capitalist class, and then it has to regulate the capitalist class, and then the state has to worry about being taken over by the capitalist class, but the state has always been there."* [quoted by Noam Chomsky, **Year 501**, p. 104]

In order to attack mercantilism, the early capitalists had to ignore the successful impact of its policies in developing industry and a "store of wealth" for future economic activity. As William Lazonick points out, *"the political purpose of [Adam Smith's] the **Wealth of Nations** was to attack the mercantilist institutions that the British economy had built up over the previous two hundred years. . . In his attack on these institutions, Smith might have asked why the extent of the world market available to Britain in the late eighteenth century was so uniquely under British control. If Smith had asked this 'big question,' he might have been forced to grant credit for [it] . . . to the very mercantilist institutions he was attacking . . ."* Moreover, he *"might have recognised the integral relation between economic and political power in the rise of Britain to international dominance."* Overall, *"[w]hat the British advocates of laissez-faire neglected to talk about was the role that a system of national power had played in creating conditions for Britain to embark on its dynamic development path . . . They did not bother to ask how Britain had attained th[e] position [of 'workshop of the world'], while they conveniently ignored the on going system of national power - the British Empire -- that . . . continued to support Britain's position."* [**Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, p. 2, p. 3, p.5]

Similar comments are applicable to American supporters of laissez faire who fail to notice that the "traditional" American support for world-wide free trade is quite a recent phenomenon. It started only at the end of the Second World War (although, of course, **within** America military Keynesian policies were utilised). While American industry was developing, the country had no time for laissez-faire. After it had grown strong, the United States began preaching laissez-faire to the rest of the world -- and began to kid itself about its own history, believing its slogans about laissez-faire as the secret of its success. In addition to the tariff, nineteenth-century America went in heavily for industrial planning--occasionally under that name but more often in the name of national defence. The military was the excuse for what is today termed rebuilding infrastructure, picking winners, promoting research, and co-ordinating industrial growth (as it still is, we should add).

As Richard B. Du Boff points out, the "anti-state" backlash of the 1840s onwards in America was highly selective, as the general opinion was that *"[h]enceforth, if governments wished to subsidise private business operations, there would be no objection. But if public power were to be used to control business actions or if the public sector were to undertake economic initiatives on its own, it would run up against the determined opposition of private capital."* [**Accumulation and Power**, p. 26] In other words, the state could aid capitalists indirectly (via tariffs, land policy, repression of the labour

movement, infrastructure subsidy and so on) and it would "leave them alone" to oppress and exploit workers, exploit consumers, build their industrial empires and so forth.

So, the expression "laissez-faire" dates from the period when capitalists were objecting to the restrictions that helped create them in the first place. It has little to do with freedom as such and far more to do with the needs of capitalist power and profits (as Murray Bookchin argues, it is an error to depict this "revolutionary era and its democratic aspirations as 'bourgeois,' an imagery that makes capitalism a system more committed to freedom, or even ordinary civil liberties, than it was historically" [**From Urbanisation to Cities**, p. 180f]). Takis Fotopoulos, in his essay "*The Nation-state and the Market*", indicates that the social forces at work in "freeing" the market did not represent a "natural" evolution towards freedom:

*"Contrary to what liberals and Marxists assert, marketisation of the economy was not just an evolutionary process, following the expansion of trade under mercantilism . . . modern [i.e. capitalist] markets did not evolve out of local markets and/or markets for foreign goods . . . the nation-state, which was just emerging at the end of the Middle Ages, played a crucial role creating the conditions for the 'nationalisation' of the market . . . and . . . by freeing the market [i.e. the rich and proto-capitalists] from effective social control."* [**Society and Nature**, Vol. 3, pp. 44-45]

The "freeing" of the market thus means freeing those who "own" most of the market (i.e. the wealthy elite) from "*effective social control*," but the rest of society was not as lucky. Peter Kropotkin makes a similar point in **Modern Science and Anarchism**, "[w]hile giving the capitalist any degree of free scope to amass his wealth at the expense of the helpless labourers, the government has **nowhere and never**. . .afforded the labourers the opportunity 'to do as they pleased'." [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 182]

The one essential form of support the "Libertarian" right wants the state (or "defence" firms) to provide capitalism is the enforcement of property rights -- the right of property owners to "do as they like" on their own property, which can have obvious and extensive social impacts. What "libertarian" capitalists object to is attempts by others -- workers, society as a whole, the state, etc. -- to interfere with the authority of bosses. That this is just the defence of privilege and power (and **not** freedom) has been discussed in [section B](#) and elsewhere in [section F](#), so we will not repeat ourselves here.

Samuel Johnson once observed that "*we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of Negroes.*" Our modern "libertarian" capitalist drivers of wage-slaves are yelping for exactly the same kind of "liberty." [Johnson quoted in Noam Chomsky, **Year 501**, p. 141]

## **F.8.3 What other forms did state intervention in creating capitalism take?**

Beyond being a paymaster for new forms of production and social relations and defending the owners' power, the state intervened economically in other ways as well. As we noted in section [B.2.5](#), the state played a key role in transforming the law codes of society in a capitalistic fashion, ignoring custom and common law to do so. Similarly, the use of tariffs and the granting of monopolies to companies played an important role in accumulating capital at the expense of working people, as did the breaking of unions and strikes by force.

However, one of the most blatant of these acts was the enclosure of common land. In Britain, by means of the Enclosure Acts, land that had been freely used by poor peasants for farming their small family plots was claimed by large landlords as private property. As E.P. Thompson notes, "*Parliament and law imposed capitalist definitions to exclusive property in land*" [**Customs in Common**, p. 163]. Property rights, which exclusively favoured the rich, replaced the use rights and free agreement that had governed peasant's use of the commons. Unlike use rights, which rest in the individual, property rights require state intervention to create and maintain.

This stealing of the land should not be under estimated. Without land, you cannot live and have to sell your liberty to others. This places those with capital at an advantage, which will tend to increase, rather than decrease, the inequalities in society (and so place the landless workers at an increasing disadvantage over time). This process can be seen from early stages of capitalism. With the enclosure of the land, an agricultural workforce was created which had to travel where the work was. This influx of landless ex-peasants into the towns ensured that the traditional guild system crumbled and was transformed into capitalistic industry with bosses and wage slaves rather than master craftsmen and their journeymen. Hence the enclosure of land played a key role, for "*it is clear that economic inequalities are unlikely to create a division of society into an employing master class and a subject wage-earning class, unless access to the mans of production, including land, is by some means or another barred to a substantial section of the community.*" [Maurice Dobbs, **Studies in Capitalist Development**, p. 253]

The importance of access to land is summarised by this limerick by the followers of Henry George (a 19th century writer who argued for a "*single tax*" and the nationalisation of land). The Georgites got their basic argument on the importance of land down these few, excellent lines:

*A college economist planned  
To live without access to land  
He would have succeeded  
But found that he needed  
Food, shelter and somewhere to stand.*

Thus the Individualist (and other) anarchists' concern over the "*land monopoly*" of which the Enclosure Acts were but one part. The land monopoly, to use Tucker's words, "*consists in the enforcement by government of land titles which do not rest upon personal occupancy and cultivation.*" [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 150] It is important to remember that wage labour first developed on the land and it was the protection of land titles of landlords and nobility, combined with enclosure, that meant people could not

just work their own land.

In other words, the circumstances so created by enclosing the land and enforcing property rights to large estates ensured that capitalists did not have to point a gun at workers head to get them to work long hours in authoritarian, dehumanising conditions. In such circumstances, when the majority are dispossessed and face the threat of starvation, poverty, homelessness and so on, "initiation of force" is **not required**. But guns **were** required to enforce the system of private property that created the labour market in the first place, to enforce the enclosure of common land and protect the estates of the nobility and wealthy.

In addition to increasing the availability of land on the market, the enclosures also had the effect of destroying working-class independence. Through these Acts, innumerable peasants were excluded from access to their former means of livelihood, forcing them to migrate to the cities to seek work in the newly emerging factories of the budding capitalist class, who were thus provided with a ready source of cheap labour. The capitalists, of course, did not describe the results this way, but attempted to obfuscate the issue with their usual rhetoric about civilisation and progress. Thus John Bellers, a 17th-century supporter of enclosures, claimed that commons were "*a hindrance to Industry, and . . . Nurseries of Idleness and Insolence.*" The "*forests and great Commons make the Poor that are upon them too much like the **indians**.*" [quoted by Thompson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 163] Elsewhere Thompson argues that the commons "*were now seen as a dangerous centre of indiscipline . . . Ideology was added to self-interest. It became a matter of public-spirited policy for gentlemen to remove cottagers from the commons, reduce his labourers to dependence . . .*" [**The Making of the English Working Class**, pp. 242-3]

The commons gave working-class people a degree of independence which allowed them to be "insolent" to their betters. This had to be stopped, as it undermined to the very roots of authority relationships within society. The commons **increased** freedom for ordinary people and made them less willing to follow orders and accept wage labour. The reference to "Indians" is important, as the independence and freedom of Native Americans is well documented. The common feature of both cultures was communal ownership of the means of production and free access to it (usufruct). This is discussed further in section I.7 ([Won't Libertarian Socialism destroy individuality?](#))

As the early American economist Edward Wakefield noted in 1833, "*where land is cheap and all are free, where every one who so pleases can easily obtain a piece of land for himself, not only is labour dear, as respects the labourer's share of the product, but the difficulty is to obtain combined labour at any price.*" [**England and America**, quoted by Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, **Commonsense for Hard Times**, p. 24]

The enclosure of the commons (in whatever form it took -- see section [F.8.5](#) for the US equivalent) solved both problems -- the high cost of labour, and the freedom and dignity of the worker. The enclosures perfectly illustrate the principle that capitalism requires a state to ensure that the majority of people do not have free access to any means of livelihood and so must sell themselves to capitalists in order to survive. There is no doubt that if the state had "left alone" the European peasantry, allowing

them to continue their collective farming practices ("collective farming" because, as Kropotkin shows in **Mutual Aid**, the peasants not only shared the land but much of the farm labour as well), capitalism could not have taken hold (see **Mutual Aid**, pp. 184-189, for more on the European enclosures). As Kropotkin notes, "*[i]nstances of commoners themselves dividing their lands were rare, everywhere the State coerced them to enforce the division, or simply favoured the private appropriation of their lands*" by the nobles and wealthy. [**Mutual Aid**, p. 188]

Thus Kropotkin's statement that "*to speak of the natural death of the village community [or the commons] in virtue of economical law is as grim a joke as to speak of the natural death of soldiers slaughtered on a battlefield.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 189]

Like the more recent case of fascist Chile, "free market" capitalism was imposed on the majority of society by an elite using the authoritarian state. This was recognised by Adam Smith when he opposed state intervention in **The Wealth of Nations**. In Smith's day, the government was openly and unashamedly an instrument of wealth owners. Less than 10 per cent of British men (and no women) had the right to vote. When Smith opposed state interference, he was opposing the imposition of wealth owners' interests on everybody else (and, of course, how "liberal", nevermind "libertarian", is a political system in which the many follow the rules and laws set-down in the so-called interests of all by the few? As history shows, any minority given, or who take, such power **will** abuse it in their own interests). Today, the situation is reversed, with neo-liberals and right libertarians opposing state interference in the economy (e.g. regulation of Big Business) so as to prevent the public from having even a minor impact on the power or interests of the elite.

The fact that "free market" capitalism always requires introduction by an authoritarian state should make all honest "Libertarians" ask: How "free" is the "free market"? And why, when it is introduced, do the rich get richer and the poor poorer? This was the case in Chile (see [Section C.11](#)). For the poverty associated with the rise of capitalism in England 200 years ago, E.P. Thompson's **The Making of the English Working Class** provides a detailed discussion. Howard Zinn's **A People's History of the United States** describes the poverty associated with 19th-century US capitalism.

## F.8.4 Aren't the enclosures a socialist myth?

The short answer is no, they are not. While a lot of historical analysis has been spent in trying to deny the extent and impact of the enclosures, the simple fact is (in the words of noted historian E.P. Thompson) enclosure "*was a plain enough case of class robbery, played according to the fair rules of property and law laid down by a parliament of property-owners and lawyers.*" [**The Making of the English Working Class**, pp. 237-8]

The enclosures were one of the ways that the "*land monopoly*" was created. The land monopoly was used to refer to capitalist property rights and ownership of land by (among others) the Individualist Anarchists. Instead of an "*occupancy and use*" regime advocated by anarchists, the land monopoly allowed a few to bar the many from the land -- so creating a class of people with nothing to sell but their

labour. While this monopoly is less important these days in developed nations (few people know how to farm) it was essential as a means of consolidating capitalism. Given the choice, most people preferred to become independent farmers rather than wage workers (see [next section](#)).

However, the importance of the enclosure movement is downplayed by supporters of capitalism. Little wonder, for it is something of an embarrassment for them to acknowledge that the creation of capitalism was somewhat less than "immaculate" -- after all, capitalism is portrayed as an almost ideal society of freedom. To find out that an idol has feet of clay and that we are still living with the impact of its origins is something pro-capitalists must deny. So is the enclosures a socialist myth? Most claims that it is flow from the work of the historian J.D. Chambers' famous essay "*Enclosures and the Labour Supply in the Industrial Revolution.*" [**Economic History Review**, 2nd series, no. 5, August 1953] In this essay, Chambers attempts to refute Karl Marx's account of the enclosures and the role it played in what Marx called "*primitive accumulation.*"

We cannot be expected to provide an extensive account of the debate that has raged over this issue. All we can do is provide a summary of the work of William Lazonick who presented an excellent reply to those who claim that the enclosures were an unimportant historical event. We are drawing upon his summary of his excellent essay "*Karl Marx and Enclosures in England*" [**Review of Radical Political Economy**, no. 6, Summer, 1974] which can be found in his books **Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor** and **Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**. There are three main claims against the socialist account of the enclosures. We will cover each in turn.

Firstly, it is often claimed that the enclosures drove the uprooted cottager and small peasant into industry. However, this was never claimed. It is correct that the agricultural revolution associated with the enclosures **increased** the demand for farm labour as claimed by Chambers and others. And this is the whole point - enclosures created a pool of dispossessed labourers who had to sell their time/liberty to survive. The "*critical transformation was not the level of agricultural employment before and after enclosure but the changes in employment relations caused by the reorganisation of landholdings and the reallocation of access to land.*" [**Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, p. 30] Thus the key feature of the enclosures was that it created a supply for farm labour, a supply that had no choice but to work for another. This would drive down wages and increase demand. Moreover, freed from the land, these workers could later move to the towns in search for better work.

Secondly, it is argued that the number of small farm owners increased, or at least did not greatly decline, and so the enclosure movement was unimportant. Again, this misses the point. Small farm owners can still employ wage workers (i.e. become capitalist farmers as opposed to "yeomen" -- independent peasant proprietor). As Lazonick notes, "*[i]t is true that after 1750 some petty proprietors continued to occupy and work their own land. But in a world of capitalist agriculture, the yeomanry no longer played an important role in determining the course of capitalist agriculture. As a social class that could influence the evolution of British economy society, the yeomanry had disappeared.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 32]

Thirdly, it is often claimed that it was population growth, rather than enclosures, that caused the supply

of wage workers. So was population growth more important than enclosures? Maurice Dobbs argues that *"the centuries in which a proletariat was most rapidly recruited were apt to be those of slow rather than of rapid natural increase of population, and the paucity or plenitude of a labour reserve in different countries was not correlated with comparable difference in their rates of population-growth."* [**Studies in Capitalist Development**, p. 223] Moreover, the population argument ignores the question of whether the changes in society caused by enclosures and the rise of capitalism have an impact on the observed trends towards earlier marriage and larger families after 1750. Lazonick argues that *"[t]here is reason to believe that they did."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 33] Also, of course, the use of child labour in the factories created an economic incentive to have more children, an incentive created by the developing capitalist system. Overall, Lazonick notes that *"[t]o argue that population growth created the industrial labour supply is to ignore these momentous social transformations"* associated with the rise of capitalism [**Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, p. 273].

In other words, there is good reason to think that the enclosures, far from being some kind of socialist myth, in fact played a key role in the development of capitalism. As Lazonick himself notes, *"Chambers misunderstood" "the argument concerning the 'institutional creation' of a proletarianised (i.e. landless) workforce. Indeed, Chamber's own evidence and logic tend to support the Marxian [and anarchist!] argument, when it is properly understood."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 273]

## F.8.5 What about the lack of enclosures in the Americas?

The enclosure movement was but one way of creating the *"land monopoly"* which ensured the creation of a working class. The circumstances facing the ruling class in the Americas were distinctly different than in the Old World and so the *"land monopoly"* took a different form there. In the Americas, enclosures were unimportant as customary land rights did not really exist. Here the problem was that (after the original users of the land were eliminated, of course) there were vast tracts of land available for people to use.

Unsurprisingly, there was a movement towards independent farming and this pushed up the price of labour, by reducing the supply. Capitalists found it difficult to find workers willing to work for them at wages low enough to provide them with sufficient profits. It was due the difficulty in finding cheap enough labour that capitalists in America turned to slavery. All things being equal, wage labour **is** more productive than slavery. But in early America all things were **not** equal. Having access to cheap (indeed, free) land meant that working people had a choice, and few desired to become wage slaves. Because of this, capitalists turned to slavery in the South and the *"land monopoly"* in the North and West.

This was because, in the words of Maurice Dobbs, it *"became clear to those who wished to reproduce capitalist relations of production in the new country that the foundation-stone of their endeavour must be the restriction of land-ownership to a minority and the exclusion of the majority from any share in [productive] property."* [**Studies in Capitalist Development**, pp. 221-2] As one radical historian puts it, *"[w]hen land is 'free' or 'cheap'. as it was in different regions of the United States before the 1830s, there was no compulsion for farmers to introduce labour-saving technology. As a result, 'independent*



*household production' . . . hindered the development of capitalism . . . [by] allowing large portions of the population to escape wage labour."* [Charlie Post, *"The 'Agricultural Revolution' in the United States"*, pp. 216-228, **Science and Society**, vol. 61, no. 2, p. 221]

It was precisely this option (i.e. of independent production) that had to be destroyed in order for capitalist industry to develop. The state had to violate the holy laws of "supply and demand" by controlling the access to land in order to ensure the normal workings of "supply and demand" in the labour market (i.e. that the bargaining position on the labour market favoured employer over employee). Once this situation became the typical one (i.e. when the option of self-employment was effectively eliminated) a (protectionist based) "laissez-faire" approach could be adopted and state action used only to protect private property from the actions of the dispossessed.

So how was this transformation of land ownership achieved?

Instead of allowing settlers to appropriate their own farms as was the case before the 1830s, the state stepped in once the army had cleared out the original users. Its first major role was to enforce legal rights of property on unused land. Land stolen from the Native Americans was sold at auction to the highest bidders, namely speculators, who then sold it on to farmers. This process started right *"after the revolution, [when] huge sections of land were bought up by rich speculators"* and their claims supported by the law [Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, p. 125] Thus land which should have been free was sold to land-hungry farmers and the few enriched themselves at the expense of the many. Not only did this increase inequality within society, it also encouraged the development of wage labour -- having to pay for land would have ensured that many immigrants remained on the East Coast until they had enough money. Thus a pool of people with little option but to sell their labour was increased due to state protection of unoccupied land. That the land usually ended up in the hands of farmers did not (could not) countermand the shift in class forces that this policy created.

This was also the essential role of the various "Homesteading Acts" and, in general, the *"Federal land law in the 19th century provided for the sale of most of the public domain at public auction to the higher bidder . . . Actual settlers were forced to buy land from speculators, at prices considerably above the federal minimal price"* (which few people could afford anyway) [Charlie Post, **Op. Cit.**, p. 222]. Little wonder the Individualist Anarchists supported an *"occupancy and use"* system of land ownership as a key way of stopping capitalist and landlord usury as well as the development of capitalism itself.

This change in the appropriation of land had significant effects on agriculture and the desirability of taking up farming for immigrants. As Post notes, *"[w]hen the social conditions for obtaining and maintaining possession of land change, as they did in the midwest between 1830 and 1840, pursuing the goal of preserving [family ownership and control] . . . produced very different results. In order to pay growing mortgages, debts and taxes, family farmers were compelled to specialise production toward cash crops and to market more and more of their output."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 221-2]

So, in order to pay for land which was formerly free, farmers got themselves into debt and increasingly

turned to the market to pay it off. Thus, the *"Federal land system, by transforming land into a commodity and stimulating land speculation, made the midwestern farmers dependent upon markets for the continual possession of their farms."* [Charlie Post, **Op. Cit.**, p. 223] Once on the market, farmers had to invest in new machinery and this also got them into debt. In the face of a bad harvest or market glut, they could not repay their loans and their farms had to be sold to do so. By 1880, 25% of all farms were rented by tenants, and the numbers kept rising.

This means that Murray Rothbard's comment that *"once the land was purchased by the settler, the injustice disappeared"* is nonsense -- the injustice was transmitted to other parts of society and this, along with the legacy of the original injustice, lived on and helped transform society towards capitalism [The **Ethics of Liberty**, p. 73]. In addition, his comments about *"the establishment in North America of a truly libertarian land system"* would be one the Individualist Anarchists would have seriously disagreed with! [**Ibid.**]

Thus state action, in restricting free access to the land, ensured that workers were dependent on wage labour. In addition, the *"transformation of social property relations in northern agriculture set the stage for the 'agricultural revolution' of the 1840s and 1850s . . . [R]ising debts and taxes forced midwestern family farmers to compete as commodity producers in order to maintain their land-holding . . . The transformation . . . was the central precondition for the development of industrial capitalism in the United States."* [Charlie Post, **Ibid.**, p. 226]

In addition to seizing the land and distributing it in such a way as to benefit capitalist industry, the *"government played its part in helping the bankers and hurting the farmers; it kept the amount of money - based in the gold supply - steady while the population rose, so there was less and less money in circulation. The farmer had to pay off his debts in dollars that were harder to get. The bankers, getting loans back, were getting dollars worth more than when they loaned them out - a kind of interest on top of interest. That was why . . . farmers' movements [like the Individualist Anarchists, we must add] . . . [talked about] putting more money in circulation."* [Howard Zinn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 278]

Overall, therefore, state action ensured the transformation of America from a society of independent workers to a capitalist one. By creating and enforcing the "land monopoly" (of which state ownership of unoccupied land and its enforcement of landlord rights were the most important) the state ensured that the balance of class forces tipped in favour of the capitalist class. By removing the option of farming your own land, the US government created its own form of enclosure and the creation of a landless workforce with little option but to sell its liberty on the "free market". This, combined with protectionism, ensured the transformation of American society from a pre-capitalist one into a capitalist one. They was nothing "natural" about it.

Little wonder the Individualist Anarchist J.K. Ingalls attacked the "land monopoly" in the following words:

*"The earth, with its vast resources of mineral wealth, its spontaneous productions and its*

*fertile soil, the free gift of God and the common patrimony of mankind, has for long centuries been held in the grasp of one set of oppressors by right of conquest or right of discovery; and it is now held by another, through the right of purchase from them. All of man's natural possessions . . . have been claimed as property; nor has man himself escaped the insatiate jaws of greed. The invasion of his rights and possessions has resulted . . . in clothing property with a power to accumulate an income."* [quoted by James Martin, **Men Against the State**, p. 142]

## F.8.6 How did working people view the rise of capitalism?

The best example of how hated capitalism was can be seen by the rise and spread of the socialist movement, in all its many forms, across the world. It is no coincidence that the development of capitalism also saw the rise of socialist theories. However, in order to fully understand how different capitalism was from previous economic systems, we will consider early capitalism in the US, which for many "Libertarians" is **the** example of the "capitalism-equals-freedom" argument.

Early America was pervaded by artisan production -- individual ownership of the means of production. Unlike capitalism, this system is **not** marked by the separation of the worker from the means of life. Most people did not have to work for another, and so did not. As Jeremy Brecher notes, in 1831 the *"great majority of Americans were farmers working their own land, primarily for their own needs. Most of the rest were self-employed artisans, merchants, traders, and professionals. Other classes - employees and industrialists in the North, slaves and planters in the South - were relatively small. The great majority of Americans were independent and free from anybody's command."* [**Strike!**, p. xxi] These conditions created the high cost of combined (wage) labour which ensured the practice of slavery existed.

However, toward the middle of the 19th century the economy began to change. Capitalism began to be imported into American society as the infrastructure was improved, which allowed markets for manufactured goods to grow. Soon, due to (state-supported) capitalist competition, artisan production was replaced by wage labour. Thus "evolved" modern capitalism. Many workers understood, resented, and opposed their increasing subjugation to their employers ("*the masters*", to use Adam Smith's expression), which could not be reconciled with the principles of freedom and economic independence that had marked American life and sunk deeply into mass consciousness during the days of the early economy. In 1854, for example, a group of skilled piano makers wrote that *"the day is far distant when they [wage earners] will so far forget what is due to manhood as to glory in a system forced upon them by their necessity and in opposition to their feelings of independence and self-respect. May the piano trade be spared such exhibitions of the degrading power of the day [wage] system."* [quoted by Brecher and Costello, **Common Sense for Hard Times**, p. 26]

Clearly the working class did not consider working for a daily wage, in contrast to working for themselves and selling their own product, to be a step forward for liberty or individual dignity. The difference between selling the product of one's labour and selling one's labour (i.e. oneself) was seen and

condemned ("*[w]hen the producer . . . sold his product, he retained himself. But when he came to sell his labour, he sold himself . . . the extension [of wage labour] to the skilled worker was regarded by him as a symbol of a deeper change*" [Norman Ware, **The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860**, p. xiv]). Indeed, one group of workers argued that they were "*slaves in the strictest sense of the word*" as they had "*to toil from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same for our masters - aye, masters, and for our daily bread*" [Quoted by Ware, **Op. Cit.**, p. 42] and another argued that "*the factory system contains in itself the elements of slavery, we think no sound reasoning can deny, and everyday continues to add power to its incorporate sovereignty, while the sovereignty of the working people decreases in the same degree.*" [quoted by Brecher and Costello, **Op. Cit.**, p. 29]

Almost as soon as there were wage workers, there were strikes, machine breaking, riots, unions and many other forms of resistance. John Zerzan's argument that there was a "*relentless assault on the worker's historical rights to free time, self-education, craftsmanship, and play was at the heart of the rise of the factory system*" is extremely accurate [**Elements of Refusal**, p. 105]. And it was an assault that workers resisted with all their might. In response to being subjected to the "law of value," workers rebelled and tried to organise themselves to fight the powers that be and to replace the system with a co-operative one. As the printer's union argued, "*[we] regard such an organisation [a union] not only as an agent of immediate relief, but also as an essential to the ultimate destruction of those unnatural relations at present subsisting between the interests of the employing and the employed classes. . . . [W]hen labour determines to sell itself no longer to speculators, but to become its own employer, to own and enjoy itself and the fruit thereof, the necessity for scales of prices will have passed away and labour will be forever rescued from the control of the capitalist.*" [quoted by Brecher and Costello, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 27-28]

Little wonder, then, why wage labourers considered capitalism as a form of "*slavery*" and why the term "*wage slavery*" became so popular in the anarchist movement. It was just reflecting the feelings of those who experienced the wages system at first hand and joined the socialist and anarchist movements. As labour historian Norman Ware notes, the "*term 'wage slave' had a much better standing in the forties [of the 19th century] than it has today. It was not then regarded as an empty shibboleth of the soap-box orator. This would suggest that it has suffered only the normal degradation of language, has become a cliché, not that it is a grossly misleading characterisation.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. xvf]

These responses of workers to the experience of wage labour is important to show that capitalism is by no means "natural." The fact is the first generation of workers tried to avoid wage labour is at all possible as they hated the restrictions of freedom it imposed upon them. They were perfectly aware that wage labour was wage slavery -- that they were decidedly **unfree** during working hours and subjected to the will of another. While many working people now are accustomed to wage labour (while often hating their job) the actual process of resistance to the development of capitalism indicates well its inherently authoritarian nature. Only once other options were closed off and capitalists given an edge in the "free" market by state action did people accept and become accustomed to wage labour.

Opposition to wage labour and factory fascism was/is widespread and seems to occur wherever it is encountered. "*Research has shown*", summarises William Lazonick, "*that the 'free-born Englishman' of the eighteenth century - even those who, by force of circumstance, had to submit to agricultural wage*

*labour - tenaciously resisted entry into the capitalist workshop.*" [**Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, p. 37] British workers shared the dislike of wage labour of their American cousins. A "*Member of the Builders' Union*" in the 1830s argued that the trade unions "*will not only strike for less work, and more wages, but will ultimately abolish wages, become their own masters and work for each other; labour and capital will no longer be separate but will be indissolubly joined together in the hands of workmen and work-women.*" [quoted by Geoffrey Ostergaard, **The Tradition of Workers' Control**, p. 133] This is unsurprising, for as Ostergaard notes, "*the workers then, who had not been swallowed up whole by the industrial revolution, could make critical comparisons between the factory system and what preceded it.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 134] While wage slavery may seem "natural" today, the first generation of wage labourers saw the transformation of the social relationships they experienced in work, from a situation in which they controlled their own work (and so themselves) to one in which **others** controlled them, and they did not like it. However, while many modern workers instinctively hate wage labour and having bosses, without the awareness of some other method of working, many put up with it as "inevitable." The first generation of wage labourers had the awareness of something else (although, of course, a flawed something else) and this gave them a deep insight into the nature of capitalism and produced a deeply radical response to it and its authoritarian structures.

Far from being a "natural" development, then, capitalism was imposed on a society of free and independent people by state action. Those workers alive at the time viewed it as "*unnatural relations*" and organised to overcome it. These feelings and hopes still exist, and will continue to exist until such time as we organise and "*abolish the wage system*" (to quote the IWW preamble) and the state that supports it.

## F.8.7 Why is the history of capitalism important?

Simply because it provides us with an understanding of whether that system is "natural" and whether it can be considered as just and free. If the system was created by violence, state action and other unjust means then the apparent "freedom" which we currently face within it is a fraud, a fraud masking unnecessary and harmful relations of domination, oppression and exploitation. Moreover, by seeing how capitalist relationships were viewed by the first generation of wage slaves reminds us that just because many people have adjusted to this regime and consider it as normal (or even natural) it is nothing of the kind.

Murray Rothbard is well aware of the importance of history. He considered the "*moral indignation*" of socialism arises from the argument "*that the capitalists have stolen the rightful property of the workers, and therefore that existing titles to accumulated capital are unjust.*" He argues that given "*this hypothesis, the remainder of the impetus for both Marxism and anarchosyndicalism follow quote logically.*" [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 52]

So some right-libertarians are aware that the current property owners have benefited extensively from violence and state action in the past. Murray Rothbard argues (in **The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 57) that if the just owners cannot be found for a property, then the property simply becomes again unowned and

will belong to the first person to appropriate and utilise it. If the current owners are not the actual criminals then there is no reason at all to dispossess them of their property; if the just owners cannot be found then they may keep the property as the first people to use it (of course, those who own capital and those who use it are usually different people, but we will ignore this obvious point).

Thus, since all original owners and the originally dispossessed are long dead nearly all current title owners are in just possession of their property except for recently stolen property. The principle is simple, dispossess the criminals, restore property to the dispossessed if they can be found otherwise leave titles where they are (as Native American tribes owned the land **collectively** this could have an interesting effect on such a policy in the USA. Obviously tribes that were wiped out need not apply, but would such right-libertarian policy recognise such collective, non-capitalist ownership claims? We doubt it, but we could be wrong -- the Libertarian Party Manifesto states that their "just" property rights will be restored. And who defines "just"? And given that unclaimed federal land will be given to Native Americans, it seems pretty likely that the **original** land will be left alone).

Of course, that this instantly gives an advantage to the wealthy on the new "pure" market is not mentioned. The large corporations that, via state protection and support, built their empires and industrial base will still be in an excellent position to continue to dominate the market. Wealthy land owners, benefiting from the effects of state taxation and rents caused by the "land monopoly" on farmstead failures, will keep their property. The rich will have a great initial advantage and this may be more than enough to maintain them in their place. After all, exchanges between worker and owner tend to reinforce existing inequalities, **not** reduce them (and as the owners can move their capital elsewhere or import new, lower waged, workers from across the world, it's likely to stay that way).

So Rothbard's "solution" to the problem of past force seems to be (essentially) a justification of existing property titles and not a serious attempt to understand or correct past initiations of force that have shaped society into a capitalist one and still shape it today. The end result of his theory is to leave things pretty much as they are, for the past criminals are dead and so are their victims.

However, what Rothbard fails to note is that the **results** of this state action and coercion are still with us. He totally fails to consider that the theft of productive wealth has a greater impact on society than the theft itself. The theft of **productive** wealth shapes society in so many ways that **all** suffer from it (including current generations). This (the externalities generated by theft) cannot be easily undone by individualistic "solutions".

Let us take an example somewhat more useful than the one Rothbard uses (namely, a stolen watch). A watch cannot really be used to generate wealth (although if I steal a watch, sell it and buy a winning lottery ticket, does that mean I can keep the prize after returning the money value of your watch to you? Without the initial theft, I would not have won the prize but obviously the prize money far exceeds the amount stolen. Is the prize money mine?). Let us take a tool of production rather than a watch.

Let us assume a ship sinks and 50 people get washed ashore on an island. One woman has foresight to take

a knife from the ship and falls unconscious on the beach. A man comes along and steals her knife. When the woman awakes she cannot remember if she had managed to bring the knife ashore with her or not. The man maintains that he brought it with him and no one else saw anything. The survivors decide to split the island equally between them and work it separately, exchanging goods via barter.

However, the man with the knife has the advantage and soon carves himself a house and fields from the wilderness. Seeing that they need the knife and the tools created by the knife to go beyond mere existing, some of the other survivors hire themselves to the knife owner. Soon he is running a surplus of goods, including houses and equipment which he decides to hire out to others. This surplus is then used to tempt more and more of the other islanders to work for him, exchanging their land in return for the goods he provides. Soon he owns the whole island and never has to work again. His hut is well stocked and extremely luxurious. His workers face the option of following his orders or being fired (i.e. expelled from the island and so back into the water and certain death). Later, he dies and leaves his knife to his son. The woman whose knife it originally was had died long before, childless.

Note that the theft did not involve taking any land. All had equal access to it. It was the initial theft of the knife which provided the man with market power, an edge which allowed him to offer the others a choice between working by themselves or working for him. By working for him they did "benefit" in terms of increased material wealth (and also made the thief better off) but the accumulate impact of unequal exchanges turned them into the effective slaves of the thief.

Now, would it **really** be enough to turn the knife over to the whoever happened to be using it once the theft was discovered (perhaps the thief made a death-bed confession). Even if the woman who had originally taken it from the ship been alive, would the return of the knife **really** make up for the years of work the survivors had put in enriching the the thief or the "voluntary exchanges" which had resulted in the thief owning all the island? The equipment people use, the houses they life in and the food they eat are all the product of many hours of collective work. Does this mean that the transformation of nature which the knife allowed remain in the hands of the descendants of the thief or become the collective property of all? Would dividing it equally between all be fair? Not everyone worked equally hard to produce it. So we have a problem -- the result of the initial theft is far greater than the theft considered in isolation due to the productive nature of what was stolen.

In other words, what Rothbard ignores in his attempt to undermine anarchist use of history is that when the property stolen is of a productive nature, the accumulative effect of its use is such as to affect all of society. Productive assets produce **new** property, **new** values, create a **new** balance of class forces, **new** income and wealth inequalities and so on. This is because of the **dynamic** nature of production and human life. When the theft is such that it creates accumulative effects after the initial act, it is hardly enough to say that it does not really matter any more. If a nobleman invests in a capitalist firm with the tribute he extracted from his peasants, then (once the firm starts doing well) sells the land to the peasants and uses that money to expand his capitalist holdings, does that **really** make everything all right? Does not the crime transmit with the cash? After all, the factory would not exist without the prior exploitation of the peasants.

In the case of actually existing capitalism, born as it was of extensive coercive acts, the resultant of these acts have come to shape the **whole** society. For example, the theft of common land (plus the enforcement of property rights -- the land monopoly -- to vast estates owned by the aristocracy) ensured that working people had no option to sell their labour to the capitalists (rural or urban). The terms of these contracts reflected the weak position of the workers and so capitalists extracted surplus value from workers and used it to consolidate their market position and economic power. Similarly, the effect of mercantilist policies (and protectionism) was to enrich the capitalists at the expense of workers and allow them to build industrial empires.

The accumulative effect of these acts of violation of a "free" market was to create a class society wherein most people "consent" to be wage slaves and enrich the few. While those who suffered the impositions are long gone and the results of the specific acts have multiplied and magnified well beyond their initial form. And we are still living with them. In other words, the initial acts of coercion have been transmitted and transformed by collective activity (wage labour) into society-wide affects.

Rothbard argues in the situation where the descendants (or others) of those who initially tilled the soil and their aggressors ("*or those who purchased their claims*") still extract "*tribute from the modern tillers*" that this is a case of "**continuing** aggression against the true owners". This means that "*the land titles should be transferred to the peasants, without compensation to the monopoly landlords.*" [Op. Cit., p. 65] But what he fails to note is that the extracted "tribute" could have been used to invest in industry and transform society. Why ignore what the "tribute" has been used for? Does stolen property not remain stolen property after it has been transferred to another? And if the stolen property is used to create a society in which one class has to sell their liberty to another, then surely any surplus coming from those exchanges are also stolen (as it was generated directly and indirectly by the theft).

Yes, anarchists agree with Rothbard -- peasants should take the land they use but which is owned by another. But this logic can equally be applied to capitalism. Workers are still living with the effects of past initiations of force and capitalists still extract "tribute" from workers due to the unequal bargaining powers within the labour market that this has created. The labour market, after all, was created by state action (directly or indirectly) and is maintained by state action (to protect property rights and new initiations of force by working people). The accumulative effects of stealing productive resources as been to increase the economic power of one class compared to another. As the victims of these past abuses are long gone and attempts to find their descendants meaningless (because of the generalised effects the thefts in question), anarchists feel we are justified in demanding the "**expropriation of the expropriators**".

Due to Rothbard's failure to understand the dynamic and generalising effects that result from the theft of productive resources (i.e. externalities that occur from coercion of one person against a specific set of others) and the creation of a labour market, his attempt to refute anarchist analysis of the history of "actually existing capitalism" also fails. Society is the product of collective activity and should belong to us all (although whether and how we divide it up is another question).



F.8 What role did the state take in the creation of capitalism?

## D.1 Why does state intervention occur?

The state is forced to intervene in society because of the anti-social effects of capitalism. The abstractly individualistic theory on which capitalism is based ("everyone for themselves") results in a high degree of statism since the economic system itself contains no means to combat its own socially destructive workings. The state must also intervene in the economy, not only to protect the interests of the ruling class but also to protect society from the atomising and destructive impact of capitalism. Moreover, capitalism has an inherent tendency toward periodic recessions or depressions, and the attempt to prevent them has become part of the state's function. However, since preventing them is impossible (they are built into the system -- see [section C.7](#)), in practice the state can only try to postpone them and ameliorate their severity. Let's begin with the need for social intervention.

Capitalism is based on turning both labour and land into commodities. As Karl Polyani points out, however, *"labour and land are no other than the human beings themselves of which every society consists and the natural surroundings in which it exists; to include labour and land in the market mechanism means to subordinate the substance of society itself to the laws of the market."* [**The Great Transformation**, p. 71] And this means that *"human society has become an accessory to the economic system,"* with humanity placing itself fully in the hands of supply and demand. But such a situation *"could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society; it would have physically destroyed man and transformed his surroundings into a wilderness."* [**Ibid.**, pp. 41-42]

To expect that a community would remain indifferent to the scourge of unemployment, dangerous working conditions, 16-hour working days, the shifting of industries and occupations, and the moral and psychological disruption accompanying them -- merely because economic effects, in the long run, might be better -- is an absurdity. Similarly, for workers to remain indifferent to, for example, poor working conditions, peacefully waiting for a new boss to offer them better conditions, or for citizens to wait passively for capitalists to start voluntarily acting responsibly toward the environment, is to assume a servile and apathetic role for humanity. Luckily, labour power refuses to be a commodity and citizens refuse to stand idly by while the planet's ecosystems are destroyed.

Therefore state intervention occurs as a form of protection against the workings of the market. As capitalism is based on atomising society in the name of "freedom" on the competitive market, it is hardly surprising that defence against the anti-social workings of the market should take statist forms -- there being few other structures capable of providing such defence (as such social institutions have been undermined, if not crushed, by the rise of capitalism in the first place). Thus, ironically, "individualism" produces a "collectivist" tendency within society as capitalism destroys communal forms of social organisation in favour of ones based on abstract individualism, authority, and hierarchy -- all qualities embodied in the state. In a free (i.e. communal) society, social self-defence would not be statist but would be similar in nature to trade unionism and co-operatives -- individuals working together in

voluntary associations to ensure a free and just society (see [section I](#)).

In addition to social protection, state intervention is required to protect a country's economy (and so the economic interests of the ruling class). As Noam Chomsky points out, even the USA, home of "free enterprise," was marked by *"large-scale intervention in the economy after independence, and conquest of resources and markets. . . [while] a centralised developmental state [was constructed] committed to [the] creation and entrenchment of domestic manufacture and commerce, subsidising local production and barring cheaper British imports, constructing a legal basis for private corporate power, and in numerous other ways providing an escape from the stranglehold of comparative advantage."* [**World Orders, Old and New**, p. 114]

In the case of Britain and a host of other countries (and more recently in the cases of Japan and the Newly Industrialising Countries of the Far East, like Korea) state intervention was, oddly enough, the key to development and success in the "free market." In other "developing" countries which have had the misfortune to be subjected to "free-market reforms" (e.g. neo-liberal Structural Adjustment Programs) rather than following the interventionist Japanese and Korean models, the results have been devastating for the vast majority, with drastic increases in poverty, homelessness, malnutrition, etc. (for the elite, the results are somewhat different of course).

In the nineteenth century, states only turned to laissez-faire once they could benefit from it and had a strong enough economy to survive it. *"Only in the mid-nineteenth century, when it had become powerful enough to overcome any competition, did England [sic!] embrace free trade."* [Noam Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 115] Before this, protectionism and other methods were used to nurture economic development. And once laissez-faire started to undermine a country's economy, it was quickly revoked. For example, protectionism is often used to protect a fragile economy and militarism has always been a favourite way for the ruling elite to help the economy, as is still the case, for example, in the *"Pentagon System"* in the USA (see [section D.8](#)).

State intervention has been a feature of capitalism from the start. As Kropotkin argued, *"nowhere has the system of 'non-intervention of the State' ever existed. Everywhere the State has been, and still is, the main pillar and the creator, direct and indirect, of Capitalism and its powers over the masses. Nowhere, since States have grown up, have the masses had the freedom of resisting the oppression by capitalists. . . The state has **always** interfered in the economic life in favour of the capitalist exploiter. It has always granted him protection in robbery, given aid and support for further enrichment. **And it could not be otherwise.** To do so was one of the functions -- the chief mission -- of the State."* [**Evolution and Environment**, pp. 97-8] Its limited attempts at laissez-faire have always been failures, resulting in a return to its statist roots. The process of selective laissez-faire and collectivism has been as much a feature of capitalism in the past as it is now. Indeed, as Noam Chomsky argues, *"[w]hat is called 'capitalism' is basically a system of corporate mercantilism, with huge and largely unaccountable private tyrannies exercising vast control over the economy, political systems, and social and cultural life, operating in close co-operation with powerful states that intervene massively in the domestic economy and international society. That is dramatically true of the United States, contrary to*

*much illusion. The rich and privileged are no more willing to face market discipline than they have been in the past, though they consider it just fine for the general population.*" ["Anarchism, Marxism and Hope for the Future", **Red and Black Revolution**, issue 2]

Therefore, contrary to conventional wisdom, state intervention will always be associated with capitalism due to: (1) its authoritarian nature; (2) its inability to prevent the anti-social results of the competitive market; (3) its fallacious assumption that society should be *"an accessory to the economic system"*; (4) the class interests of the ruling elite; and (5) the need to impose its authoritarian social relationships upon an unwilling population in the first place.

State intervention is as natural to capitalism as wage labour. As Polyani summarises, *"the countermove against economic liberalism and laissez-faire possessed all the unmistakable characteristics of a spontaneous reaction. . . [and] a closely similar change from laissez-faire to 'collectivism' took place in various countries at a definite stage of their industrial development, pointing to the depth and independence of the underlying causes of the process."* [Op. Cit., pp. 149-150] For *"government cannot want society to break up, for it would mean that it and the dominant class would be deprived of sources of exploitation; nor can it leave society to maintain itself without official intervention, for then people would soon realise that government serves only to defend property owners. . . and they would hasten to rid themselves of both."* [Errico Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 22]

And neither should it be forgotten that state intervention was required to create the "free" market in the first place. To quote Polyani again, *"[f]or as long as [the market] system is not established, economic liberals must and will unhesitatingly call for the intervention of the state in order to establish it, and once established, in order to maintain it."* [Op. Cit., p. 149] Protectionism and subsidy (mercantilism) -- along with the liberal use of state violence against the working class -- was required to create and protect capitalism and industry in the first place (see section F.8 - [What role did the state take in the creation of capitalism?](#)).

In short, although laissez-faire may be the ideological basis of capitalism -- the religion that justifies the system -- it has rarely if ever been actually practised. So, while the ideologues are praising "free enterprise" as the fountainhead of modern prosperity, corporations and companies are gorging at the table of the State.

The recent enthusiasm for the "free market" is in fact the product of an extended boom, which in turn was a product of a state co-ordinated war economy and highly interventionist Keynesian economics (a boom that the apologists of capitalism use, ironically, as "evidence" that "capitalism" works) plus an unhealthy dose of nostalgia for a past that never existed. It's strange how a system that has never existed has produced so much!

## **D.1.1 Does state intervention cause the problems to begin with?**

Usually, no. This does not mean that state intervention cannot have bad effects on the economy or

society. Given the state's centralised, bureaucratic nature, it would be impossible for it **not** to have bad effects. State intervention can and does make bad situations worse in many cases. As Malatesta notes, *"the practical evidence [is] that whatever governments do is always motivated by the desire to dominate, and is always geared to defending, extending and perpetuating its privileges and those of the class of which it is both the representative and defender."* [**Anarchy**, p. 21].

However, for economic liberals (or, as we would call them today, neo-liberals or "conservatives"), state intervention is the root of all evil, and for them, it is precisely the state's interference with the market which causes the problems that society blames on the market.

But such a position is illogical, for *"whoever says regulation says limitation: now, how conceive of limiting privilege before it existed? ... [I]t would be an effect without a cause"* and so *"regulation was a corrective to privilege"* and not vice versa. [P-J Proudhon, **System of Economic Contradictions**, p. 371] As Polyani explains, the neo-liberal premise is false, because state intervention always *"dealt with some problem arising out of modern industrial conditions or, at any rate, in the market method of dealing with them."* [Karl Polyani, **Op. Cit.**, p. 146] In fact, these "collectivist" measures were usually carried out by convinced supporters of laissez-faire, who were as a rule uncompromising opponents of all forms of socialism (and often introduced to undermine support for socialist ideas caused by the excesses of "free market" capitalism).

Thus state intervention did not spring out of thin air, but occurred in response to pressing social and economic needs. This can be observed in the mid 19th century, which saw the closest approximation to laissez-faire in the history of capitalism. As Takis Fotopoulos argues, *"the attempt to establish pure economic liberalism, in the sense of free trade, a competitive labour market and the Gold Standard, did not last more than 40 years, and by the 1870s and 1880s, protectionist legislation was back. . . . It was also significant. . . [that all major capitalist powers] passed through a period of free trade and laissez-faire, followed by a period of anti-liberal legislation"* ["*The Nation-state and the Market*," p. 48, **Society and Nature**, Vol. 3, pp. 44-45].

The reason for the return of protectionist legislation was the Depression of 1873-86, which marked the end of the first experiment with pure economic liberalism. Paradoxically, then, the attempt to liberalise the markets led to more regulation. In light of our previous analysis, this is not surprising. Neither the owners of the country nor the politicians desired to see society destroyed, the result to which unhindered laissez-faire leads. Apologists of capitalism overlook the fact that *"[a]t the beginning of the Depression, Europe had been in the heyday of free trade"* [Polyani, **Op. Cit.**, p. 216]. State intervention came about in response to the social disruptions resulting from laissez-faire. It did not cause them.

Similarly, it is a fallacy to state, as Ludwig Von Mises does, that *"as long as unemployment benefit is paid, unemployment must exist."* This statement is not only ahistoric but ignores the existence of the **involuntary** unemployment which caused the state to start paying out a dole in order eliminate the possibility of crime as well as working class self-help, which could conceivably have undermined the status quo. The elite was well aware of the danger in workers organising for their own benefit.

Sadly, in pursuing of ideologically correct answers, capitalist apologists often ignore common sense. If one believes people exist for the economy and not the economy for people, one becomes willing to sacrifice people and their society today for the supposed economic benefit of future generations (in reality, current profits). If one accepts the ethics of mathematics, a future increase in the size of the economy is more important than current social disruption. Thus Polyani again: "*a social calamity is primarily a cultural not an economic phenomenon that can be measured by income figures*" [Op. Cit., p. 157]. And it is the nature of capitalism to ignore and despise what cannot be measured.

## D.1.2 Is state intervention the result of democracy?

No. Social and economic intervention by the modern state began long before universal suffrage became widespread. For example, in Britain, "collectivist" measures were introduced when property and sexual restrictions on voting rights still existed. The centralist and hierarchical nature of "representative" democracy means that the population at large has little real control over politicians, who are far more influenced by big business, business lobby groups, and the state bureaucracy. This means that truly popular and democratic pressures are limited within the capitalist state and the interests of elites are far more decisive in explaining state actions.

The "New Deal" and the post-war Keynesianism measures of limited state intervention to stimulate economic recovery from the Depression were motivated by more material reasons than democracy. Thus Takis Fotopoulos argues that "*[t]he fact . . . that 'business confidence' was at its lowest could go a long way in explaining the much more tolerant attitude of those controlling production towards measures encroaching on their economic power and profits. In fact, it was only when -- and as long as -- state interventionism had the approval of those actually controlling production that it was successful*" ["*The Nation-state and the Market*", p. 55, **Society and Nature**, Vol. 3, pp. 44-45]

An example of this principle can be seen in the 1934 Wagner Act in the USA, which gave US labour its first and last political victory. The act made it legal for unions to organise, but this placed labour struggles within the boundaries of legal procedures and so meant that they could be more easily controlled. In addition, this concession was a form of appeasement whose effect was to make those involved in union actions less likely to start questioning the fundamental bases of the capitalist system. Once the fear of a militant labour movement had passed, the Wagner Act was undermined and made powerless by new laws, laws which made illegal the tactics which forced the politicians to pass the Wagner Act in the first place and increased the powers of bosses over workers.

Needless to say, the implication of classical liberal ideology that popular democracy is a threat to capitalism is the root of the fallacy that democracy leads to state intervention. The notion that by limiting the franchise the rich will make laws which benefit all says more about the classical liberals' touching faith in the altruism of the rich than it does about their understanding of human nature or their grasp of history. The fact that they can join with John Locke and claim with a straight face that all must abide by the rules that only the few make also says a lot about their concept of "freedom."

Of course some of the more modern classical liberals (for example, right-wing libertarians) advocate a "democratic state" which cannot intervene in economic matters. This is no solution, however, as it only gets rid of the statist response to real and pressing social problems caused by capitalism without supplying anything better in its place.

Anarchists agree that the state, due to its centralisation and bureaucracy, crushes the spontaneous nature of society and is a handicap to social progress and evolution. However, leaving the market alone to work its course fallaciously assumes that people will happily sit back and let market forces rip apart their communities and environment. Getting rid of state intervention without getting rid of capitalism and creating a free, communal society would mean that the need for social self-protection would still exist but that there would be even less means of achieving it than now. The results of such a policy, as history shows, would be a catastrophe for the working class (and the environment, we must add) and beneficial only for the elite (as intended, of course).

The implication of the false premise that democracy leads to state intervention is that the state exists for the benefit of the majority, which uses the state to exploit the rich minority! Amazingly, many capitalist apologists accept this as a valid inference from their premise, even though it's obviously a *reductio ad absurdum* of that premise as well as going against the facts of history.

### D.1.3 Is state intervention socialistic?

No. Libertarian socialism is about self-liberation and self-management of one's activities. Getting the state to act for us is the opposite of these ideals. In addition, the question implies that socialism is connected with its nemesis, statism, and that socialism means even more bureaucratic control and centralisation. The identification of socialism with the state is something that Stalinists and capitalist apologists **both** agreed upon. However, as we'll see in section [H.3.13](#), "state socialism" is in reality just state capitalism-- the turning of the world into "*one office and one factory*" (to use Lenin's expression). Little wonder that most sane people join with anarchists in rejecting it. Who wants to work under a system in which, if one does not like the boss (i.e. the state), one cannot even quit?

The theory that state intervention is "creeping socialism" takes the laissez-faire ideology of capitalism at its face value, not realising that it is ideology rather than reality. Capitalism is a dynamic system and evolves over time, but this does not mean that by moving away from its theoretical starting point it is negating its essential nature and becoming socialistic. Capitalism was born from state intervention, and except for a very short period of laissez-faire which ended in depression, has always depended on state intervention for its existence.

The claim that state intervention is "socialist" also ignores the realities of power concentration under capitalism. Real socialism equalises power by redistributing it to the people, but as Noam Chomsky points out, "*[in] a highly inegalitarian society, it is most unlikely that government programs will be equalisers. Rather, it is to be expected that they will be designed and manipulated by private power for their own benefits; and to a significant degree the expectation is fulfilled*" [**The Chomsky Reader**, p.

184]. "Welfare equals socialism" is nonsense.

Similarly, in Britain and the nationalisation of roughly 20% of the economy (the most unprofitable sections of it as well) in 1945 by the Labour Government was the direct result of ruling class fear, not socialism. As Quintin Hogg, a Tory M.P. at the time, said, *"If you don't give the people social reforms they are going to give you social revolution."* Memories of the near revolutions across Europe after the First World War were obviously in many minds, on both sides. Not that nationalisation was particularly feared as "socialism." As anarchists at the time noted, *"the real opinions of capitalists can be seen from Stock Exchange conditions and statements of industrialists [rather] than the Tory Front bench. . . [and from these we] see that the owning class is not at all displeased with the record and tendency of the Labour Party"* [Vernon Richards, ed., **Neither Nationalisation nor Privatisation -- Selections from Freedom 1945-1950**, p. 9].

So where do anarchists stand on state intervention? Usually we are against it, although most of us think state health care services and unemployment benefits (for example) are more socially useful than arms production, and in lieu of more anarchistic solutions, better than the alternative of "free market" capitalism. This does not mean we are happy with state intervention, which in practice undermines working class self-help, mutual aid and autonomy. Also, state intervention of the "social" nature is often paternalistic, run by and for the "middle classes" (i.e. professional/managerial types and other self-proclaimed "experts"). However, until such time as a viable anarchist counterculture is created, we have little option but to "support" the lesser evil (but let's make no mistake, it **is** an evil).

This is not to deny that in many ways such state "support" can be used as a means of regaining some of the power and labour stolen from us by capitalists in the first place. State intervention **can** give working people more options than they otherwise would have. If state action could not be used in this way, it is doubtful that capitalists and their hired "experts" would spend so much time trying to undermine and limit it. As the capitalist class happily uses the state to enforce its power and property rights, working people making whatever use they can of it is to be expected. Be that as it may, this does not blind anarchists to the negative aspects of the welfare state and other forms of state intervention (see section [J.5.15](#) for anarchist perspectives on the welfare state).

One problem with state intervention, as Kropotkin saw, is that the state's absorption of social functions *"necessarily favoured the development of an unbridled, narrow-minded individualism. In proportion as the obligations towards the State grew in numbers, the citizens were evidently relieved from their obligations towards each other"* [**Mutual Aid**, p. 183]. In the case of state "social functions," such as the British National Health Service, although they were created as a **result** of the social atomisation caused by capitalism, they have tended to **reinforce** the individualism and lack of personal and social responsibility that produced the need for such action in the first place. (Forms of community and social self-help and their historical precedents will be discussed in section [J.5.16](#)).

The example of nationalised industries is a good indicator of the non-socialist nature of state intervention. Nationalisation meant replacing the capitalist bureaucrat with a state one, with little real



improvement for those subjected to the "new" regime. At the height of the British Labour Party's post-war nationalisations, anarchists were pointing out its anti-socialist nature. Nationalisation was *"really consolidating the old individual capitalist class into a new and efficient class of managers to run. . . state capitalism"* by *"installing the really creative industrialists in dictatorial managerial positions"* [Vernon Richards, **Op. Cit.**, p. 10].

Anarchists are in favour of self-directed activity and direct action to get improvements and defend reforms in the here and now. By organising strikes and protests ourselves, we can improve our lives. This does not mean that using direct action to get favourable laws passed or less-favourable ones revoked is a waste of time. Far from it. However, unless ordinary people use their own strength and grassroots organisations to enforce the law, the state and employers will honour any disliked law purely in the breach. By trusting the state, social self-protection against the market and power concentrations becomes hollow. In the end, what the state gives (or is pressurised into giving), it can take away but what we create and run ourselves is always responsive to **our** desires and interests. We have seen how vulnerable state welfare is to pressures from the capitalist class to see that this is a truism.

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## J.3 What kinds of organisation do anarchists build?

Anarchists are well aware of the importance of building organisations. Organisations allow those within them to multiply their strength and activity, becoming the means by which an individual can see their ideas, hopes and dreams realised. This is as true for getting the anarchist message across as for building a home, running a hospital or creating some useful product like food. Anarchists support two types of organisation -- organisations of anarchists and popular organisations which are not made up exclusively of anarchists such as industrial unions, co-operatives and community assemblies. In this section of the FAQ we will discuss the kinds, nature and role of the first type of organisation, namely explicitly anarchist organisations. In addition, we discuss anarcho-syndicalism, a revolutionary unionism which aims to create an anarchist society by anarchist tactics, as well as why many anarchists are not anarcho-syndicalists. The second type of organisations, popular organisations, are discussed in detail in [section J.5](#) which gives specific examples of the kinds of social alternatives anarchists support and create under capitalism (community and industrial unions, mutual banks, co-operatives and so on).

Both forms of organisation, however, share the anarchist commitment to confederalism, decentralisation, self-management and decision making from the bottom up. In such organisations the membership play the decisive role in running them and ensuring that power remains in their hands. They express the anarchist vision of the power and creative efficacy people have when they are self-reliant, when they act for themselves and manage their own lives directly. Anarchists insist that people must manage their own affairs (individually and collectively) and have both the right and the ability to do so. Only by organising in this way can we create a new world, a world worthy of human beings and unique individuals.

Anarchist organisation in all its forms reflects the anarchist desire to *"build the new world in the shell of the old"* and to empower the individual. We reject the notion that it does not really matter how we organise to change society. Indeed, nothing could be further from the truth. We are all the products of the influences and social relationships in our lives, this is a basic idea of (philosophical) materialism. Thus the way our organisations are structured has an impact on us. If the organisation is centralised and hierarchical (no matter how "democratically" controlled any officials or leaders are) then those subject to it will, as in any hierarchical organisation, see their abilities to manage their own lives, their creative thought and imagination eroded under the constant stream of orders from above. This in turn justifies the pretensions to power of those at the top, as the capacity of self-management of the rank and file is weakened by authoritarian social relationships.

This means anarchist organisations are so structured so that they allow everyone the maximum potential to participate. Such participation is the key for a free organisation. As Malatesta argued:

*"The real being is man, the individual. Society or the collectivity. . . if it is not a hollow abstraction, must be made up of individuals. And it is in the organism of every individual*

*that all thoughts and human actions inevitably have their origin, and from being individual they become collective thoughts and acts when they are or become accepted by many individuals. Social action, therefore, is neither the negation nor the complement of individual initiative, but is the resultant of initiatives, thoughts and actions of all individuals who make up society.*" [Anarchy, p. 36]

Anarchist organisations exist to allow this development and expression of individual initiatives. This empowering of the individual is an important aspect of creating viable solidarity for sheep cannot express solidarity, they only follow the shepherd. Therefore, *"to achieve their ends, anarchist organisations must, in their constitution and operation, remain in harmony with the principles of anarchism; that is, they must know how to blend the free action of individuals with the necessity and the joy of co-operation which serve to develop the awareness and initiative of their members and a means of education for the environment in which they operate and of a moral and material preparation for the future we desire."* [Errico Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 95]

As such, anarchist organisations reflect the sort of society anarchists desire. We reject as ridiculous the claim of Marxists and Leninists that the form of organisation we build is irrelevant and therefore we must create highly centralised parties which aim to become the leadership of the working class. No matter how "democratic" such organisations are, they just reflect the capitalist division of labour between brain and manual work and the Liberal ideology of surrendering our ability to govern ourselves to an elected elite. In other words, they just mirror the very society we are opposed to and so will soon produce the very problems **within** so-called anti-capitalist organisations which originally motivated us to oppose capitalism in the first place. Because of this, anarchists regard *"the Marxist party as another statist form that, if it succeeded in 'seizing power,' would preserve the power of one human being over another, the authority of the leader over the led. The Marxist party. . . was a mirror image of the very society it professed to oppose, an invasion of the camp of revolutionaries by bourgeois values, methods, and structures."* [The Spanish Anarchists, pp. 179-80] As can be seen from the history of the Russian Revolution, this was the case with the Bolsheviks soon taking the lead in undermining workers' self-management, soviet democracy and, finally, democracy within the ruling party itself. Of course, from an anarchist (i.e. materialist) point of view, this was highly predictable -- after all, *"facts are before ideas; yes, the ideal, as Proudhon said, is but a flower whose root lies in the material conditions of existence."* [Bakunin, **God and the State**, p.9] -- and so it is unsurprising that hierarchical parties helped to maintain a hierarchical society. In the words of the famous Sonvillier Circular (issued by the libertarian sections of the First International):

*"How could one want an egalitarian and free society to issue from an authoritarian organisation? It is impossible."*

We must stress here that anarchists are **not** opposed to organisation and are **not** opposed to organisations of anarchists (i.e. **political** organisations, although anarchists generally reject the term "party" due to its statist and hierarchical associations). Murray Bookchin makes the issues clear when he wrote that the *"real question at issue here is not Organisation versus non-organisation, but rather what kind of*

*organisation . . . [anarchist] organisations . . . [are] organic developments from below . . . They are social movements, combining a creative revolutionary lifestyle with a creative revolutionary theory . . . As much as is humanly possible, they try to reflect the liberated society they seek to achieve . . . [and] are built around intimate groups of brothers and sisters - affinity groups . . . [with] co-ordination between groups . . . discipline, planning, and unity in action. . . achieved **voluntarily**, by means of a self-discipline nourished by conviction and understanding." [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, pp. 214-215]*

In the sections that follow, we discuss the nature and role of anarchist organisation. Anarchists would agree totally with these words of the Situationist Guy Debord that a *"revolutionary organisation must always remember that its objective is not getting people to listen to speeches by expert leaders, but getting them to speak for themselves"* and organise their groups accordingly. Section [J.3.1](#) discusses the basic building block of specifically anarchist organisations, the *"affinity group."* Sections [J.3.2](#), [J.3.3](#), [J.3.4](#) and [J.3.5](#), we discuss the main types of federations of *"affinity groups"* anarchists create to help spread our message and influence. Then section [J.3.6](#) highlights the role these organisations play in our struggles to create an anarchist society. Many Marxists fail to understand the nature of anarchist organisation and, because of this, misunderstand Bakunin's expression *"Invisible Dictatorship"* and paint a picture of him (and, by implication, all anarchists) as a hierarchical would-be dictator. Section [J.3.7](#) analyses these claims and shows why they are wrong. Finally, in sections [J.3.8](#) and [J.3.9](#) we discuss anarcho-syndicalism and other anarchists attitudes to it.

The power of ideas cannot be under estimated, for *"if you have an idea you can communicate it to a million people and lose nothing in the process, and the more the idea is propagated the more it acquires in power and effectiveness"* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 46]. The right idea at the right time, one that reflects the needs of individuals and of required social change, can have a transforming effect on those who hold the idea and the society they live in. That is why organisations that anarchists create to spread their message are so important and why we devote a whole section to them.

Anarchist organisations, therefore, aim to enrich social struggle by their ideas and suggestions but also, far more importantly, enrich the idea by practical experience and activity. In other words, a two way process by which life informs theory and theory aids life. The means by which this social dynamic is created and developed is the underlying aim of anarchist organisation and is reflected in its theoretical role we highlight in the following sections.

## J.3.1 What are affinity groups?

Affinity groups are the basic organisation which anarchists create to spread the anarchist idea. The term *"affinity group"* comes from the Spanish F.A.I. (**Iberian Anarchist Federation**) and refers to the organisational form devised by the Spanish Anarchists in their struggles. It is the English translation of *"grupo de afinidad."* At its most basic, it is a (usually small) group of anarchists who work together to spread their ideas to the wider public, using propaganda, initiating or working with campaigns and spreading their ideas **within** popular organisations (such as unions) and communities. It aims not to be a

"leadership" but to give a lead, to act as a catalyst within popular movements. Unsurprisingly it reflects basic anarchist ideas:

*"Autonomous, communal and directly democratic, the group combines revolutionary theory with revolutionary lifestyle in its everyday behaviour. It creates a free space in which revolutionaries can remake themselves individually, and also as social beings."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 221]

The reason for this is simple, for a *"movement that sought to promote a liberatory revolution had to develop liberatory and revolutionary forms. This meant . . . that it had to mirror the free society it was trying to achieve, not the repressive one it was trying to overthrow. If a movement sought to achieve a world united by solidarity and mutual aid, it had to be guided by these precepts; if it sought to achieve a decentralised, stateless, non-authoritarian society, it had to be structured in accordance with these goals."* [**The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 180]

The aim of an anarchist (i.e. anti-authoritarian) organisation is to promote a sense of community, of confidence in ones own abilities, to enable all to be involved in the identification, initiation and management of group/communal needs and decisions. Moreover, they must ensure that individuals are in a position (both physically, as part of a group/community, and mentally, as an individual) to manage their own lives and take direct action in the pursuit of individual and communal needs and desires.

Anarchist organisation is about empowering all, to develop "integral" or whole individuals and a community that encourages individuality (not abstract "individualism") and solidarity. It is about collective decision making from the bottom up, that empowers those at the "base" of the structure and only delegates the work of co-ordinating and implementing the members decisions (and not the power of making decisions for people). In this way the initiative and power of the few (government) is replaced by the initiative and empowerment of all (anarchy).

Affinity groups exist to achieve these aims and are structured to encourage them.

The local affinity group is the means by which anarchists co-ordinate their activities in a community, workplace, social movement and so on. Within these groups, anarchists discuss their ideas, politics and hopes, what they plan to do, write leaflets and organise other propaganda work, discuss how they are going to work within wider organisations like unions, how their strategies fit into their long term plans and goals and so on. It is the basic way that anarchists work out their ideas, pull their resources and get their message across to others. There can be affinity groups for different interests and activities (for example a workplace affinity group, a community affinity group, an anarcha-feminist affinity group, etc., could all exist within the same area, with overlapping members). Moreover, as well as these more "political" activities, the "affinity group" also stresses the *"importance of education and the need to live by Anarchist precepts -- the need . . . to create a counter-society that could provide the space for people to begin to remake themselves."* [Bookchin, **Ibid.**] In other words, "affinity groups" aim to be the *"living germs"* of the new society in **all** aspects, not purely in a structurally way.

These basic affinity groups are not seen as being enough in themselves. Most anarchists see the need for local groups to work together with others in a confederation. Such co-operation aims to pull resources and reduce duplicating efforts, in other words, expanding the options for the individuals and groups who are part of the federation. Such a federation is based upon the *"[f]ull autonomy, full independence and therefore full responsibility of individuals and groups; free accord between those who believe it useful to unite in co-operating for a common aim; moral duty to see through commitments undertaken and to do nothing that would contradict the accepted programme. It is on these bases that the practical structures, and the right tools to give life to the organisation should be build and designed."* [Errico Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 101]

Therefore, affinity groups are self-managed, autonomous groupings of anarchists who unite and work on specific activities and interests. They are a key way for anarchists to co-ordinate their activity and spread their message of individual freedom and voluntary co-operation. However, the description of what an "affinity group" is does not explain **why** anarchists organise in that way. For a discussion on the role these groups play in anarchist theory, see [section J.3.6](#). Essentially, these "affinity groups" are the means by which anarchists actually intervene in social movements and struggles in order to win people to the anarchist idea and so help transform them from struggles **against** injustice into struggles **for** a free society, as we will discuss [later](#).

To aid in this process of propaganda, agitation, political discussion and development, anarchists organise federations of affinity groups. These take three main forms, *"synthesis"* federations (see [section J.3.2](#)), *"Platformist"* federations (see [section J.3.3](#) and [section J.3.4](#) for criticism of this tendency) and *"class struggle"* groups (see [section J.3.5](#)). However, we must note here that these types of federation are not mutually exclusive. Synthesis type federations often have "class struggle" and "platformist" groups within them (although, as will become clear, Platformist federations do not have synthesis groups within them) and most countries have different federations representing the different political perspectives within the movement. Moreover, it should also be noted that no federation will be a totally "pure" expression of each tendency. "Synthesis" groups merge in "class struggle" ones, platformist groups do not subscribe totally to the Platform and so on. We isolate each tendency to show its essential features. In real life few, if any, federations will exactly fit the types we highlight. It would be more precise to speak of organisations which are descended from a given tendency, for example the French Anarchist Federation is obviously mostly influenced by the synthesis tradition but it is not, strictly speaking, 100% synthesis. Lastly, we must also note that the term "class struggle" anarchist group in no way implies that "synthesis" and "platformist" groups do not support the class struggle, they most definitely do -- the technical term "class struggle" organisation we use, in other words, does **not** mean that other kinds of organisations are not class-struggle!

All the various types of federation are based on groups of anarchists organising themselves in a libertarian fashion. This is because anarchists try to live by the values of the future to the extent that this is possible under capitalism and try to develop organisations based upon mutual aid and brotherhood, in which control would be exercised from below upward, not downward from above.

It must be stressed anarchists do not reduce the complex issue of political organisation and ideas into **one** organisation but instead recognise that different threads within anarchism will express themselves in different political organisations (and even within the same organisation). Therefore a diversity of anarchist groups and federations is a good sign and expresses the diversity of political and individual thought to be expected in a movement aiming for a society based upon freedom. All we aim in the next four sections is paint a broad picture of the differences between different perspectives on anarchist organising. However, the role of these federations is as described here, that of an "aid" in the struggle, not a new leadership wanting power.

## J.3.2 What are "synthesis" federations?

As noted in the [last section](#), there are three main types of affinity group federation -- "synthesis", "class struggle" (our term) and "platformist." In this section we discuss "synthesis" federations.

The "synthesis" group acquired its name from the work of the Russian anarchist Voline and the French anarchist Sebastien Faure. Voline published in 1924 a paper calling for "*the anarchist synthesis*" and was also the author of the article in Faure's **Encyclopedie Anarchiste** on the very same topic. However, its roots lie in the Russian revolution and the **Nabat** federation (or the "*Anarchist Organisations of the Ukraine*") created in 1918. The aim of the **Nabat** was "*organising all of the life forces of anarchism; bringing together through a common endeavour all anarchists seriously desiring of playing an active part in the social revolution which is defined as a process (of greater or lesser duration) giving rise to a new form of social existence for the organised masses.*" [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 117]

The "synthesis" organisation is based on uniting all kinds of anarchists in one federation as there is, to use the words of the **Nabat**, "*validity in all anarchist schools of thought. We must consider all diverse tendencies and accept them.*" [cited in "*The Reply*," **Constructive Anarchism**, p. 32] The "synthesis" organisation attempts to get different kinds of anarchists "*joined together on a number of basic positions and with the awareness of the need for planned, organised collective effort on the basis of federation.*" [**Ibid.**] These basic positions would be based on a synthesis of the viewpoints of the members of the organisation, but each tendency would be free to agree their own ideas due to the federal nature of the organisation.

An example of this synthesis approach is provided by the differing assertions that anarchism is a theory of classes (as stated by the Platform, among others), that anarchism is a humanitarian ideal for all people (supporters of such a position sometimes accuse those who hold a class based version of anarchism of Marxism) and that anarchism is purely about individuals (and so essentially individualist and having nothing to do with humanity or with a class). The synthesis of these positions would be as follows:

*"We must create a synthesis and state that anarchism contains class elements as well as humanism and individualist principles . . . Its class element is above all its means of fighting for liberation; its humanitarian character is its ethical aspect, the foundation of society; its individualism is the goal of humanity."* [**Ibid.**]

So, as can be seen, the "synthesis" tendency aims to unite all anarchists (be they individualist, mutualist, syndicalist or communist) into one common federation. Thus the "synthesis" viewpoint is "inclusive" and obviously has affinities with the "*anarchism without adjectives*" approach favoured by many anarchists (see [section A.3.8](#) for details). However, in practice many "synthesis" organisations are more restrictive (for example, they could aim to unite all **social** anarchists like the French Anarchist Federation does). This means that there can be a difference between the general idea of the synthesis and how it is actually and concretely applied.

The basic idea behind the synthesis is that the anarchist scene (in most countries, at most times, including France in the 1920s and Russia during the revolution and at this time) is divided into three main tendencies: communist anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism, and individualist anarchism. This division can cause severe damage to the anarchist movement, simply because of the many (and often redundant) arguments and diatribes on why "my anarchism is best" can get in the way of working in common in order to fight our common enemies, known as state, capitalism and authority. The "synthesis" federations are defined by agreeing what is the common denominator of the various tendencies within anarchism and agreeing a minimum programme based on this for the federation. This would allow a "*certain ideological and tactical unity among organisations*" within the "synthesis" federation. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 35]

Moreover, as well as saving time and energy for more important tasks, there are technical and efficiency reasons for unifying into one organisation, namely allowing the movement to have access to more resources and being able to co-ordinate them so as to maximise their use and impact. The "synthesis" federation, like all anarchist groups, aims to spread anarchist ideas within society as a whole. They believe that their role is to "*assist the masses only when they need such assistance. . . the anarchists are part of the membership in the economic and social mass organisations [such as trade unions, for example]. They act and build as part of the whole. An immense field of action is opened to them for ideological [sic!], social and creative activity without assuming a position of superiority over the masses. Above all they must fulfil their ideological [sic!] and ethical influence in a free and natural manner. . . [they] only offer ideological assistance, but not in the role of leaders.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 33] This, as we shall see in [section J.3.6](#), is the common anarchist position as regards the role of an anarchist group. And, just to stress the point, this also shows that "synthesist" federations are usually class-struggle organisations (i.e. support and take part in the class-struggle as the key means of creating an anarchist society and making the current one freer and fairer).

The great strength of "synthesis" federations, obviously, is that they allow a wide and diverse range of viewpoints to be expressed within the organisation (which can allow the development of political ideas and theories by constant discussion and debate). In addition, they allow the maximum amount of resources to be made available to individuals and groups within the organisation.

This is why we find the original promoters of the "synthesis" arguing that "*that first step toward achieving unity in the anarchist movement which can lead to serious organisation is collective*



*ideological work on a series of important problems that seek the clearest possible collective solution. . . [discussing] concrete questions [rather than "philosophical problems and abstract dissertations"] . . . [and] suggest that there be a publication for discussion in every country where the problems in our ideology [sic!] and tactics can be fully discussed, regardless of how 'acute' or even 'taboo' it may be. The need for such a printed organ, as well as oral discussion, seems to us to be a 'must' because it is the practical way, to try to achieve 'ideological unity', 'tactical unity', and possibly organisation. . . A full and tolerant discussion of our problems. . . will create a basis for understanding, not only among anarchists, but among different conceptions of anarchism." [Ibid., p. 35]*

The "synthesis" idea for anarchist organisation was taken up by those who opposed the Platform (see [next section](#)). For both Faure and Voline, the basic idea was the same, namely that the historical tendencies in anarchism (communist, syndicalist and individualist) must co-operate and work in the same organisation. However, there are differences between Voline's and Faure's points of view. The latter saw these various tendencies as a wealth in themselves and advocated that each tendency would gain from working together in a common organisation. From Voline's point of view, the emergence of these various tendencies was historically needed to discover the in-depth implications of anarchism in various settings (such as the economical, the social and individual life). However, it was the time to go back to anarchism as a whole, an anarchism considerably empowered by what each tendency could give it, and in which tendencies as such should dissolve. Moreover, these tendencies co-existed in every anarchist at various levels, so all anarchists should aggregate in an organisation where these tendencies would disappear (both individually and organisationally, i.e. there would not be an "anarcho-syndicalist" specific tendency inside the organisation, and so forth).

The "synthesis" federation would be based on complete autonomy (within the basic principles of the Federation and Congress decisions, of course) for groups and individuals, so allowing all the different trends to work together and express their differences in a common front. The various groups would be organised in a federal structure, combining to share resources in the struggle against state, capitalism and all other forms of oppression. This federal structure is organised at the local level through a "local union" (i.e. the groups in a town or city), at the regional level (i.e. all groups in, say, Strathclyde are members of the same regional union) up to the "national" level (i.e. all groups in France, say) and beyond.

As every group in the federation is autonomous, it can discuss, plan and initiate an action (such as campaign for a reform, against a social evil, and so on) without having to others in the federation (or have to wait for instructions). This means that the local groups can respond quickly to local issues. This does not mean that each group works in isolation. These initiatives may gain federal support if local groups see the need. The federation can adopt an issue if it is raised at a federal conference and other groups agree to co-operate on that issue. Moreover, each group has the freedom **not** to participate on a specific issue while leaving others to do so. Thus groups can concentrate on what they are interested in most.

The programme and policies of the federation would be agreed at regular delegate meetings and

congresses. The "synthesis" federation is "managed" at the federal level by "relations committees" made up of people elected and mandated at the federation congresses. These committees would have a purely administrative role, spreading information, suggestions and proposals coming from groups and individuals within the organisation, for example, or looking after the finances of the federation and so on. They do not have any more rights in regards to this than any other member of the federation (i.e. they could not make a proposal as a committee, just as members of their local group or as individuals). These administrative committees are accountable to the federation and subject to both mandates and recall.

The **French Anarchist Federation** is a good example of a successful federation which is heavily influenced by "synthesis" ideas (as is the **Italian Anarchist Federation** and many other anarchist federations across the world). Obviously, how effective a "synthesis" federation is depends upon how tolerant members are of each other and how seriously they take their responsibilities towards their federations and the agreements they make.

Of course, there are problems involved in most forms of organisation, and the "synthesis" federation is no exception. While diversity can strengthen an organisation by provoking debate, a diverse grouping can often make it difficult to get things done. Platformist and other critics of the "synthesis" federation argue that it can be turned into a talking shop and any common programme difficult to agree, never mind apply. For example, how can mutualists and communists agree on the ends, never mind the means, their organisation supports? One believes in co-operation within a (modified) market system and reforming capitalism and statism away, while the other believes in the abolition of commodity production and money and revolution as the means of so doing. Ultimately, all they could do would be to disagree and thus any joint programmes and activity would be somewhat limited. It could, indeed, be argued that both Voline and Faure forgot essential points, namely what is this common denominator between the different kinds of anarchism, how do we achieve it and what is in it? For without this agreed common position, many so-called "anarchist synthesist organisations" end up becoming little more than talking shops, escaping from any social perspective or any organisational perspective and soon becoming neither organisations, nor anarchist, nor synthesist as both Faure and Voline meant by the term.

It is this (potential) disunity that lead the authors of the Platform to argue that "*[s]uch an organisation having incorporated heterogeneous theoretical and practical elements, would only be a mechanical assembly of individuals each having a different conception of all the questions of the anarchist movement, an assembly which would inevitably disintegrate on encountering reality.*" [**The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists**, p. 12] The Platform suggested "*Theoretical and Tactical Unity*" as a means of overcoming this problem, but that term provoked massive disagreement in anarchist circles (see [section J.3.4](#)). In reply to the Platform, supporters of the "synthesis" counter by pointing to the fact that "Platformist" groups are usually very small, far smaller than "synthesis" federations (for example, compare the size of the French Anarchist Federation with, say, the Irish based Workers Solidarity Movement or the French Alternative Libertaire). This means, they argue, that the Platform does not, in fact, lead to a more effective organisation, regardless of the claims of its supporters. Moreover, they argue that the requirements for "*Theoretical and Tactical Unity*" help

ensure a small organisation as differences would express themselves in splits than constructive activity. Needless to say, the discussion continues within the movement on this issue!

What can be said is that this potential problem within "synthesisism" has been the cause of some organisations failing or becoming little more than talking shops, with each group doing its own thing and so making co-ordination pointless as any agreements made would be ignored (according to many this was a major problem with the **Anarchist Federation of Britain**, for example). Most supporters of the synthesis would argue that this is not what the theory aims for and that the problem lies in a misunderstanding of the theory rather than the theory itself (as can be seen from the FAF and FAI, "synthesis" inspired federations can be **very** successful). Non-supporters are more critical, with some supporting the "Platform" as a more effective means of organising to spread anarchist ideas and influence (see the [next section](#)). Other social anarchists create the "class struggle" type of federation (this is a common organisational form in Britain, for example) as discussed in [section J.3.5](#).

### J.3.3 What is the "Platform"?

The Platform is a current within anarcho-communism which has specific suggestions on the nature and form which an anarchist federation takes. Its roots lie in the Russian anarchist movement, a section of which published *"The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists"* when in exile from the Bolshevik dictatorship in Paris, in 1926. The authors of the work included Nestor Makhno, Peter Arshinov and Ida Mett. At the time it provoked intense debate (and still does in most anarchist) circles between supporters of the Platform (usually called "Platformists") and those who oppose it (which includes other communist-anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and supporters of the "synthesis"). We will discuss why many anarchists oppose the Platform in the [next section](#). Here we discuss what the Platform argued for.

Like the "synthesis" federation (see [last section](#)), the Platform was created in response to the experiences of the Russian Revolution. The authors of the Platform (like Voline and other supporters of the "synthesis") had participated in that Revolution and saw all their work, hopes and dreams fail as the Bolshevik state triumphed and destroyed any chances of socialism by undermining soviet democracy, workers' self-management of production, trade union democracy as well as fundamental individual freedoms and rights (see the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#) for details). Moreover, the authors of the Platform had been leading activists in the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine, which had successfully resisted both White and Red armies in the name of working class self-determination and anarchism (see ["Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?"](#)). Facing the same problems of the Bolshevik government, the Makhnovists had actively encouraged popular self-management and organisation, freedom of speech and of association, and so on, whereas the Bolsheviks had not. Thus they were aware that anarchist ideas not only worked in practice, but that the arguments of Leninists who maintained that Bolshevism (and the policies it introduced at the time) was the only "practical" response to the problems facing a revolution were false.

They wrote the pamphlet in order to examine why the anarchist movement had failed to build on their successes in gaining influence within the working class. As can be seen from their work in the factory committees, where workers organised their own workforces and had begun to build a society based on both freedom and equality, anarchist ideas had proven to be both popular and practical. While repression by the Bolsheviks (as documented by Voline in his classic history of the Russian Revolution, **The Unknown Revolution**, for example) did play a part in this failure, it did not explain everything. Also important, in the eyes of the Platform authors, was the lack of anarchist organisation **before** the revolution. In the first paragraph they state:

*"It is very significant that, in spite of the strength and incontestably positive character of libertarian ideas, and in spite of the facing up to the social revolution, and finally the heroism and innumerable sacrifices borne by the anarchists in the struggle for anarchist communism, the anarchist movement remains weak despite everything, and has appeared, very often, in the history of working class struggles as a small event, an episode, and not an important factor."* [**Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists**, p. 11]

This weakness in the movement derived from a number of causes, the main one being *"the absence of organisational principles and practices"* within the anarchist movement. Indeed, they argued, *"the anarchist movement is represented by several local organisations advocating contradictory theories and practices, having no perspectives for the future, nor of a continuity in militant work, and habitually disappearing, hardly leaving the slightest trace behind them."* This explained the *"contradiction between the positive and incontestable substance of libertarian ideas, and the miserable state in which the anarchist movement vegetates."* [**Ibid.**] For anyone familiar with the anarchist movement in many countries, these words will still strike home. Thus the Platform still appears to many anarchists a relevant and important document, even if they are not Platformists.

The author's of the Platform proposed a solution to this problem, namely the creation of certain type of anarchist organisation. This organisation would be based upon communist-anarchist ideas exclusively, while recognising syndicalism as a principal method of struggle. Like most anarchists, the Platform placed class and class struggle as the centre of their analysis, recognising that the *"social and political regime of all states is above all the product of class struggle. . . The slightest change in the course of the battle of classes, in the relative locations of the forces of the class struggle, produces continuous modifications in the fabric and structure of society."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 14] And, again, like most anarchists, the Platform aimed to *"transform the present bourgeois capitalist society into a society which assures the workers the products of the labours, their liberty, independence, and social and political equality,"* one based on a *"federalist system of workers organisations of production and consumption, united federatively and self-administering."* In addition, they argued that the *"birth, the blossoming, and the realisation of anarchist ideas have their roots in the life and the struggle of the working masses and are inseparable bound to their fate."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 15, p. 19 and p. 15] Again, most anarchists (particularly social anarchists) would agree -- anarchist ideas will (and have) wither when isolated from working class life since only working class people, the vast majority, can create a free society and anarchist ideas are expressions of working class experience (remove the experience and the ideas do not develop as they should).

In order to create such a free society it is necessary, argue the Platformists, *"to work in two directions: on the one hand towards the selection and grouping of revolutionary worker and peasant forces on a libertarian communist theoretical basis (a specifically libertarian communist organisation); on the other hand, towards regrouping revolutionary workers and peasants on an economic base of production and consumption (revolutionary workers and peasants organised around production [i.e. syndicalism, unionism]; workers and free peasants co-operatives)"* [Op. Cit., p. 20] Again, most anarchists would agree with this along with the argument that *"anarchism should become the leading concept of revolution. . . The leading position of anarchist ideas in the revolution suggests an orientation of events after anarchist theory. However, this theoretical driving force should not be confused with the political leadership of the statist parties which leads finally to State Power."* [Op. Cit., p. 21] The "synthesis" critics of the Platform also recognised the importance of spreading anarchist ideas within popular and revolutionary movements and supporting the class struggle, for example, although they expressed the concept in a different way.

This *"leadership of ideas"* (see also [section J.3.6](#) for more on this) would aim at developing and co-ordinating libertarian feelings already existing within social struggle. *"Although the masses,"* explains the Platform, *"express themselves profoundly in social movements in terms of anarchist tendencies and tenets, these . . . do however remain dispersed, being uncoordinated, and consequently do not lead to the . . . preserving [of] the anarchist orientation of the social revolution."* [p. 21] The Platform argued that a specific anarchist organisation was required to ensure that the libertarian tendencies initially expressed in any social revolution or movement (for example, free federation, self-management in mass assemblies, mandating of delegates, decentralisation, etc.) do not get undermined by statist and authoritarians who have their own agendas.

However, these principles do not, in themselves, determine a Platformist organisation. After all, most anarcho-syndicalists and non-Platformist communist-anarchists would agree with these positions. The main point which distinguishes the Platform is its position on how an anarchist organisation should be structured and work. This is sketched in the *"Organisational Section,"* the shortest and most contentious section of the whole work. They call this the **General Union of Anarchists**. This is where they introduce the concepts of *"Theoretical and Tactical Unity"* and *"Collective Responsibility,"* concepts which are unique to the Platform.

The first concept, obviously, has two parts. Firstly the members of these organisations are in theoretical agreement with each other. Secondly they agree that if a certain type of work is prioritised, all should take part. Even today within the anarchist movement these are contentious ideas so it is worth exploring them in a little more detail.

By *"Theoretical Unity"* the Platform meant any anarchist organisation must come to an agreement on the theory upon which it is based. In other words, that members of the organisation must agree on a certain number of basic points, such as class struggle, anti-capitalism and anti-statism, and so on. An organisation in which half the members thought that union struggles were important and the other half

that they were a waste of time would not be effective as the membership would spend all their time arguing with themselves. While most Platformists agreed that everyone will not agree with everything, they think its important to reach as much agreement as possible, and to translate this into action. Once a theoretical position is reached, the members have to argue it in public (even if they initially opposed it within the organisation but they do have the right to get the decision of the organisation changed by internal discussion).

Which brings us to "*Tactical Unity*." By "*Tactical Unity*" the Platform meant that the members of an organisation should struggle together **as an organised force** rather than as individuals. Once a strategy has been agreed by the Union, all members would work towards ensuring its success (even if they initially opposed it). In this way resources and time are concentrated in a common direction, towards an agreed objective.

Thus "*Theoretical and Tactical Unity*" means an anarchist organisation that agrees specific ideas and the means of applying those ideas. The Platform's basic assumption is that there is a link between coherency and efficiency. By increasing the coherency of the organisation by making collective decisions and applying them, the Platform argues that this will increase the influence of anarchist ideas. Without this, they argue, better organised groups (such as Leninist ones) would be in a better position to have their arguments heard and listened to than anarchists would. Anarchists cannot be complacent, and rely on the hope that the obvious strength and rightness of our ideas will shine through and win the day. As history shows, this rarely happens and when it does, the authoritarians are usually in positions of power to crush the emerging anarchist influence (this was the case in Russia, for example). Platformists argue that the world we live in is the product of struggles between competing ideas of how society should be organised and if the anarchist voice is weak, quiet and disorganised, it will not be heard, and other arguments, other perspectives will win the day.

Which brings us to "*Collective Responsibility*," which the Platform defines as "*the entire Union will be responsible for the political and revolutionary activity of each member; in the same way, each member will be responsible for the political and revolutionary activity of the Union.*" [Op. Cit., p. 32]

By this term, the Platform meant that each member should support the decisions made by the organisation and that each member should take part in the process of collective decision making process. Without this, argue Platformists, any decisions made will be paper decisions only as individuals and groups would ignore the agreements made by the federation (the Platform calls this "*the tactic of irresponsible individualism*" [Ibid.]). However, with "*Collective Responsibility*," the strength of all the individuals that make up the group is magnified and collectively applied. However, as one supporter of the Platform notes:

*"The Platform doesn't go into detail about how collective responsibility works in practice. There are issues it leaves untouched such as the question of people who oppose the majority view. We would argue that obviously people who oppose the view of the majority have a right to express their own views, however in doing so they must make clear that*

*they don't represent the view of the organisation. If a group of people within the organisation oppose the majority decision they have the right to organise and distribute information so that their arguments can be heard within the organisation as a whole. Part of our anarchism is the belief that debate and disagreement, freedom and openness strengthens both the individual and the group to which she or he belongs."* [Red and Black Revolution, no. 4, p. 30]

The last principle in the "*Organisational Section*" of the Platform is "*Federalism*," which it defines as "*the free agreement of individuals and organisations to work collectively towards a common objective*" and allows the "*reconcil[ing] the independence and initiative of individuals and the organisation with service to the common cause.*" [Op. Cit., p. 33] However, the Platform argues that this principle has been "*deformed*" within the movement to mean the "*right*" to "*manifest one's 'ego,' without obligation to account for duties as regards the organisation*" one is a member of. [Ibid.] In order to overcome this problem, they stress that "*the federalist type of anarchist organisation, while recognising each member's rights to independence, free opinion, individual liberty and initiative, requires each member to undertake fixed organisation duties, and demands execution of communal decisions.*" [Op. Cit., pp. 33-4]

As part of their solution to the problem of anarchist organisation, the Platform suggested that each group would have "*its secretariat, executing and guiding theoretically the political and technical work of the organisation.*" [Op. Cit., p. 34] Moreover, the Platform suggests that "*a special organ [must] be created: **the executive committee of the Union***" which would "*be in charge*" of "*the execution of decisions taken by the Union with which it is entrusted; the theoretical and organisational orientation of the activity of isolated organisations consistent with the theoretical positions and the general tactical lines of the Union; the monitoring of the general state of the movement; the maintenance of working and organisational links between all the organisations in the Union; and with other organisation.*" The rights, responsibilities and practical tasks of the executive committee are fixed by the congress of the Union. [Ibid.] This suggestion, unsurprisingly, meet with strong disapproval by most anarchists, as we will see in the [next section](#), who argued that this would turn the anarchist movement into a centralised, hierarchical party similar to the Bolsheviks. Needless to say, supporters of the Platform reject this argument and point out that the Platform itself is not written in stone and needs to be discussed fully and modified as required. In fact, few, if any, Platformist groups, do have this "*secretariat*" structure (it could, in fact, be argued that there are no actual "Platformist" groups, rather groups influenced by the Platform, namely on the issues of "*Theoretical and Tactical Unity*" and "*Collective Responsibility*").

Similarly, most modern day Platformists reject the idea of gathering all anarchists into one organisation. The original Platform seemed to imply that the **General Union** would be an umbrella organisation, which is made up of different groups and individuals. Most Platformists would argue that not only will there never be one organisation which encompasses everyone, they do not think it necessary. Instead they envisage the existence of a number of organisations, each internally unified, each co-operating with each other where possible, a much more amorphous and fluid entity than a General Union of Anarchists.

As well as the original Platform, most Platformists place the **Manifesto of Libertarian Communism** by Georges Fontenis and **Towards a Fresh Revolution** by the "*Friends of Durruti*" as landmark texts in the Platformist tradition. A few anarcho-syndicalists question this last claim, arguing that the "*Friends of Durruti*" manifesto has strong similarities with the CNT's pre-1936 position on revolution and thus is an anarcho-syndicalist document, going back to the position the CNT ignored after July 19th, 1936.

There are numerous Platformist and Platformist influenced organisations in the world today. These include the Irish based **Workers Solidarity Movement**, the British **Anarchist Communist Federation**, the French **Libertarian Alternative**, the Swiss **Libertarian Socialist Organisation**, the Italian **Federation of Anarchist Communists** and the South African **Workers Solidarity Federation**.

In the [next section](#) we discuss the objections that most anarchists have towards the Platform.

### J.3.4 Why do many anarchists oppose the "Platform"?

When the "Platform" was published it provoked a massive amount of debate and comment, the majority of it critical. The majority of famous anarchists rejected the Platform. Indeed, only Nestor Makhno (who co-authored the work) supported its proposals, with (among others) Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, Voline, G.P. Maximoff, Luigi Fabbri, Camilo Berneri and Errico Malatesta rejecting its suggestions on how anarchists should organise. All argued that the Platform was trying to "*Bolshevise anarchism*" or that the authors were too impressed by the "success" of the Bolsheviks in Russia. Since then, it has continued to provoke a lot of debate in anarchist circles. So why did so many anarchists then, and now, oppose the Platform?

While many of the anti-Platformists made points about most parts of the Platform (both Maximoff and Voline pointed out that while the Platform denied the need of a "*Transitional Period*" in theory, they accepted it in practice, for example) the main bone of contention was found in the "*Organisational Section*" with its call for "*Tactical and Theoretical Unity*," "*Collective Responsibility*" and group and executive "*secretariats*" guiding the organisation. Here most anarchists found ideas they considered incompatible with anarchist ideas. We will concentrate on this issue as it is usually considered as the most important.

Today, in some quarters of the libertarian movement, the Platformists are often dismissed as 'want-to-be leaders'. Yet this was not where Malatesta and other critics of the Platform took issue. Malatesta and Maximoff both argued in favour of, to use Maximoff's words, anarchists "*go[ing] into the masses. . . , work[ing] with them, struggle for their soul, and attempt to win it **ideologically** [sic!] and give it guidance.*" [**Constructive Anarchism**, p. 19] Moreover, as Maximoff notes, the "synthesis" anarchists come to the same conclusion. Thus all sides of the debate accepted that anarchists should take the lead. The question, as Malatesta and the others saw it, was not whether to lead, but rather how you should lead - a fairly important distinction in the argument. Following Bakunin, Maximoff argued that the question was "*not the rejection of leadership, but making certain it is **free and natural.***" [**Ibid.**] Malatesta made the same point and posed two 'alternatives': Either we "*provide leadership by advice and*



*example leaving people themselves to . . . adopt our methods and solutions if these are, or seem to be, better than those suggested and carried out by others...."* or we "*can also direct by taking over command, that is by becoming a government.*" He asked the Platformists, "*In which manner do you wish to direct?*" [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 108]

He goes on to say that while he thought, from his knowledge of Makhno and his work, that the answer must be the second way, he was "*assailed by doubt that [Makhno] would also like to see, within the general movement, a central body that would, in an authoritarian manner, dictate the theoretical and practical programme for the revolution.*" This was because of the "*Executive Committee*" in the Platform which would "*give ideological and organisational direction to the [anarchist] association.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 110]

Maximoff makes the same point when he notes that when the Platform argues that anarchists must "*enter into revolutionary trade unions as an organised force, responsible to accomplish work in the union before the general anarchist organisation and orientated by the latter*" [**The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists**, p. 25] this implies that anarchists in the unions are responsible to the anarchist federation, **not** to the union assemblies that elected them. As he puts it, according to the Platform, anarchists "*are to join the Trades Unions with ready-made recipes and are to carry out their plans, if necessary, against the will of the Unions themselves.*" [**Constructive Anarchism**, p. 19] However, Maximoff's argument may be considered harsh as the Platform argues that anarchism "*aspires neither to political power nor dictatorship*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 21] and so they would hardly be urging the opposite principles within the trade union movement. If we take the Platform's comments within a context informed by the "*leadership of ideas*" concept (see [section J.3.6](#)) then what they meant was simply that the anarchist group would convince the union members of the validity of their ideas by argument and so the disagreement becomes one of unclear (or bad) use of language by the Platform's authors. Something Maximoff would not have disagreed with, we are sure.

Despite many efforts and many letters on the subject (in particular between Malatesta and Makhno) the question of "leadership" could not be clarified to either side's satisfaction, in part because there was an additional issue for dispute. This was the related issue of organisational principles (which in themselves make up the defining part of the original Platform). Malatesta argued that this did not conform with anarchist methods and principles, and so could not "*help bring about the triumph of anarchism.*" [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 97] This was because of two main reasons, the first being the issue of the Platform's "secretariats" and "executive committee" and the issue of "Collective Responsibility." We will take each in turn.

With an structure based round "secretariats" and "executive committees" the "*will of the [General] Union [of Anarchists] can only mean the will of the majority, expressed through congresses which nominate and control the **Executive Committee** and decide on all important issues. Naturally, the congresses would consist of representatives elected by the majority of member groups . . . So, in the best of cases, the decisions would be taken by a majority of a majority, and this could easily, especially when the opposing opinions are more than two, represent only a minority.*" This, he argues, "*comes down to a*

*pure majority system, to pure parliamentarianism*" and so non-anarchist in nature. [Op. Cit., p. 100]

As long as a Platformist federation is based on "secretariats" and "executive committees" directing the activity and development of the organisation, this critique is valid. In such a system, as these bodies control the organisation and members are expected to follow their decisions (due to "theoretical and tactical unity" and "collective responsibility") they are, in effect, the government of the association. While this government may be elected and accountable, it is still a government simply because these bodies have executive power. As Maximoff argues, individual initiative in the Platform *"has a special character . . . Each organisation (i.e. association of members with the right to individual initiative) has its secretariat which . . . directs the ideological, political and technical activities of the organisation . . . In what, then, consists the self-reliant activities of the rank-and-file members? Apparently in one thing: initiative to obey the secretariat and carry out its directives."* [Constructive Anarchism, p. 18] This seems to be the logical conclusion of the structure suggested by the Platform. *"The spirit,"* argued Malatesta, *"the tendency remains authoritarian and the educational effect would remain anti-anarchist."* [The Anarchist Revolution, p. 98]

Malatesta, in contrast, argued that an anarchist organisation must be based on the *"[f]ull autonomy, full independence and therefore the full responsibility of individuals and groups"* with all organisational work done *"freely, in such a way that the thought and initiative of individuals is not obstructed."* The individual members of such an organisation *"express any opinion and use any tactic which is not in contradiction with accepted principles and which does not harm the activities of others."* Moreover, the administrative bodies such organisations nominate would *"have no executive powers, have no directive powers"* leaving it up to the groups and their federal meetings to decide their own fates. While they may be representative bodies, the congresses of such organisations would be *"free from any kind of authoritarianism, because they do not lay down the law; they do not impose their own resolutions on others. . . and do not become binding and enforceable except on those who accept them."* [Op. Cit., p. 101, p. 102, p. 101] Such an organisation does not exclude collective decisions and self-assumed obligations, rather it is based upon them.

Most groups inspired by the Platform, however, seem to reject this aspect of its organisational suggestions. Instead of "secretariats" and "executive committees" they have regular conferences and meetings to reach collective decisions on issues and practice unity that way. Thus the **really** important issue is of "theoretical and tactical unity" and "collective responsibility," not in the structure suggested by the Platform. Indeed, this issue was the main topic in Makhno's letter to Malatesta, for example, and so we would be justified in saying that this is the key issues dividing "Platformists" from other anarchists.

So in what way did Malatesta disagree with this concept? As we mentioned in the [last section](#), the Platform defined the idea of "Collective Responsibility" as *"the entire Union will be responsible for the political and revolutionary activity of each member; in the same way, each member will be responsible for the political and revolutionary activity of the Union."* To which Malatesta commented as follows:

*"But if the Union is responsible for what each member does, how can it leave to its members and to the various groups the freedom to apply the common programme in the way they think best? How can one be responsible for an action if it does not have the means to prevent it? Therefore, the Union and in its name the Executive Committee, would need to monitor the action of the individual member and order them what to do and what not to do; and since disapproval after the event cannot put right a previously accepted responsibility, no-one would be able to do anything at all before having obtained the go-ahead, the permission of the committee. And, on the other hand, can an individual accept responsibility for the actions of a collectivity before knowing what it will do and if he cannot prevent it doing what he disapproves of?" [Op. Cit., p. 99]*

In other words, the term "collective responsibility" (if taken literally) implies a highly inefficient and somewhat authoritarian mode of organisation. Before any action could be undertaken, the organisation would have to be consulted and this would crush individual, group and local initiative. The organisation would respond slowly to developing situations, if at all, and this response would not be informed by first hand knowledge and experience. Moreover, this form of organisation implies a surrendering of individual judgement, as members would have to *"submit to the decisions of the majority before they have even heard what those might be."* [Op. Cit., 101] In the end, all a member could do would be to leave the organisation if they disagree with a tactic or position and could not bring themselves to further it by their actions.

This structure also suggests that the Platform's commitment to federalism is in words only. As most anarchists critical of the Platform argued, while its authors affirm federalist principles they, in fact, *"outline a perfectly centralised organisation with an Executive Committee that has responsibility to give ideological and organisational direction to the different anarchist organisations, which in turn will direct the professional organisations of the workers."* ["The Reply", **Constructive Anarchism**, pp. 35-6]

Thus it is likely that "Collective Responsibility" taken to its logical end would actually **hinder** anarchist work by being too bureaucratic and slow. Let us assume that by applying collective responsibility as well as tactical and theoretical unity, anarchist resources and time will be more efficiently utilised. However, what is the point of being "efficient" if the collective decision reached is wrong or is inapplicable to many areas? Rather than local groups applying their knowledge of local conditions and developing theories and policies that reflect these conditions (and co-operating from the bottom up), they may be forced to apply inappropriate policies due to the "Unity" of the Platformist organisation. It is true that Makhno argued that the *"activities of local organisations can be adapted, as far as possible, to suit local conditions"* but only if they are *"consonant with the pattern of the overall organisational practice of the Union of anarchists covering the whole country."* [**The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays**, p. 62] Which still begs the question on the nature of the Platform's unity (however, it does suggest that the Platform's position may be less extreme than might be implied by the text, as we will discuss). That is why anarchists have traditionally supported federalism and free agreement within their organisations, to take into account the real needs of localities.

However, if we do not take the Platform's definition of "Collective Responsibility" literally or to its

logical extreme (as Makhno's comments suggest) then the differences between Platformists and non-Platformists may not be that far. As Malatesta pointed out in his reply to Makhno's letter:

*"I accept and support the view that anyone who associates and co-operates with others for a common purpose must feel the need to co-ordinate his [or her] actions with those of his [or her] fellow members and do nothing that harms the work of others . . . and respect the agreements that have been made. . . [Moreover] I maintain that those who do not feel and do not practice that duty should be thrown out the of the association.*

*"Perhaps, speaking of collective responsibility, you mean precisely that accord and solidarity that must exist among members of an association. And if that is so, your expression amounts. . . to an incorrect use of language, but basically it would only be an unimportant question of wording and agreement would soon be reached." [Op. Cit., pp. 107-8]*

This, indeed, seems to be the way that most Platformist organisation do operate. They have agreed broad theoretical and tactical positions on various subjects (such as, for example, the nature of trade unions and how anarchists relate to them) while leaving it to local groups to act within these guidelines. Moreover, the local groups do not have to report to the organisation before embarking on an activity. In other words, most Platformist groups do not take the Platform literally and so many differences are, to a large degree, a question of wording.

While many anarchists are critical of Platformist groups for being too centralised for their liking, it is the case that the Platform has influenced many anarchist organisations, even non-Platformist ones (this can be seen in the "class struggle" groups discussed in the [next section](#)). This influence has been both ways, with the criticism the original Platform was subjected to having had an effect on how Platformist groups have developed. This, of course, does not imply that there is little or no difference between Platformists and other anarchists. Platformist groups tend to stress "collective responsibility" and "theoretical and tactical unity" more than others, which has caused problems when Platformists have worked within "synthesis" organisations (as was the case in France, for example, which resulted in much bad-feeling between Platformists and others).

**Constructive Anarchism** by the leading Russian anarcho-syndicalist G.P. Maximoff gathers all the relevant documents in one place. As well as Maximoff's critique of the Platform, it includes the "synthesis" reply and the exchange of letters between Malatesta and Makhno on the former's critical article on the Platform (which is also included). **The Anarchist Revolution** also contains Malatesta's article and the exchange of letters between him and Makhno.

### J.3.5 Are there other kinds of anarchist federation?

Another type of anarchist federation is what we term the "*class struggle*" group. Many local anarchist groups in Britain, for example organise in this fashion. They use the term "class struggle" to indicate that

their anarchism is based on collective working class resistance as opposed to reforming capitalism via lifestyle changes and the support of, say, co-operatives (many "class struggle" anarchists do these things, of course, but they are aware that they cannot create an anarchist society by doing so). We follow this use of the term here. And just to stress the point again, our use of "class struggle" to describe this type of anarchist federation and group does not imply that "synthesis" or "Platformist" do not support the class struggle. They do!

This kind of group is half-way between the "synthesis" and the "Platform." The "class struggle" group agrees with the "synthesis" in so far as it is important to have a diverse viewpoints within a federation and that it would be a mistake to try to impose a common-line on different groups in different circumstances as the Platform does. However, like the "Platform," the class struggle group recognises that there is little point in creating a forced union between totally different strands of anarchism. Thus the "class struggle" group rejects the idea that individualist or mutualist anarchists should be part of the same organisation as anarchist communists or syndicalists or that anarcho-pacifists should join forces with non-pacifists. Thus the "class struggle" group acknowledges that an organisation which contains viewpoints which are dramatically opposed can lead to pointless debates and the paralysis of action due to the impossibilities of overcoming those differences.

Instead, the "class struggle" group agrees a common set of "aims and principles" which are the basic terms of agreement within the federation. If an individual or group does not agree with this statement then they cannot join. If they are members and try to change this statement and cannot get the others to agree its modification, then they are morally bound to leave the organisation. In other words, the aims and principles is the framework within which individuals and groups apply their own ideas and their interpretation of agreed policies. It means that individuals in a group and the groups within a federation have something to base their local activity on, something which has been agreed collectively. Hence, there would be a common thread to activities and a guide to action (particularly in situations where a group or federation meeting cannot be called). In this way individual initiative and co-operation can be reconciled, without hindering either. In addition, the "*aims and principles*" would show potential members where the anarchist group was coming from.

Such a federation, like all anarchist groups, would be based upon regular assemblies locally and in frequent regional, national, etc., conferences to continually re-evaluate policies, tactics, strategies and goals. In addition, such meetings prevent power from collecting in the higher administration committees created to co-ordinate activity. The regular conferences aim to create federation policies on specific topics and agree common strategies. Such policies, once agreed, are morally binding on the membership, who can review and revise them as required at a later stage but cannot take action which would hinder their application (they do not have to apply them themselves, if they consider them as a big mistake). In other words, "*[i]n an anarchist organisation the individual members can express any opinion and use any tactic which is not in contradiction with accepted principles and which does not harm the activities of others.*" [Errico Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 102]

For example, minorities in such a federation can pursue their own policies as long as they clearly state that theirs is a minority position and does not contradict the federation's aims and principles. In this way

the anarchist federation combines united action and dissent, for no general policy will be applicable in all circumstances and it is better for minorities to make mistakes than for them to pursue policies which they know will make even greater problems in their area. As long as their actions and policies do not contradict the federations basic political ideas, then diversity is an essential means for ensuring that the best tactic and ideas are identified. The problem with the "synthesis" grouping is that any such basic political ideas would be hard to agree and be so watered down as to be almost useless (for example, a federation combining individualist and communist anarchists would find it impossible to agree on such things as the necessity for communism, communal ownership, and so on).

Thus, supporters of the "class struggle" group agree with Malatesta when he argued that anarchist groups must be founded on "*[f]ull autonomy, full independence and therefore full responsibility of individuals and groups; free accord between those who believe it is useful to unite in co-operating for a common aim; moral duty to see through commitments undertaken and to do nothing that would contradict the accepted programme. It is on these bases that the practical structures, and the right tools to give life to the organisation should be built and designed. Then the groups, the federations of groups, the federations of federations, the meetings, the congresses, the correspondence committees and so forth. But all this must be done freely, in such a way that the thought and initiative of individuals is not obstructed, and with the sole view of giving greater effect to efforts which, in isolation, would be either impossible or ineffective.*" [Op. Cit., p. 101]

The "class struggle" group, like all anarchist groupings, is convinced that (to use Murray Bookchin's words) "*anarcho-communism cannot remain a mere mood or tendency, wafting in the air like a cultural ambience. It must be organised -- indeed **well-organised** -- if it is effectively articulate and spread this new sensibility; it must have a coherent theory and extensive literature; it must be capable of duelling with the authoritarian movements [capitalist or state socialist] that try to denature the intuitive libertarian impulses of our time and channel social unrest into hierarchical forms of organisation.*" ["Looking Back at Spain," pp. 53-96, **The Radical Papers**, p. 90]

### J.3.6 What role do these groups play in anarchist theory?

The aim of these groups and federations is to spread anarchist ideas within society and within social movements. They aim to convince people of the validity of anarchist ideas and analysis, of the need for a libertarian transformation of society and of themselves. They do so by working with others as equals and "*through advice and example, leaving people . . . to adopt our methods and solutions if these are, or seem to be, better than those suggested and carried out by others.*" [Errico Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 108]

The role of "affinity groups" and their federations play a key role in anarchist theory. This is because anarchists are well aware that there are different levels of knowledge and consciousness in society. While it is a basic element of anarchism that people learn through struggle and their own experiences, it is also a fact that different people develop at different speeds, that each individual is unique and subject to different influences. As one anarchist pamphlet puts it, the "*experiences of working class life*

*constantly lead to the development of ideas and actions which question the established order . . . At the same time, different sections of the working class reach different degrees of consciousness."* [**The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation**, p.3] This can easily be seen from any group of individuals of the same class or even community. Some are anarchists, others Marxists, some social democrats/labourites, others conservatives, other liberals, most "apolitical," some support trade unions, others are against and so on.

Because they are aware that they are one tendency among many, anarchists organise as anarchists to influence social struggle. Only when anarchist ideas are accepted by the vast majority will an anarchist society be possible. We wish, in other words, to win the most widespread understanding and influence for anarchist ideas and methods in the working class and in society, primarily because we believe that these alone will ensure a successful revolutionary transformation of society. Hence Malatesta's argument that anarchists *"must strive to acquire overwhelming influence in order to draw the movement towards the realisation of our ideals. But such influence must be won by doing more and better than others, and will be useful of won in that way . . . [therefore] we must deepen, develop and propagate our ideas and co-ordinate our forces in a common action. We must act within the labour movement to prevent it being limited to and corrupted by the exclusive pursuit of small improvements compatible with the capitalist system. . . We must work with . . . [all the] masses to awaken the spirit of revolt and the desire for a free and happy life. We must initiate and support all movements that tend to weaken the forces of the State and of capitalism and to raise the mental level and material conditions of the workers."* [**Life and Ideas**, p. 109]

Anarchist organisation exists to help the process by which people come to anarchist conclusions. It aims to make explicit the feelings and thoughts that people have (such as, wage slavery is hell, that the state exists to rip people off and so on) by exposing as wrong common justifications for existing society and social relationships by a process of debate and providing a vision of something better. In other words, anarchist organisations seek to explain and clarify what is happening in society and show why anarchism is the only real solution to social problems. As part of this, we also have combat false ideas such as Liberalism, Social Democracy, right-wing Libertarianism, Leninism and so on, indicating why these proposed solutions are not real ones. In addition, an anarchist organisation must also be a 'collective memory' for the oppressed, keeping alive and developing the traditions of the labour movement and anarchism so that new generations of anarchists have a body of experience to build upon and use in their struggles.

Anarchist organisations see themselves in the role of aiders, **not** leaders. As Voline argued, the minority which is politically aware minority *"should intervene. But, in every place and under all circumstances, . . . [they] should freely participate in the common work, as true collaborators, not as dictators. It is necessary that they especially create an example, and employ themselves. . . without dominating, subjugating, or oppressing anyone. . . Accordingly to the libertarian thesis, it is the labouring masses themselves, who, by means of the various class organisations, factory committees, industrial and agricultural unions, co-operatives, et cetera, federated. . . should apply themselves everywhere, to solving the problems of waging the Revolution. . . As for the 'elite' [i.e. the politically aware], their role, according to the libertarians, is to help the masses, enlighten them, teach them, give*

*them necessary advice, impel them to take initiative, provide them with an example, and support them in their action -- but not to direct them governmentally.*" [The Unknown Revolution, pp. 177-8]

This role is usually called providing a "*leadership of ideas*" (Bakunin used the unfortunate term "*invisible dictatorship*" to express approximately the same idea -- see [section J.3.7](#) for details).

Anarchists stress the difference of this concept with authoritarian notions of "leadership" such as Leninist ideas about party leadership where in members of the vanguard party are elected to positions of power or responsibility within an organisation. While both anarchist and Leninist organisations exist to overcome the problem of "uneven development" within the working class (i.e. the existence of many different political opinions within it), the aims, role and structure of these groups could not be more different. Essentially, Leninist parties (as well as reproducing hierarchical structures within the so-called "revolutionary" organisation) see socialist politics as arising **outside** the working class, in the radical intelligentsia (see Lenin's **What is to be Done** for details) rather than as the product of working class experience (in this, we must add, Lenin was following standard Social Democratic theory and the ideas of Karl Kautsky -- the "Pope of Marxism" -- in particular).

Anarchists, on the other hand, argue that rather than being the product of "outside" influence, (libertarian) socialist ideas are the natural product of working class life. In other words, (libertarian) socialist ideas come from **within** the working class. Bakunin, for example, constantly referred to the "*socialist instinct*" of the working classes and argued that the socialist ideal was "*necessarily the product of the people's historical experience*" and that workers "*most basic instinct and their social situation makes them . . . socialists. They are socialists because of all the conditions of their material existence.*" [quoted by Richard B. Saltman, **The Social and Political Thought of Michael Bakunin**, p. 100, **The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 101-2]

Needless to say, instinct in itself is not enough (if it was, we would be living in an anarchist society!) and so Bakunin, like all anarchists, stressed the importance of self-liberation and self-education through struggle in order to change "*instinct*" into "*thought*." He argued that there was "*but a single path, that of emancipation through practical action . . . [by] workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses. It means trade unions, organisation, and the federation of resistance funds . . . [Once the worker] begins to fight, in association with his comrades, for the reduction of his working hours and for an increase in his salary. . .and become[s] increasingly accustomed to relying on the collective strength of the workers . . . The worker thus enlisted in the struggle will necessarily . . . recognise himself [or herself] to be a revolutionary socialist.*" [The Basic Bakunin, p. 103]

In addition to recognising the importance of popular organisations (such as trade unions) and of direct action in developing libertarian socialist thought, Bakunin also stressed the need for anarchist groups to work with these organisations and on the mass of the population in general. These groups would play an important role in helping to clarify the ideas of those in struggle and undermining the internal and external barriers against these ideas. The first of these are what Emma Goldman termed the "*internal tyrants*," the "*ethical and social conventions*" of existing, hierarchical society which accustom people to



authoritarian social relationships, injustice, lack of freedom and so on. External barriers are what Chomsky terms "*the Manufacture of Consent*," the process by which the population at large are influenced to accept the status quo and the dominant elites viewpoint via the education system and media. It is this "manufacture of consent" which helps explain why, relatively speaking, there are so few anarchists even though we argue that anarchism is the natural product of working class life. While, objectively, the experiences of life drives working class people to resist domination and oppression, they enter that struggle with a history behind them, a history of education in capitalist schools, of reading pro-capitalist papers, and so on.

This means that while social struggle is radicalising, it also has to combat years of pro-state and pro-capitalist influences. So even if an anarchist consciousness springs from the real conditions of working class life, because we live in a class society there are numerous counter-tendencies that **inhibit** the development of that consciousness (such as religion, current morality the media, pro-business and pro-state propaganda, state and business repression and so on). This explains the differences in political opinion within the working class, as people develop at different speeds and are subject to different influences and experiences. However, the numerous internal and external barriers to the development of anarchist opinions created our "internal tyrants" and by the process of "manufacturing consent" can be, and are, weakened by rational discussion as well as social struggle and self-activity. Indeed, until such time as we "*learned to defy them all [the internal tyrants], to stand firmly on [our] own ground and to insist upon [our] own unrestricted freedom*" we can never be free or successfully combat the "manufacture of consent." [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, p. 140] And this is where the anarchist group can play a part, for there is an important role to be played by those who have been through this process already, namely to aid those going through it.

Of course the activity of an anarchist group does not occur in a vacuum. In periods of low class struggle, where there is little collective action, anarchist ideas will seem to be utopian and so dismissed by most. In these situations, only a few will become anarchists simply because the experiences of working people do not breed confidence that an alternative is possible to the current system. In addition, if anarchist groups are small, many who are looking for an alternative may join other groups which are more visible and express a libertarian sounding rhetoric (such as Leninist groups, who often talk about workers' control, workers' councils and so on while meaning something distinctly different from what anarchists mean by these terms). However, as the class struggle increases and people become more inclined to take collective action, they can become empowered and radicalised by their own activity and be more open to anarchist ideas and the possibility of changing society. In these situations, anarchist groups grow and the influence in anarchist ideas increases. This also explains why anarchist ideas are not as widespread as they could be. It also indicates another important role for the anarchist group, namely to provide an environment and space where those drawn to anarchist ideas can meet and share experiences and ideas during periods of reaction.

The role of the anarchist group, therefore, is **not** to import a foreign ideology into the working class, but rather to help develop and clarify the ideas of those working class people who are moving from "instinct" to the "ideal" and so aid those undergoing that development. They would aid this development by providing propaganda which exposes the current social system (and the rationales for it) as bankrupt

as well as encouraging resistance to oppression and exploitation. The former, for Bakunin, allowed the *"bringing [of] a more just general expression, a new and more congenial form to the existent instincts of the proletariat . . . [which] can sometimes facilitate and precipitate development . . . [and] give them an awareness of what they have, of what they feel, of what they already instinctively desire, but never can it give to them what they don't have."* The latter *"is the most popular, the most potent, and the most irresistible form of propaganda"* and *"awake[s] in the masses all the social-revolutionary instincts which reside deeply in the heart of every worker"* so allowing instinct to become transformed into *"reflected socialist thought."* [cited by Richard B. Saltman, **The Social and Political Thought of Michael Bakunin**, p. 107, p. 108 and p. 141]

In other words, *"the [anarchist] organisation cannot see itself solely as a propaganda group. Above all it is an assembly of activists. It must actively work in all the grassroots organisations of the working class such as rank and file [trade union] groups, tenants associations, squatters and unemployed groups as well as women's, black and gay groups . . . It does not try to make these movements into an appendage of the revolutionary organisation just as it respects the autonomy and self-organisation of the rank and file workers movement that may develop . . . [while] spread[ing] its ideas in these movements."* [**The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation**, p.5] Such an organisation is not vanguardist in the Leninist sense as it recognises that socialist politics derive from working class experience, rather than "science" (as Lenin and Kautsky argued), and that it does not aim to dominate popular movements but rather work within them as equals.

Indeed, Bakunin (in his discussion of the evils of the idea of god) presents an excellent summary of why Leninist ideas of vanguardism always end up created the dictatorship of the party rather than socialism. As he put it:

*"[F]rom the moment that the natural inferiority of man and his fundamental incapacity to rise by his own effort, unaided by any divine inspiration, to the comprehension of just and true ideas, are admitted. it becomes necessary to admit also all the theological, political, and social consequences of the positive religions. From the moment that God, the perfect supreme being, is posited face to face with humanity, divine mediators, the elect, the inspired of God spring from the earth to enlighten, direct, and govern in his name the human race."* [**God and the State**, p. 37]

In **What is to be Done?**, Lenin argued that socialist *"consciousness could only be brought to [the workers] from without. . . the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade union consciousness"* and that the *"theory of socialism"* was developed by *"the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals"* and, in so doing, replaced God with Marxism [**The Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 74] Hence Trotsky's comments at the Communist Party's 1921 congress that *"the Party [is] entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy!"* and that it is *"obliged to maintain its dictatorship . . . regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class"* come as no surprise [quoted by M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 78]. They are just the logical, evil consequences of vanguardism (and, of course, it is the Party -- upholders of the correct ideology , of *"scientific"* socialism-- which

determines what is a "*passing mood*" or a "*temporary vacillation*" and so dictatorship is the logical consequence of Leninism). The validity of Bakunin's argument can easily be recognised. Little wonder anarchists reject the concept of vanguardism totally.

So while we recognise that "advanced" sections do exist within the working class and that anarchists are one such section, we also recognise that **central** characteristic of anarchism is that its politics are derived from the concrete experience of fighting capitalism and statism directly -- that is, from the realities of working class life. This means that anarchists must also learn from working class people in struggle. If we recognise that anarchist ideas are the product of working class experience and self-activity and that these constantly change and develop in light of new experiences and struggles then anarchist theory **must be open to change by learning from non-anarchists**. Not to recognise this fact is to open the door to vanguardism and dogma. Because of this fact, anarchists argue that the relationship between anarchists and non-anarchists must be an egalitarian one, based on mutual interaction and the recognition that no one is infallible or have all the answers -- particularly anarchists! With this in mind, while we recognise the presence of "advanced" groups within the working class (which obviously reflects the uneven development within it), anarchists aim to minimise such unevenness by the way anarchist organisations intervene in social struggle, intervention based on involving **all** in the decision making process (as we discuss below).

Thus the general aim of anarchist groups is to spread ideas -- such as general anarchist analysis of society and current events, libertarian forms of organisation, direct action and solidarity and so forth -- and win people over to anarchism (i.e. to "make" anarchists). This involves both propaganda and participate as equals in social struggle and popular organisation. Anarchists do not think that changing leaders is a solution to the problem of (bad) leadership. Rather, it is a question of making leaders redundant by empowering all. As Malatesta argued, we "*do not want to **emancipate** the people; we want the people to **emancipate themselves**.*" [Op. Cit., p. 90] Thus anarchists "*advocate and practise direct action, decentralisation, autonomy and individual initiative; they should make special efforts to help members [of popular organisations] learn to participate directly in the life of the organisation and to dispense with leaders and full-time functionaries.*" [Op. Cit., p. 125]

This means that anarchists reject the idea that anarchist groups and federations must become the "leaders" of organisations. Rather, we desire anarchist ideas to be commonplace in society and in popular organisations, so that leadership by people from positions of power is replaced by the "*natural influence*" (to use Bakunin's term) of activists within the rank and file on the decisions made **by** the rank and file. While we will discuss Bakunin's ideas in more detail in [section J.3.7](#), the concept of "*natural influence*" can be gathered from this comment of Francisco Ascaso (friend of Durruti and an influential anarchist militant in the CNT and FAI in his own right):

*"There is not a single militant who as a 'FAIista' intervenes in union meetings. I work, therefore I am an exploited person. I pay my dues to the workers' union and when I intervene at union meetings I do it as someone who is exploited, and with the right which is granted me by the card in my possession, as do the other militants, whether they belong*

*to the FAI or not.*" [cited by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 137]

This shows the nature of the "leadership of ideas." Rather than be elected to a position of power or responsibility, the anarchist presents their ideas at mass meetings and argues his or her case. This means obviously implies a two-way learning process, as the anarchist learns from the experiences of others and the others come in contact with anarchist ideas. Moreover, it is an egalitarian relationship, based upon discussion between equals rather than urging people to place someone into power above them. And it ensures that everyone in the organisation participants in making, understands and agrees with the decisions reached. This obviously helps the political development of all involved (including, we must stress, the anarchists). As Durruti argued, *"the man [or woman] who alienates his will, can never be free to express himself and follow his own ideas at a union meeting if he feel dominated by the feeblest orator. . . As long as a man doesn't think for himself and doesn't assume his own responsibilities, there will be no complete liberation of human beings."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 184]

Because of our support for the "leadership of ideas", anarchists think that all popular organisations must be open, fully self-managed and free from authoritarianism. Only in this way can ideas and discussion play an important role in the life of the organisation. Since anarchists *"do not believe in the good that comes from above and imposed by force. . .[and] want the new way of life to emerge from the body of the people and advance as they advance. It matters to use therefore that all interests and opinions find their expression in a conscious organisation and should influence communal life in proportion to their importance."* [Errico Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 90] Bakunin's words with regards the first International Workers Association indicate this clearly:

*"It must be a people's movement, organised from the bottom up by the free, spontaneous action of the masses. There must be no secret governmentalism, the masses must be informed of everything . . . All the affairs of the International must be thoroughly and openly discussed without evasions and circumlocutions."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 408]

(Such a assertion by Bakunin may come as a surprise to some readers who are aware -- usually via Marxist sources -- that Bakunin argued for a *"invisible dictatorship"* in some of his letters. As we discuss in [section J.3.7](#), the claims that Bakunin was a closet authoritarian are simply wrong.)

Equally as important as **how** anarchists intervene in social struggles and popular organisations and the organisation of those struggles and organisations, there is the question of the nature of that intervention. We would like to quote the following by the British libertarian socialist group **Solidarity** as it sums up the underlying nature of anarchist action and the importance of a libertarian perspective on social struggle and change and how politically aware minorities work within them:

*"**Meaningful action**, for revolutionaries, is whatever increases the confidence, the autonomy, the initiative, the participation, the solidarity, the egalitarian tendencies and the self-activity of the masses and whatever assists in their demystification. **Sterile and***

*harmful action* is whatever reinforces the passivity of the masses, their apathy, their cynicism, their differentiation through hierarchy, their alienation, their reliance on others to do things for them and the degree to which they can therefore be manipulated by others - even by those allegedly acting on their behalf." [As We See it]

Part of this "meaningful action" involves encouraging people to "*act for yourselves*" (to use Kropotkin's words). As we noted in [section A.2.7](#), anarchism is based on self-liberation and self-activity is key aspect of this. Hence Malatesta's argument:

*"Our task is that of 'pushing' the people to demand and to seize all the freedom they can and to make themselves responsible for providing their own needs without waiting for orders from any kind of authority. Our task is that of demonstrating the uselessness and harmfulness of government, provoking and encouraging by propaganda and action, all kinds of individual and collective activities.*

*"It is in fact a question of education for freedom, of making people who are accustomed to obedience and passivity consciously aware of their real power and capabilities. One must encourage people to do things for themselves. . . "* [Op. Cit., pp. 178-9]

This "pushing" people to "do it themselves" is another key role for any anarchist organisation. The encouragement of direct action is just as important as anarchist propaganda and popular participation within social struggle and popular organisations.

As such social struggle developments, the possibility of revolution becomes closer and closer. While we discuss anarchists ideas on social revolution in [section J.7](#), we must note here that the role of the anarchist organisation does not change. As Murray Bookchin argues, anarchists "*seek to persuade the factory committees, assemblies [and other organisations created by people in struggle] . . . to make themselves into genuine organs of popular self-management, not to dominate them, manipulate them, or hitch them to an all-knowing political party.*" [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, p. 217] In this way, by encouraging self-management in struggle, anarchist lay the foundations of a self-managed society.

### **J.3.7 Doesn't Bakunin's "*Invisible Dictatorship*" prove that anarchists are secret authoritarians?**

This claim is often made by Leninists and other Marxists and expresses a distinct, even wilful, misunderstanding of the role revolutionaries should play in popular movements and the ideas of Bakunin on this issue. In actual fact, the term "*invisible dictatorship*" does not prove that Bakunin or anarchists are secret authoritarians, for reasons we will explain.

Marxists quote Bakunin's terms "*invisible dictatorship*" and "*collective dictatorship*" out of context, using it to "prove" that anarchists are secret authoritarians, seeking dictatorship over the masses. More

widely, the question of Bakunin and his "invisible dictatorship" finds its way into the most sympathetic accounts of anarchist ideas. For example, Peter Marshall writes that it is *"not difficult to conclude that Bakunin's invisible dictatorship would be even more tyrannical than a . . . Marxist one"* and that it expressed a *"profound authoritarian and dissimulating streak in his life and work."* [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 287] So, the question of setting the record straight about this aspect of Bakunin's theory is of more importance than just correcting a few Leninists. In addition, to do so will help clarify the concept of *"leadership of ideas"* we discussed in the [last section](#). For both these reasons, this section, while initially appearing somewhat redundant and of interest only to academics, is of a far wider interest.

It is particularly ironic that Leninists (followers of a person who created an actual, **very visible**, dictatorship) accuse anarchists of seeking to create a "dictatorship" -- but then again, irony and a sense of humour is not usually noted in Leninists and Trotskyists. In a similar fashion, they (quite rightly) attack Bakunin for being anti-Jewish but keep quiet strangely quiet on Marx and Engels anti-Slavism. Indeed, Marx once published an article by Engels which actually preached race hatred and violence -- *"that hatred of the Russians was and remains the primary revolutionary passion of the Germans; and since the revolution it extends to the Czechs and the Croatsians . . . we . . . can safeguard the revolution only by the most determined terrorism against these Slavic peoples"* and that the *"stubborn Czechs and the Slovaks should be grateful to the Germans, who have taken the trouble to civilise them."* [cited in **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p.432] Obviously being anti-Slavic is okay, being anti-Jewish is not (they also keep quiet on Marx's anti-Jewish comments). The hypocrisy is clear.

Actually, it is in their attempts to smear anarchism with closet authoritarianism that the authoritarianism of the Marxists come to the fore. For example, in the British Socialist Workers Party journal **International Socialism** number 52, we find this treat of "logic." Anarchism is denounced for being *"necessarily deeply anti-democratic"* due to its *"thesis of the absolute sovereignty of the individual ego."* Then Hal Draper is quoted arguing that *"[o]f all ideologies, anarchism is the most fundamentally anti-democratic in principle."* [p. 145] So, because anarchism favours individuals being free and making their own decisions, it is **less** democratic than Fascism, Nazism and Stalinism! Makes you wonder what they mean by democracy if ideologies which actively promote leader worship and party/leader dictatorships are more "democratic" than anarchism! Of course, in actuality, for most anarchists individual sovereignty implies direct democracy in free associations (see, for example, [section A.2.11](#) or Robert Graham's excellent essay *"The Anarchist Contract"* in **Reinventing Anarchy, Again**). Any "democracy" which is not based on individual freedom is too contradictory to be taken seriously.

But to return to our subject. Anarchists have two responses to claims that Bakunin (and, by implication, all anarchists) seek an *"invisible"* dictatorship and so are not true libertarians. Firstly, and this is the point we will concentrate upon in this section, Bakunin's expression is taken out of context and when placed within its context it takes on a radically different meaning than that implied by critics of Bakunin and anarchism. Secondly, even **if** the expression means what the critics claim it does, it does not refute anarchism as a political theory (any more than Bakunin's racism or Proudhon's sexism and racism). This is because anarchists are **not** Bakuninists (or Proudhonists or Kropotkinites or any other person-ist). We

recognise other anarchists as what they are, human beings who said lots of important and useful things but, like any other human being, they make mistakes and often do not live up to all of their ideas. For anarchists, it is a question of extracting the useful parts from their works and rejecting the useless (as well as the downright nonsense!). Just because Bakunin said something, it does not make it right! This common-sense approach to politics seems to be lost on Marxists. Indeed, if we take the logic of these Marxists to its conclusion, we must reject everything Rousseau wrote (he was sexist), Marx and Engels (their comments against Slavs spring to mind, along with numerous other racist comments) and so on. But, of course, this never happens to non-anarchist thinkers when Marxists write their articles and books.

However, to return to our main argument, that of the importance of context. What does the context around Bakunin's term "*invisible dictatorship*" bring to the discussion? Simply that whenever Bakunin uses the term "invisible" or "collective" dictatorship he also explicitly states his opposition to government (or official) power and **in particular** the idea that anarchist organisations should take such power. For example, the **International Socialist** review mentioned above quotes the following passage from "*a Bakuninist document*" to "prove" that the "*principle of anti-democracy was to leave Bakunin unchallenged at the apex of power*":

*"It is necessary that in the midst of popular anarchy, which will constitute the very life and energy of the revolution, unity of thought and revolutionary action should find an organ. This organ must be the secret and world-wide association of the international brethren."*

This passage is from point 9 of Bakunin's "*Programme and Purpose of the Revolutionary Organisation of International Brothers*." In the sentence **immediately before** those quoted, Bakunin stated that "*[t]his organisation rules out any idea of dictatorship and custodial control.*" [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 172] Strange that this part of point 9 of the programme was not quoted! Nor do they quote Bakunin when he wrote, in point 4 of the same programme, "*[w]e are the natural enemies of those revolutionaries -- future dictators, regimentors and custodians of revolution -- who. . . [want] to create new revolutionary States just as centralist and despotic as those we already know. . .*" Nor, in point 8, that since the "*revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations. . . organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegations. . . [who] will set out to administer public services, not to rule over peoples.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 169, p. 172]

(As an aside, we can understand why Leninists would not willing to quote point 8, as Bakunin's position is far in advance of Marx's on the structure of revolutionary society. Indeed, it was not until 1917, when Lenin supported the spontaneously created Soviets as the framework of his socialist state -- at least in rhetoric, in practice, as we discuss in the appendix on "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)", he did not -- that Marxists belatedly discovered the importance of workers' councils. In other words, Bakunin predicted the rise of workers' councils as the framework of a socialist revolution -- after all the Russian soviets were, originally, "*a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations.*" It must

be embarrassing for Leninists to have one of what they consider as a key contribution to Marxism predicted over 50 years beforehand by someone Marx called an "*ignoramus*" and a "*non-entity as a theoretician.*"")

Similarly, when we look at the situations where Bakunin uses the terms "*invisible*" or "*collective*" dictatorship (usually in letters to comrades) we find the same thing -- the explicit denial **in these same letters** that Bakunin thought the revolutionary association should take state/governmental power. For example, in a letter to Albert Richard (a fellow member of the anarchist "*Alliance of Social Democracy*") Bakunin states that "*[t]here is only one power and one dictatorship whose organisation is salutary and feasible: it is that collective, invisible dictatorship of those who are allied in the name of our principle.*" He then immediately adds that "*this dictatorship will be all the more salutary and effective for not being dressed up in any official power or extrinsic character.*" Earlier in the letter he argues that anarchists must be "*like invisible pilots in the thick of the popular tempest. . . steer[ing] it [the revolution] not by any open power but by the collective dictatorship of all the allies -- a dictatorship without insignia, titles or official rights, and all the stronger for having none of the paraphernalia of power.*" Explicitly opposing "*Committees of Public Safety and official, overt dictatorship*" he explains his idea of a revolution based on "*workers hav[ing] joined into associations . . . armed and organised by streets and **quartiers**, the federative commune.*" [Op. Cit., p. 181, p. 180 and p. 179] Hardly what would be expected from a would-be dictator?

As Sam Dolgoff notes, "*an organisation exercising no overt authority, without a state, without official status, without the machinery of institutionalised power to enforce its policies, cannot be defined as a dictatorship. . . Moreover, if it is borne in mind that this passage is part of a letter repudiating in the strongest terms the State and the authoritarian statism of the 'Robespierres, the Dantons, and the Saint-Justs of the revolution,' it is reasonable to conclude that Bakunin used the word 'dictatorship' to denote preponderant influence or guidance exercised largely by example. . . In line with this conclusion, Bakunin used the words 'invisible' and 'collective' to denote the underground movement exerting this influence in an organised manner.*" [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 182]

This analysis is confirmed by other passages from Bakunin's letters. In a letter to the Nihilist Sergi Nechaev (within which Bakunin indicates exactly how far apart politically they were -- which is important as, from Marx onwards, many of Bakunin's opponents quote Nechaev's pamphlets as if they were "Bakunist," when in fact they were not) we find him arguing that:

*"These [revolutionary] groups would not seek anything for themselves, neither privilege nor honour nor power. . . [but] would be in a position to direct popular movements . . . [via] **the collective dictatorship** of a secret organisation. . . The dictatorship. . . does not reward any of the members. . . or the groups themselves. . . with any. . . official power. It does not threaten the freedom of the people, because, lacking any official character, it does not take the place of State control over the people, and because its whole aim. . . consists of the fullest realisation of the liberty of the people.*



*"This sort of dictatorship is not in the least contrary to the free development and the self-development of the people, nor its organisation from the bottom upward. . . for it influences the people exclusively through the natural, personal influence of its members, who have not the slightest power. . . to direct the spontaneous revolutionary movement of the people towards. . . the organisation of popular liberty. . . This secret dictatorship would in the first place, and at the present time, carry out a broadly based popular propaganda. . . and by the power of this propaganda and also by **organisation among the people themselves** join together separate popular forces into a mighty strength capable of demolishing the State."* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, pp. 193-4]

The key aspect of this is the term "*natural influence*." In a letter to Pablo, a Spanish member of the Alliance, we find Bakunin arguing that the Alliance "*will promote the Revolution only through the **natural but never official influence** of all members of the Alliance. . .*" [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 387] This term was also used in his public writings. For example, we find in one of his newspaper articles Bakunin arguing that the "*very freedom of every individual results from th[e] great number of material, intellectual, and moral influences which every individual around him and which society. . . continually exercise on him*" and that "*everything alive . . . intervene[s] . . . in the life of others. . . [so] we hardly wish to abolish the effect of any individual's or any group of individuals' natural influence upon the masses.*" [The Basic Bakunin, p. 140, p. 141]

Thus "*natural influence*" simply means the effect of communicating with others, discussing your ideas with them and winning them over to your position, nothing more. This is hardly authoritarian, and so Bakunin contrasts this "*natural*" influence with "*official*" influence, which replaced the process of mutual interaction between equals with a fixed hierarchy of command and thereby induced the "*transformation of natural influence, and, as such, the perfectly legitimate influence over man, into a right.*" [cited by Richard B. Saltman, **The Social and Political Thought of Michael Bakunin**, p. 46]

As an example of this difference, consider the case of a union militant (as will become clear, this is the sort of example Bakunin had in mind). As long as they are part of the rank-and-file, arguing their case at union meetings or being delegated to carry out the decisions of these assemblies then their influence is "*natural*." However, if this militant is elected into a position with executive power in the union (i.e. becomes a full-time union official, for example, rather than a shop-steward) then their influence becomes "*official*" and so, potentially, corrupting for both the militant and the rank-and-file who are subject to the rule of the official.

Indeed, this notion of "*natural*" influence (or authority) was also termed "*invisible*" by Bakunin -- "*[i]t is only necessary that one worker in ten join the [International Working-Men's] Association earnestly and with full understanding of the cause for the nine-tenths remaining outside its organisation nevertheless to be influenced invisibly by it. . .*" [The Basic Bakunin, p. 139] So, as can be seen, the terms "*invisible*" and "*collective*" dictatorship used by Bakunin in his letters is strongly related to the term "*natural influence*" used in his public works and seems to be used simply to indicate the effects of an organised political group on the masses. To see this, it is worthwhile to quote Bakunin at length about the nature of this "*invisible*" influence:

*"It may be objected that this. . . [invisible] influence. . . suggests the establishment of a system of authority and a new government. . . [but this] would be a serious blunder. The organised effect of the International on the masses. . . is nothing but the entirely natural organisation -- neither official nor clothed in any authority or political force whatsoever -- of the effect of a rather numerous group of individuals who are inspired by the same thought and headed toward the same goal, first of all on the opinion of the masses and only then, by the intermediary of this opinion (restated by the International's propaganda), on their will and their deeds. But the governments. . . impose themselves violently on the masses, who are forced to obey them and to execute their decrees. . . The International's influence will never be anything but one of opinion and the International will never be anything but the organisation of the natural effect of individuals on the masses." [Op. Cit., pp. 139-40]*

Therefore, from both the fuller context provided by the works and letters selectively quoted by anti-anarchists **and** his other writings, we find that rather than being a secret authoritarian, Bakunin was, in fact, trying to express how anarchists could "*naturally influence*" the masses and their revolution. As he himself argues:

*"We are the most pronounced enemies of every sort of **official power**. . . We are the enemies of any sort of publicly declared dictatorship, we are social revolutionary anarchists. . . if we are anarchists, by what right do we want to influence the people, and what methods will we use? Denouncing all power, with what sort of power, or rather by what sort of force, shall we direct a people's revolution? **By a force that is invisible. . . that is not imposed on anyone. . . [and] deprived of all official rights and significance.**" [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, pp. 191-2]*

Continually opposing "*official*" power, authority and influence, Bakunin used the term "*invisible, collective dictatorship*" to describe the "*natural influence*" of organised anarchists on mass movements. Rather than express a desire to become a dictator, it in fact expresses the awareness that there is an "uneven" political development within the working class, an unevenness that can only be undermined by discussion within the mass assemblies of popular organisations. Any attempt to by-pass this "unevenness" by seizing or being elected to positions of power (i.e. by "*official influence*") would be doomed to failure and result in dictatorship by a party -- "*triumph of the Jacobins or the Blanquists [or the Bolsheviks, we must add] would be the death of the Revolution.*" [Op. Cit., p. 169]

This analysis can be seen from Bakunin's discussion on union bureaucracy and how anarchists should combat it. Taking the Geneva section of the IWMA, Bakunin notes that the construction workers' section "*simply left all decision-making to their committees. . . In this manner power gravitated to the committees, and by a species of fiction characteristic of all governments the committees substituted their own will and their own ideas for that of the membership.*" [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 246] To combat this bureaucracy, "*the construction workers. . . sections could only defend their rights and their*

*autonomy in only one way: the workers called general membership meetings. Nothing arouses the antipathy of the committees more than these popular assemblies. . . In these great meetings of the sections, the items on the agenda was amply discussed and the most progressive opinion prevailed. . ."* [Op. Cit., p. 247]

Given that Bakunin considered "*the federative Alliance of all working men's [sic!] associations. . . [would] constitute the Commune*" made up of delegates with "*accountable and removable mandates*" we can easily see that the role of the anarchist federation would be to intervene in general assemblies of these associations and ensure, through debate, that "*the most progressive opinion prevailed.*" [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 170, p. 171] Rather than seek power, the anarchists would seek **influence** based on the soundness of their ideas, the "*leadership of ideas*" in other words. Thus the anarchist federation "*unleashes their [the peoples] will and gives wider opportunity for their self-determination and their social-economic organisation, which should be created by them alone from the bottom upwards . . . The [revolutionary] organisation . . . [must] not in any circumstances. . . ever be their [the peoples] master . . . What is to be the chief aim and pursue of this organisation? To help the people towards self-determination on the lines of the most complete equality and fullest human freedom in every direction, without the least interference from any sort of domination. . . that is without any sort of government control.*" [Op. Cit., p. 191]

Having shown that the role of Bakunin's revolutionary organisations is drastically different than that suggested by the selective quotations of Marxists, we need to address two more issues. One, the so-called hierarchical nature of Bakunin's organisations and, two, their secret nature. Taking the issue of hierarchy first, we can do no better than quote Richard B. Saltman's summary of the internal organisation of these groups:

*"The association's 'single will,' Bakunin wrote, would be determined by 'laws' that every member 'helped to create,' or at a minimum 'equally approved' by 'mutual agreement.' This 'definite set of rules' was to be 'frequently renewed' in plenary sessions wherein each member had the 'duty to try and make his view prevail,' but then he must accept fully the decision of the majority. Thus the revolutionary association's 'rigorously conceived and prescribed plan,' implemented under the 'strictest discipline,' was in reality to be 'nothing more or less than the expression and direct outcome of the reciprocal commitment contracted by each of the members towards the others.'"* [The Social and Political Thought of Michael Bakunin, p. 115]

While many anarchists would not agree 100 per cent with this set-up (although we think that most supporters of the "Platform" would) all would agree that it is **not** hierarchical. If anything, it appears quite democratic in nature. Moreover, comments in Bakunin's letters to other Alliance members support the argument that his revolutionary associations were more democratic in nature than Marxists suggest. In a letter to a Spanish comrade we find him suggesting that "*all [Alliance] groups. . . should. . . from now on accept new members not by majority vote, but unanimously.*" In a letter to Italian members of the IWMA he argued that in Geneva the Alliance did not resort to "*secret plots and intrigues.*" Rather:

*"Everything was done in broad daylight, openly, for everyone to see . . . The Alliance had regular weekly open meetings and everyone was urged to participate in the discussions. . . The old procedure where members sat and passively listened to speakers talking down to them from their pedestal was discarded.*

*"It was established that all meetings be conducted by informal round-table conversational discussions in which everybody felt free to participate: not to be talked at, but to exchange views . . . "[Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 386, pp. 405-6]*

Moreover, we find Bakunin being out-voted within the Alliance, hardly what we would expect if they **were** top-down dictatorships run by Bakunin (as Marxists claim). The historian T.R. Ravindranathan indicates that after the Alliance was founded *"Bakunin wanted the Alliance to become a branch of the International [Worker's Association] and at the same time preserve it as a secret society. The Italian and some French members wanted the Alliance to be totally independent of the IWA and objected to Bakunin's secrecy. Bakunin's view prevailed on the first question as he succeeded in convincing the majority of the harmful effects of a rivalry between the Alliance and the International. On the question of secrecy, he gave way to his opponents. . ."* [Bakunin and the Italians, p. 83]

These comments and facts suggest that the picture painted by Marxists of Bakunin and his secret societies is somewhat flawed. Moreover, if Bakunin **did** seek to create a centralised, hierarchical organisation, as Marxists claim, he did not do a good job. We find him complaining that the Madrid Alliance was breaking up (*"The news of the dissolution of the Alliance in Spain saddened Bakunin. he intensified his letter-writing to Alliance members whom he trusted. . . He tried to get the Spaniards to reverse their decision"*) and we find that while the "Bakuninist" Spanish and Swiss sections of the IWMA sent delegates to its infamous Hague congress, the "Bakuninist" Italian section did not (and these "missing" votes may have been enough to undermine the rigged congress). Of course, Marxists could argue that these facts show Bakunin's cunning nature, but the more obvious explanation is that Bakunin did not create (nor desire to create) a hierarchical organisation with himself at the top. As Juan Gomez Casa notes, the Alliance *"was not a compulsory or authoritarian body . . . [I]n Spain [it] acted independently and was prompted by purely local situations. The copious correspondence between Bakunin and his friends . . . was at all times motivated by the idea of offering advice, persuading, and clarifying. It was never written in a spirit of command, because that was not his style, nor would it have been accepted as such by his associates."* Moreover, there *"is no trace or shadow or hierarchical organisation in a letter from Bakunin to Mora . . . On the contrary, Bakunin advises 'direct' relations between Spanish and Italian Comrades."* The Spanish comrades also wrote a pamphlet which *"ridiculed the fable of orders from abroad."* [Anarchist Organisation, pp. 37-8, p.25 and p. 40] This is confirmed by George R. Esenwein who argues that *"[w]hile it is true that Bakunin's direct intervention during the early days of the International's development in Spain had assured the pre-dominance of his influence in the various federations and sections of the FRE [Spanish section of the International], it cannot be said that he manipulated it or otherwise used the Spanish Alliance as a tool for his own subversive designs."* Thus, *"though the Alliance did exist in Spain, the society did not bear any resemblance to the nefarious organisation that the Marxists depicted."* [Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain, p. 42] Indeed, as Max Nettlau points out, those Spaniards who did break with the Alliance were

persuaded of its *"hierarchical organisation. . . not by their own direct observation, but by what they had been told about the conduct of the organisation in the abovementioned countries"* (which included England, where no evidence of any Alliance group has ever been recorded!) [cited by Casa, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 39-40]. In addition, if Bakunin **did** run the Alliance under his own personal dictatorship we would expect it to change or dissolve upon his death. However the opposite happened -- *"the Spanish Alliance survived Bakunin, who died in 1876, yet with few exceptions it continued to function in much the same way it had during Bakunin's lifetime."* [George R. Esenwein, **Op. Cit.**, p. 43]

Moving on to the second issue, the question of why should the revolutionary organisation be secret? Simply because, at the time of Bakunin's activism, many states were despotic monarchies, with little or no civil rights. As he argued, *"nothing but a secret society would want to take this [arousing a revolution] on, for the interests of the government and of the government classes would be bitterly opposed to it."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 188] For survival, Bakunin considered secrecy an essential. As Juan Gomez Casas notes, *"[i]n view of the difficulties of that period, Bakunin believed that secret groups of convinced and absolutely trustworthy men were safer and more effective. They would be able to place themselves at the head of developments at critical moments, but only to inspire and to clarify the issues."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 22] Even Marxists, faced with dictatorial states, have organised in secret. And as George R. Esenwein points out, the *"claim that Bakunin's organisation scheme was not the product of a 'hard-headed realism' cannot be supported in the light of the experiences of the Spanish Alliances. It is beyond doubt that their adherence to Bakunin's program greatly contributed to the FRE's [Spanish section of the First International] ability to flourish during the early part of the 1870s and to survive the harsh circumstances of repression in the period 1874-1881."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 224f] However, few, if any, anarchists would agree with this position now, shaped as it was by Bakunin's personal experiences in Tsarist Russia and other illiberal states (and let us not forget that Bakunin had been imprisoned in the Peter and Paul prison for his activities).

This is not to suggest that all of Bakunin's ideas on the role and nature of anarchist groups are accepted by anarchists today. Most anarchists would reject Bakunin's arguments for secrecy and love of conspiracy, for example (particularly as secrecy cannot help but generate an atmosphere of deceit and, potentially, manipulation). Anarchists remember that anarchism did not spring fully formed and complete from Bakunin's (or any other individual's) head. Rather it was developed over time and by many individuals, inspired by many different experiences and movements. Because of this, anarchists recognise that Bakunin was inconsistent in some ways, as would be expected from a theorist breaking new ground, and this applies to his ideas on how anarchist groups should work within, and the role they should play, in popular movements. Most of his ideas are valid, once we place them into context, some are not. Anarchists embrace the valid ones and voice their opposition to the invalid ones.

In summary, any apparent contradiction (a contradiction which Marxists try hard to maintain and use to discredit anarchism by painting Bakunin as a closet dictator) between the "public" and "private" Bakunin disappears once we place his comments into context within both the letters he wrote and his overall political theory. In fact, rather than promoting a despotic dictatorship over the masses his concept of *"invisible dictatorship"* is very similar to the *"leadership of ideas"* concept we discussed in [section J.3.6](#).

As Brian Morris argues, those who, like Leninist Hal Draper, argue that Bakunin was in favour of despotism only come to *"these conclusions by an incredible distortion of the substance of what Bakunin was trying to convey in his letters to Richard and Nechaev"* and *"[o]nly the most jaundiced scholar, or one blinded by extreme antipathy towards Bakunin or anarchism, could interpret these words as indicating that Bakunin conception of a secret society implied a revolutionary dictatorship in the Jacobin sense, still less a 'despotism'"* [**Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 144, p. 149]

## J.3.8 What is anarcho-syndicalism?

Anarcho-syndicalism (as mentioned in [section A.3.2](#)) is a form of anarchism which applies itself (primarily) to creating industrial unions organised in an anarchist manner, using anarchist tactics (such as direct action) to create a free society. Or, in the words of the International Workers' Association:

*"Revolutionary Syndicalism basing itself on the class-war, aims at the union of all manual and intellectual workers in economic fighting organisations struggling for their emancipation from the yoke of wage slavery and from the oppression of the State. Its goal consists in the re-organisation of social life on the basis of free Communism, by means of the revolutionary action of the working-class itself. It considers that the economic organisations of the proletariat are alone capable of realising this aim, and, in consequence, its appeal is addressed to workers in their capacity of producers and creators of social riches, in opposition to the modern political labour parties which can never be considered at all from the points of view of economic re-organisation."* [**The Principles of Revolutionary Syndicalism**, point 1]

The word *"syndicalism"* is basically an English rendering of the French for *"revolutionary trade unionism"* (*"syndicalisme revolutionarie"*). In the 1890s many anarchists in France started to work within the trade union movement, radicalising it from within. As the ideas of autonomy, direct action, the general strike and political independence of unions which were associated with the French **Confederation Generale du Travail** (General Confederation of Labour) spread across the world (partly through anarchist contacts, partly through word of mouth by non-anarchists who were impressed by the militancy of the CGT), the word *"syndicalism"* was used to describe movements inspired by the example of the CGT. Thus *"syndicalism," "revolutionary syndicalism"* and *"anarcho-syndicalism"* all basically mean *"revolutionary unionism"* (the term *"industrial unionism"* used by the IWW essentially means the same thing).

The main difference is between revolutionary syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism, with anarcho-syndicalism arguing that revolutionary syndicalism concentrates too much on the workplace and, obviously, stressing the anarchist roots and nature of syndicalism more than revolutionary syndicalism. In addition, particularly in France, anarcho-syndicalism is considered compatible with supporting a specific anarchist organisation to complement the work of the revolutionary unions. Revolutionary syndicalism, in contrast, argues that the syndicalist unions are sufficient in themselves to create libertarian socialism and rejects anarchist groups along with political parties. However, the dividing line

can be unclear (and, just to complicate things even more, **some** syndicalists support political parties and are not anarchists -- there have been a few Marxist syndicalists, for example. We will ignore these syndicalists in our discussion and concentrate on the libertarian syndicalists). We will use the term syndicalism to describe what each branch has in common.

Syndicalism is different from ordinary trade unionism (sometimes called business unionism by anarchists and syndicalists as it treats the union's job purely as the seller of its members labour power and acts like any other business). Syndicalism, in contrast with trade unionism, is based on unions managed directly by the rank and file membership rather than by elected officials and bureaucrats. The syndicalist union is not based on where the worker lives (as is the case with many trade unions). Instead, the union is based and run from the workplace. It is there that union meetings are held, where workers are exploited and oppressed and where their economic power lies. Syndicalism is based on local branch autonomy, with each branch having the power to call and end strikes and organise its own affairs. No union officials have the power to declare strikes "unofficial" as every strike decided upon by the membership is automatically "official" simply because the branch decided it in a mass meeting. Power would be decentralised into the hands of the union membership, as expressed in local branch assemblies.

To co-ordinate strikes and other forms of action, these autonomous branches are part of a federal structure. The mass meeting in the workplace mandates delegates to express the wishes of the membership at "labour councils" and "industrial unions."

The labour council is the federation of all workplace branches of all industries in a geographical area (say, for example, in a city or region) and it has the tasks of, among other things, education, propaganda and the promotion of solidarity between the different union branches in its area. Due to the fact it combines all workers into one organisation, regardless of industry or union, the labour council plays a key role in increasing **class** consciousness and solidarity. This can be seen from both the Italian USI and the Spanish CNT, to take two examples. In the later case, the *"territorial basis of organisation linkage brought all the workers from one area together and fomented working-class solidarity over and before corporate solidarity."* [J. Romero Maura, *"The Spanish Case"*, contained in **Anarchism Today**, D. Apter and J. Joll (eds.), p. 75] The example of the USI also indicates the validity of French syndicalist Fernand Pelloutier's passionate defence of the **Bourse du Travail** as a revolutionary force (see Carl Levy, *"Italian Anarchism: 1870-1926"* in **For Anarchism**, David Goodway (ed.), pp. 48-9).

The industrial union, on the other hand, is the federation of union branches **within the same industry** in a given area (there would be a coal miners industry wide union, a software workers industrial union and so on). These councils would organise industry wide struggles and solidarity. In this way workers in the same industry support each other, ensuring that if workers in one workplace goes on strike, the boss cannot swap production to another workplace elsewhere and so weaken and defeat the action (see Berkman's **ABC of Anarchism**, p. 54, for a fuller discussion of why such industrial unionism is essential to win strikes).

In practice, of course, the activities of these dual federations would overlap: labour councils would

support an industry wide strike or action while industrial unions would support action conducted by its member unions called by labour councils. However, we must stress that both the industrial federations and the cross-industry (territorial) labour councils are *"based on the principles of Federalism, on free combination from below upwards, putting the right of self-determination of every member above everything else and recognising only the organic agreement of all on the basis of like interests and common convictions."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 53]

As well as being decentralised and organised from the bottom up, the syndicalist union differs from the normal trade union by having no full-time officials. All union business is conducted by elected fellow workers who do their union activities after work or, if it has to be done during work hours, they get the wages they lost while on union business. In this way no bureaucracy of well paid officials is created and all union militants remain in direct contact with their fellow workers. Given that it is their wages, working conditions and so on that are effected by their union activity they have a real interest in making the union an effective organisation and ensuring that it reflects the interests of the rank and file. In addition, all part-time union "officials" are elected, mandated and recallable delegates. If the fellow worker who is elected to the local labour council or other union committee is not reflecting the opinions of those who mandated him or her then the union assembly can countermand their decision, recall them and replace them with someone who **will** reflect the decisions of the union.

The syndicalist union is committed to **direct action** and refuses links with political parties, even labour or "socialist" ones. A key idea of syndicalism is that of union autonomy -- the idea that the workers' organisation is capable of changing society by its own efforts and that it must control its own fate and not be controlled by any party or other outside group (including anarchist federations). This is sometimes termed *"workerism"* (from the French *"ouvrierisme"*), i.e. workers' control of the class struggle and their own organisations. Rather than being a cross-class organisation like the political party, the union is a **class** organisation and is so uniquely capable of representing working class aspirations, interests and hopes. There is *"no place in it for anybody who was not a worker. Professional middle class intellectuals who provided both the leadership and the ideas of the socialist political movement, were therefore at a discount. As a consequence the syndicalist movement was, and saw itself as, a purely working class form of socialism . . . [S]yndicalism appears as the great heroic movement of the proletariat, the first movement which took seriously . . . [the argument] that the emancipation of the working class must be the task of labour unaided by middle class intellectuals or by politicians and aimed to establish a genuinely working class socialism and culture, free of all bourgeois taints. For the syndicalists, the workers were to be everything, the rest, nothing."* [Geoffrey Ostergaard, **The Tradition of Workers' Control**, p. 38]

Therefore syndicalism is *"consciously anti-parliamentary and anti-political. It focuses not only on the realities of power but also on the key problem of achieving its disintegration. Real power in syndicalist doctrine is economic power. The way to dissolve economic power is to make every worker powerful, thereby eliminating power as a social privilege. Syndicalism thus ruptures all the ties between the workers and the state. It opposes political action, political parties, and any participant in political elections. Indeed it refuses to operate in the framework of the established order and the state . . . [S]yndicalism turns to direct action -- strikes, sabotage, obstruction, and above all, the revolutionary*



*general strike. Direct action not only perpetuates the militancy of the workers and keeps alive the spirit of revolt, but awakens in them a greater sense of individual initiative. By continual pressure, direct action tests the strength of the capitalist system at all times and presumably in its most important arena -- the factory, where ruled and ruler seem to confront each other most directly.*" [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 121]

This does not mean that syndicalism is "apolitical" in the sense of ignoring totally all political issues. This is a Marxist myth. Syndicalists follow other anarchists by being opposed to all forms of authoritarian/capitalist politics but do take a keen interest in "political" questions as they relate to the interests of working people. Thus they do not "ignore" the state, or the role of the state. Indeed, syndicalists are well aware that the state exists to protect capitalist property and power. For example, the British syndicalists' *"vigorous campaign against the 'servile state' certainly disproves the notion that syndicalists ignored the role of the state in society. On the contrary, their analysis of bureaucratic state capitalism helped to make considerable inroads into prevailing Labourist and state socialist assumptions that the existing state could be captured by electoral means and used as an agent of through-going social reform."* [Bob Holton, **British Syndicalism: 1900-1914**, p. 204]

Indeed, Rudolf Rocker makes the point very clear. *"It has often been charged against Anarcho-Syndicalism,"* he writes, *"that it has no interest in the political structure of the different countries, and consequently no interest in the political struggles of the time, and confines its activities entirely to the fight for purely economic demands. This idea is altogether erroneous and springs either from outright ignorance or wilful distortion of the facts. It is not the political struggle as such which the Anarcho-Syndicalist from the modern labour parties, both in principle and tactics, but form of this struggle and the aims which it has in view. . . their efforts are also directed, even today, at restricting the activities of the state . . . The attitude of Anarcho-Syndicalism towards the political power of the present-day state is exactly the same as it takes towards the system of capitalist exploitation . . . [and] pursue the same tactics in their fight against . . . the state . . . [T]he worker cannot be indifferent to the economic conditions of life . . . so he cannot remain indifferent to the political structure of his [or her] country . . ."* [Op. Cit., p.63]

Thus syndicalism is not indifferent to or ignores political struggles and issues. Rather, it fights for political change and reforms as it fights for economic ones -- by direct action and solidarity. If revolutionary and anarcho-syndicalists *"reject any participation in the works of bourgeois parliaments, it is not because they have no sympathy with political struggles in general, but because they are firmly convinced that parliamentary activity is for the workers the very weakest and most hopeless form of the political struggles."* [Op. Cit., p. 65] Syndicalists (like other anarchists) argue that the political and the economic must be **integrated** and that integration must take place in working class organisations, which, for syndicalists, means their unions (or union-like organisations such as workplace councils or assemblies). Rather than being something other people discuss on behalf of working class people, syndicalists, again like all anarchists, argue that politics must no longer be in the hands of so-called experts (i.e. politicians) but instead lie in the hands of those directly affected by it. Also, in this way the union encourages the political development of its members by the process of participation and self-management.

In other words, political issues must be raised in economic and social organisations and discussed there, where working class people have real power. In this they follow Bakunin who argued that an *"it would be absolutely impossible to ignore political and philosophical questions"* and that an *"exclusive preoccupation with economic questions would be fatal for the proletariat."* Therefore, the unions must be open to all workers, be independent of all political parties and be based on economic solidarity with all workers, in all lands, but there must be *"free discussion of all political and philosophical theories"* *"leaving the sections and federations to develop their own policies"* since *"political and philosophical questions . . . [must be] posed in the International . . . [by] the proletariat itself . . ."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 301, p. 302, p. 297, p. 302]

Thus revolutionary and anarcho-syndicalism are deeply political in the widest sense of the word, aiming for a radical change in political, economic and social conditions and institutions. Moreover, it is political in the narrower sense of being aware of political issues and aiming for political reforms along with economic ones. They are only "apolitical" when it comes to supporting political parties and using bourgeois political institutions, a position which is "political" in the wider sense of course! This is obviously identical to the usual anarchist position (see [section J.2](#))

Which indicates another importance difference between syndicalism and trade unionism. Syndicalism aims at changing society rather than just working within it. Thus syndicalism is revolutionary while trade unionism is reformist. For syndicalists the union *"has a double aim: with tireless persistence, it must pursue betterment of the working class's current conditions. But, without letting themselves become obsessed with this passing concern, the workers should take care to make possible and imminent the essential act of comprehensive emancipation: the expropriation of capital."* [Emile Pouget, **No Gods, No Masters**, p. 71] Thus syndicalism aims to win reforms by direct action and by this struggle bring the possibilities of a revolution, via the general strike, closer. Indeed any *"desired improvement is to be wrested directly from the capitalist. . . [and] must always represent a reduction in capitalist privileges and be a partial expropriation."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 73] Thus Emma Goldman:

*"Of course Syndicalism, like the old trade unions, fights for immediate gains, but it is not stupid enough to pretend that labour can expect humane conditions from inhumane economic arrangements in society. Thus it merely wrests from the enemy what it can force him to yield; on the whole, however, Syndicalism aims at, and concentrates its energies upon, the complete overthrow of the wage system.*

*"Syndicalism goes further: it aims to liberate labour from every institution that has not for its object the free development of production for the benefit of all humanity. In short, the ultimate purpose of Syndicalism is to reconstruct society from its present centralised, authoritative and brutal state to one based upon the free, federated grouping of the workers along lines of economic and social liberty.*

*"With this object in view, Syndicalism works in two directions: first, by undermining the*

*existing institutions; secondly, by developing and educating the workers and cultivating their spirit of solidarity, to prepare them for a full, free life, when capitalism shall have been abolished. . .*

*"Syndicalism is, in essence, the economic expression of Anarchism..."* [Red Emma Speaks, p. 68]

Which, in turn, explains why syndicalist unions are structured in such an obviously libertarian way. On the one hand, it reflects the importance of empowering every worker by creating a union which is decentralised and self-managed, a union which every member plays a key role in determining its policy and activities. Participation ensures that the union becomes a *"school for the will"* (to use Pouget's expression) and allows working people to learn how to govern themselves and so do without government and state. On the other hand, *"[a]t the same time that syndicalism exerts this unrelenting pressure on capitalism, it tries to build the new social order within the old. The unions and the 'labour councils' are not merely means of struggle and instruments of social revolution; they are also the very structure around which to build a free society. The workers are to be educated [by their own activity within the union] in the job of destroying the old propertied order and in the task of reconstructing a stateless, libertarian society. The two go together."* [Murray Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 121] The syndicalist union is seen as prefiguring the future society, a society which (like the union) is decentralised and self-managed in all aspects.

Thus, as can be seen, syndicalism differs from trade unionism in its structure, its methods and its aims. Its structure, method and aims are distinctly anarchist. Little wonder the leading syndicalist theorist Fernand Pelloutier argued that the trade union, *"governing itself along anarchic lines,"* must become *"a practical schooling in anarchism."* [No Gods, No Masters, p. 55, p. 57] In addition, most anarcho-syndicalists support community organisations and struggle alongside the more traditional industry based approach usually associated within syndicalism. While we have concentrated on the industrial side here (simply because this is a key aspect of syndicalism) we must stress that syndicalism can and does lend itself to community struggles, so our comments have a wider application (for example, in the form of community unionism as a means to create community assemblies -- see [section J.5.1](#)). It is a myth that anarcho-syndicalism ignores community struggles and organisation, as can be seen from the history of the Spanish CNT for example (the CNT helped organise rent strikes, for example).

It must be stressed that a syndicalist union is open to all workers regardless of their political opinions (or lack of them). The union exists to defend workers' interests as workers and is organised in an anarchist manner to ensure that their interests are fully expressed. This means that an syndicalist organisation is different from an organisation of syndicalists. What makes the union syndicalist is its structure, aims and methods. Obviously things can change (that is true of any organisation which has a democratic structure) but that is a test revolutionary and anarcho-syndicalists welcome and do not shirk from. As the union is self-managed from below up, its militancy and political content is determined by its membership. As Pouget put it, the union *"offers employers a degree of resistance in geometric proportion with the resistance put up by its members."* [Op. Cit., p. 71] That is why syndicalists ensure that power rests in

the members of the union.

Syndicalists have two main approaches to building revolutionary unions -- "*dual unionism*" and "*boring from within*." The former approach involves creating new, syndicalist, unions, in opposition to the existing trade unions. This approach was historically and is currently the favoured way of building syndicalist unions (American, Italian, Spanish, Swedish and numerous other syndicalists built their own union federations in the heyday of syndicalism between 1900 and 1920). "Boring from within" simply means working within the existing trade unions in order to reform them and make them syndicalist. This approach was favoured by French and British syndicalists, plus a few American ones. See also sections [J.5.2](#) and [J.5.3](#) for more on industrial unionism and anarchist perspectives on existing trades unions.

However, these two approaches are not totally in opposition. Many of the dual unions were created by syndicalists who had first worked within the existing trade unions. Once they got sick of the bureaucratic union machinery and of trying to reform it, they split from the reformist unions and formed new, revolutionary, ones. Similarly, dual unionists will happily support trade unionists in struggle and often be "two carders" (i.e. members of both the trade union and the syndicalist one). Rather than being isolated from the majority of trade unionists, supporters of dual unionism argue that they would be in contact with them where it counts, on the shop floor and in struggle rather than in trade union meetings which many workers do not even attend. Dual unionists argue that the trade unions, like the state, are too bureaucratic to be changed and that, therefore, trying to reform them is a waste of time and energy (and it is likely that rather than change the trade union, "boring from within" would more likely change the syndicalist by watering down their ideas).

However, syndicalists no matter what tactics they prefer, favour autonomous workplace organisations, controlled from below. Both tend to favour syndicalists forming networks of militants to spread anarchist/syndicalist ideas within the workplace. Indeed, such a network (usually called "*Industrial Networks*" -- see [section J.5.4](#) for more details) would be an initial stage and essential means for creating syndicalist unions. These groups would encourage syndicalist tactics and rank and file organisation during struggles and so create the potential for building syndicalist unions as syndicalist ideas spread and are seen to work.

While the names "syndicalism" and "anarcho-syndicalism" date from the 1890s in France, the ideas associated with these names have a longer history. Anarcho-syndicalist ideas have developed independently in many different countries and times. As Rudolf Rocker notes, anarcho-syndicalism itself was "*a direct continuation of those social aspirations which took shape in the bosom of the First International and which were best understood and most strongly held by the libertarian wing of the great workers' alliance . . . Its theoretical assumptions are based on the teachings of Libertarian or Anarchist Socialism, while its form of organisation is largely borrowed from revolutionary Syndicalism.*" [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 49]

Indeed, anyone familiar with Bakunin's work will quickly see that much of his ideas prefigure what was latter to become known as syndicalism. Bakunin, for example, argued that the "*organisation of the trade*

*sections, their federation in the International, and their representation by the Chambers of Labour, not only create a great academy, in which the workers of the International, combining theory and practice, can and must study economic science, they also bear in themselves the living germs of **the new social order**, which is to replace the bourgeois world. They are creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself."* [quoted by Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 45] Bakunin continually stressed that trade unions were the "*only really efficacious weapons the workers now can use against*" the bourgeoisie, as well as the importance of solidarity and the radicalising and empowering effect of strikes and the importance of the general strike as a means of "*forc[ing] society to shed its old skin.*" [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 153, p. 150]

(We must stress that we are **not** arguing that Bakunin "invented" syndicalism. Far from it. Rather, we are arguing that Bakunin expressed ideas already developed in working class circles and became, if you like, the "spokes-person" for these libertarian tendencies in the labour movement as well as helping to clarify these ideas in many ways. As Emma Goldman argued, the "*feature which distinguishes Syndicalism from most philosophies is that it represents the revolutionary philosophy of labour conceived and born in the actual struggle and experience of workers themselves -- not in universities, colleges, librarries, or in the brain of some scientists.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 65-6] This applies equally to Bakunin and the first International).

Thus, rather than being some sort of revision of anarchism or some sort of "semi-Marxist" movement, syndicalism was, in fact, a reversion to the ideas of Bakunin and the anarchists in the first International (although, as we discuss in the [next section](#), with some slight differences) after the disastrous experience of "*propaganda by the deed*" (see sections [A.2.18](#) and [A.5.3](#)). Given the utter nonsense usually written by Marxists (and liberals) about Bakunin, it is not hard to understand why Marxists fail to see the anarchist roots of syndicalism -- not being aware of Bakunin's ideas, they think that anarchism and syndicalism are utterly different while, in fact, (to use Emma Goldman's words) syndicalism "*is, in essence, the economic expression of Anarchism*" and "*under Bakunin and the Latin workers, [the International was] forging ahead along industrial and Syndicalist lines.*" [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 68, p. 66] Similarly, we find that the American **Black International** (organised by anarchists in the 1880s) "*anticipated by some twenty years the doctrine of anarcho-syndicalism*" and "*[m]ore than merely resembling the 'Chicago Idea' [of the **Black International**], the IWW's principles of industrial unionism resulted from the conscious efforts of anarchists . . . who continued to affirm . . . the principles which the Chicago anarchists gave their lives defending.*" [Salvatore Salerno, **Red November, Black November**, p. 51 and p. 79] Thus, ironically, many Marxists find themselves in the curious position of ascribing ideas and movements inspired by Bakunin to Marx!

Moreover, ideas similar to anarcho-syndicalism were also developed independently of the libertarian wing of the IWMA nearly 40 years previously in Britain. The idea that workers should organise into unions, use direct action and create a society based around the trade union federation had been developed within the early labour movement in Britain. The Grand National Consolidated Trade Union of Great Britain and Ireland had, as one expert on the early British Labour movement put it, a "*vision [which] is an essentially syndicalist one of decentralised socialism in which trade unions. . . have*

*acquired. . . the productive capacity to render themselves collectively self-sufficient as a class"* and a union based "*House of Trades*" would replace the existing state [Noel Thompson, **The Real Rights of Man**, p.88]. This movement also developed Proudhon's ideas on mutual banks and labour notes decades before he put pen to paper. For an excellent history of this period, see E.P. Thompson's **The Making of the English Working Class** and for a fuller history of proto-syndicalism Rudolf Rocker's **Anarcho-Syndicalism** cannot be bettered.

Thus syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism (or anarchist-syndicalism) is revolutionary labour unionism. Its theoretical assumptions and organisation are based on the teachings of libertarian socialism (or Anarchism). Syndicalism combines the day-to-day struggle for reforms and improvements in working class life within the framework of existing capitalist society (reforms gained by direct action and considered as partial expropriations) with the long term aim of the overthrow of capitalism and statism. The aim of the union is workers' self-management of production and distribution after the revolution, a self-management which the union is based upon in the here and now.

Syndicalists think that such an organisation is essential for the successful creation of an anarchist society as it builds the new world in the shell of the old, making a sizeable majority of the population aware of anarchism and the benefits of anarchist forms of organisation and struggle. Moreover, they argue that those who reject syndicalism "*because it believes in a permanent organisation of workers*" and urge "*workers to organise 'spontaneously' at the very moment of revolution*" promote a "*con-trick, designed to leave 'the revolutionary movement,' so called, in the hands of an educated class. . . [or] so-called 'revolutionary party'. . . [which] means that the workers are only expected to come in the fray when there's any fighting to be done, and in normal times leave theorising to the specialists or students.*" [Albert Meltzer, **Anarchism: Arguments for and Against**, p. 57] The syndicalist union is seen as a "school" for anarchism, "*the germ of the Socialist economy of the future, the elementary school of Socialism in general. . . [we need to] plant these germs while there is yet time and bring them to the strongest possible development, so as to make the task of the coming social revolution easier and to insure its permanence.*" [Rudolf Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 52] A self-managed society can only be created by self-managed means, and as only the practice of self-management can ensure its success, the need for libertarian popular organisations is essential. Syndicalism is seen as the key way working people can prepare themselves for revolution and learn to direct their own lives. In this way syndicalism creates, to use Bakunin's terms, a true politics of the people, one that does not create a parasitic class of politicians and bureaucrats ("*We wish to emancipate ourselves, to free ourselves*", Pelloutier wrote, "*but we do not wish to carry out a revolution, to risk our skin, to put Pierre the socialist in the place of Paul the radical*").

This does not mean that syndicalists do not support organisations spontaneously created by workers' in struggle (such as workers' councils, factory committees and so on). Far from it. Anarcho-syndicalists and revolutionary syndicalists have played important parts in these kinds of organisation (as can be seen from the Russian Revolution, the factory occupations in Italy in 1920, the British Shop Steward movement and so on). This is because syndicalism acts as a catalyst to militant labour struggles and serves to counteract class-collaborationist tendencies by union bureaucrats and other labour fakirs. Part of this activity must involve encouraging self-managed organisations where none exist and so

syndicalists support and encourage all such spontaneous movements, hoping that they turn into the basis of a syndicalist union movement or a successful revolution. Moreover, most anarcho-syndicalists recognise that it is unlikely that every worker, nor even the majority, will be in syndicalist unions before a revolutionary period starts. This means **new** organisations, created spontaneously by workers in struggle, would have to be the framework of social struggle and the post-capitalist society rather than the syndicalist union as such. All the syndicalist union can do is provide a practical example of how to organise in a libertarian way within capitalism and statism and provide **part** of the framework of the free society, along with other spontaneously created organisations.

Hence spontaneously created organisations of workers in struggle play an important role in revolutionary and anarcho-syndicalist theory. Since syndicalists advocate that it is the workers, using their own organisations who will control their own struggles (and, eventually, their own revolution) in their own interests, not a vanguard party of elite political theorists, this is unsurprising. It matters little if the specific organisations are revolutionary industrial unions, factory committees, workers councils', or other labour formations. The important thing is that they are created and run by workers themselves. Meanwhile, anarcho-syndicalists are industrial guerrillas waging class war at the point of production in order to win improvements in the here and now and strengthen tendencies towards anarchism by showing that direct action and libertarian organisation is effective and can win partial expropriations of capitalist and state power.

Lastly, we must point out here that while syndicalism has anarchist roots, not all syndicalists are anarchists. A few Marxists have been syndicalists, particularly in the USA where the followers of Daniel De Leon supported Industrial Unionism and helped form the Industrial Workers of the World. The Irish socialist James Connelly was also a Marxist-syndicalist, as was Big Bill Haywood a leader of the IWW and member of the US Socialist Party. Marxist-syndicalists are generally in favour of more centralisation within syndicalist unions (the IWW was by far the most centralised syndicalist union) and often argue that a political party is required to complement the work of the union. Needless to say, anarcho-syndicalists and revolutionary syndicalists disagree, arguing that centralisation kills the spirit of revolt and weakens a unions real strength [Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 53] and that political parties divide labour organisations needlessly and are ineffective when compared to militant unionism [**Op. Cit.**, p. 51] So not all syndicalists are anarchists and not all anarchists are syndicalists (we discuss the reasons for this in the [next section](#)). Those anarchists who are syndicalists often use the term "anarcho-syndicalism" to indicate that they are both anarchists and syndicalists and to stress the libertarian roots and syndicalism.

For more information on anarcho-syndicalist ideas, Rudolf Rocker's classic introduction to the subject, **Anarcho-Syndicalism** is a good starting place, as is the British syndicalist Tom Brown's **Syndicalism**. Daniel Guerin's **No Gods, No Masters** contains articles by leading syndicalist thinkers and is also a useful source of information.

### **J.3.9 Why are many anarchists not anarcho-syndicalists?**

Before discussing why many anarchists are not anarcho-syndicalists, we must clarify a few points first. Let us be clear, non-syndicalist anarchists usually support the ideas of workplace organisation and struggle, of direct action, of solidarity and so on. Thus most non-syndicalist anarchists do not disagree with anarcho-syndicalists on these issues. Indeed, many even support the creation of syndicalist unions. Thus many anarcho-communists like Alexander Berkman, Errico Malatesta and Emma Goldman supported anarcho-syndicalist organisations and even, like Malatesta, helped form such revolutionary union federations (he helped form the FORA in Argentina) and urged anarchists to take a leading role in organising unions. So when we use the term "non-syndicalist anarchist" we are not suggesting that these anarchists reject all aspects of anarcho-syndicalism. Rather, they are critical of certain aspects of anarcho-syndicalist ideas while supporting other aspects of it.

In the past, a few communist-anarchists **did** oppose the struggle for improvements within capitalism as "reformist." However, these were few and far between and with the rise of anarcho-syndicalism in the 1890s, the vast majority of communist-anarchists recognised that only by encouraging the struggle for reforms would people take them seriously. Only by showing the benefits of anarchist tactics and organisation in practice could anarchist ideas grow in influence. Thus syndicalism was a healthy response to the rise of "abstract revolutionarism" that infected the anarchist movement during the 1880s, particularly in France and Italy. Thus communist-anarchists agree with syndicalists on the importance of struggling for and winning reforms and improvements within capitalism.

Similarly, anarchists like Malatesta also recognised the importance of mass organisations like unions. As he argued, *"to encourage popular organisations of all kinds is the logical consequence of our basic ideas . . . An authoritarian party, which aims at capturing power to impose its ideas, has an interest in the people remaining an amorphous mass, unable to act for themselves and therefore easily dominated . . . But we anarchists do not want to **emancipate** the people; we want the people to **emancipate themselves** . . . we want the new way of life to emerge from the body of the people and correspond to the state of their development and advance as they advance."* [**Life and Ideas**, p. 90] And this can only occur when there are popular organisations, like trade unions, within which people can express themselves, come to common agreements and act. Moreover, these organisations must be autonomous, self-governing, be libertarian in nature **and** be independent of all parties and organisations (including anarchist ones). The similarity with anarcho-syndicalist ideas is striking.

So why, if this is the case, are many anarchists not anarcho-syndicalists? There are two main reasons for this. First, there is the question of whether unions are, by their nature, revolutionary organisations. Second, whether syndicalist unions are sufficient to create anarchy by themselves. We will discuss each in turn.

As can be seen from any country, the vast majority of unions are deeply reformist and bureaucratic in nature. They are centralised, with power resting at the top in the hands of officials. This suggests that in themselves unions are not revolutionary. As Malatesta argued, this is to be expected for *"all movements founded on material and immediate interests (and a mass working class movement cannot be founded on anything else), if the ferment, the drive and the unremitting efforts of men [and women] of ideas struggling and making sacrifices for an ideal future are lacking, tend to adapt themselves to*



*circumstances, foster a conservative spirit, and fear of change in those who manage to improve their conditions, and often end up by creating new privileged classes and serving to support and consolidate the system one would want to destroy."* [Op. Cit., pp. 113-4]

If we look at the **role** of the union within capitalist society we see that in order for it to work, it must offer a reason for the boss to recognise it and negotiate with it. This means that the union must be able to offer the boss something in return for any reforms it gets and this "something" is labour discipline. In return for an improvement in wages or conditions, the union must be able to get workers to agree to submit to the contracts the union signs with their boss. In other words, they must be able to control their members -- stop them fighting the boss -- if they are to have anything with which to bargain with. This results in the union becoming a third force in industry, with interests separate than the workers which it claims to represent. The role of unionism as a seller of labour power means that it often has to make compromises, compromises it has to make its members agree to. This necessitates a tendency for power to be taken from the rank and file of the unions and centralised in the hands of officials at the top of the organisation. This ensures that *"the workers organisation becomes what it must perforce be in a capitalist society -- a means not of refusing to recognise and overthrowing the bosses, but simply for hedging round and limiting the bosses' power."* [Errico Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 29]

Anarcho-syndicalists are aware of this problem. That is why their unions are decentralised, self-managed and organised from the bottom up in a federal manner. As Durruti argued:

*"No anarchists in the union committees unless at the ground level. In these committees, in case of conflict with the boss, the militant is forced to compromise to arrive at an agreement. The contracts and activities which come from being in this position, push the militant towards bureaucracy. Conscious of this risk, we do not wish to run it. Our role is to analyse from the bottom the different dangers which can beset a union organisation like ours. No militant should prolong his job in committees, beyond the time allotted to him. No permanent and indispensable people."* [Durruti: **The People Armed**, p. 183]

However, structure is rarely enough in itself to undermine the bureaucratic tendencies created by the role of unions in the capitalist economy. While such libertarian structures can slow down the tendency towards bureaucracy, non-syndicalist anarchists argue that they cannot stop it. They point to the example of the French CGT which had become reformist by 1914 (the majority of other syndicalist unions were crushed by fascism or communism before they had a chance to develop fully). Even the Spanish CNT (by far the most successful anarcho-syndicalist union) suffered from the problem of reformism, causing the anarchists in the union to organise the FAI in 1927 to combat it (which it did, very successfully). According to Jose Peirats, the *"participation of the anarchist group in the mass movement CNT helped to ensure that CNT's revolutionary nature."* [**Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 241] This indicates the validity of Malatesta's arguments concerning the need for anarchists to remain distinct of the unions organisationally while working within them (just as Peirat's comment that *"[b]linked by participation in union committees, the FAI became incapable of a wider vision"* indicates the validity of Malatesta's warnings against anarchists taking positions of responsibility in unions! [Op. Cit., pp. 239-40]).

Moreover, even the structure of syndicalist unions can cause problems. *"In modelling themselves structurally on the bourgeois economy, the syndicalist unions tended to become the organisational counterparts of the very centralised apparatus they professed to oppose. By pleading the need to deal effectively with the tightly knit bourgeoisie and state machinery, reformist leaders in syndicalist unions often had little difficulty in shifting organisational control from the bottom to the top."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 123]

In addition, as the syndicalist unions grow in size and influence their initial radicalism is usually watered-down. This is because, *"since the unions must remain open to all those who desire to win from the masters better conditions of life, whatever their opinions may be . . ., they are naturally led to moderate their aspirations, first so that they should not frighten away those they wish to have with them, and because, in proportion as numbers increase, those with ideas who have initiated the movement remain buried in a majority that is only occupied with the petty interests of the moment."* [Errico Malatesta, *"Anarchism and Syndicalism"*, contained in Geoffrey Ostergaard, **The Tradition of Workers' Control**, p. 150]

Which, ironically given that increased self-management is the means of reducing tendencies towards bureaucracy, means that syndicalist unions have a tendency towards reformism simply because the majority of their members will be non-revolutionary if the union grows in size in non-revolutionary times. This can be seen from the development of the Swedish syndicalist union the SAC, which went from being a very militant minority union to watering down its politics to retain members in non-revolutionary times

So, if the union's militant strategy succeeds in winning reforms, more and more workers will join it. This influx of non-anarchists and non-syndicalists must, in a self-managed organisation, exert a de-radicalising influence on the unions politics and activities in non-revolutionary times. The syndicalist would argue that the process of struggling for reforms combined with the educational effects of participation and self-management will reduce this influence and, of course, they are right. However, non-syndicalist anarchists would counter this by arguing that the libertarian influences generated by struggle and participation would be strengthened by the work of anarchist groups and, without this work, the de-radicalising influences would outweigh the libertarian ones. In addition, the success of a syndicalist union must be partly determined by the general level of class struggle. In periods of great struggle, the membership will be more radical than in quiet periods and it is quiet periods which cause the most difficulties for syndicalist unions. With a moderate membership the revolutionary aims and tactics of the union will also become moderated. As one academic writer on French syndicalism put it, syndicalism *"was always based on workers acting in the economic arena to better their conditions, build class consciousness, and prepare for revolution. The need to survive and build a working-class movement had always forces syndicalists to adapt themselves to the exigencies of the moment."* [Barbara Mitchell, *"French Syndicalism: An Experiment in Practical Anarchism"*, contained in **Revolutionary Syndicalism: An International Perspective**, Marcel can der Linden and Wayne Thorpe (eds.), p. 25]

As can be seen from the history of many syndicalist unions (and, obviously, mainstream unions too) this seems to be the case -- the libertarian tendencies are outweighed by the de-radicalising ones. This can also be seen from the issue of collective bargaining:

*"The problem of collective bargaining foreshadowed the difficulty of maintaining syndicalist principles in developed capitalist societies. Many organisations within the international syndicalist movement initially repudiated collective agreements with employers on the grounds that by a collaborative sharing of responsibility for work discipline, such agreements would expand bureaucratisation within the unions, undermine revolutionary spirit, and restrict the freedom of action that workers were always to maintain against the class enemy. From an early date, however, sometimes after a period of suspicion and resistance, many workers gave up this position. In the early decades of the century it became clear that to maintain or gain a mass membership, syndicalist unions had to accept collective bargaining."* [Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe, **Op. Cit.**, p. 19]

Thus, for most anarchists, *"the Trade Unions are, by their very nature reformist and never revolutionary. The revolutionary spirit must be introduced, developed and maintained by the constant actions of revolutionaries who work from within their ranks as well as from outside, but it cannot be the normal, natural definition of the Trade Unions function."* [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 117]

This does not mean that anarchists should not work within labour organisations. Nor does it mean rejecting anarcho-syndicalist unions as an anarchist tactic. Far from it. Rather it is a case of recognising these organisations for what they are, reformist organisations which are not an end in themselves but one (albeit, an important one) means of preparing the way for the achievement of anarchism. Neither does it mean that anarchists should not try to make labour organisations as anarchistic as possible or have anarchist objectives. Working within the labour movement (at the rank and file level, of course) is essential to gain influence for anarchist ideas, just as working with unorganised workers is also important. But this does not mean that the unions are revolutionary by their very nature, as syndicalism suggests. As history shows, and as syndicalists themselves are aware, the vast majority of unions are reformist. Non-syndicalist anarchists argue there is a reason for that and syndicalist unions are not immune to these tendencies just because they call themselves revolutionary. Due to these tendencies, non-syndicalist anarchists stress the need to organise as anarchists first and foremost in order to influence the class struggle and encourage the creation of autonomous workplace and community organisations to fight that struggle. Rather than fuse the anarchist and working class movement, non-syndicalist anarchists stress the importance of anarchists organising as anarchists to influence the working class movement.

All this does not mean that purely anarchist organisations or individual anarchists cannot become reformist. Of course they can (just look at the Spanish FAI which along with the CNT co-operated with the state during the Spanish Revolution). However, unlike syndicalist unions, the anarchist organisation is not pushed towards reformism due to its role within society. That is an important difference -- the institutional factors are not present for the anarchist federation as they are for the syndicalist union

federation.

The second reason why many anarchists are not anarcho-syndicalists is the question of whether syndicalist unions are sufficient in themselves to create anarchy. Pierre Monatte, a French syndicalist, argued that "*[s]yndicalism, as the [CGT's] Congress of Amiens proclaimed in 1906, is sufficient unto itself. . . [as] the working class, having at last attained majority, means to be self-sufficient and to reply on no-one else for its emancipation.*" [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 219]

This idea of self-sufficiency means that the anarchist and the syndicalist movement must be fused into one, with syndicalism taking the role of both anarchist group and labour union. Thus a key difference between anarcho-syndicalists and other anarchists is over the question of the need for a specifically anarchist organisation. While most anarchists are sympathetic to anarcho-syndicalism, few totally subscribe to anarcho-syndicalist ideas in their pure form. This is because, in its pure form, syndicalism rejects the idea of anarchist groups and instead considers the union as **the** focal point of social struggle and anarchist activism. However, this "pure" form of syndicalism may be better described as revolutionary syndicalism rather than as anarcho-syndicalism. In France, for example, anarcho-syndicalism is used to describe the idea that unions can be complemented with anarchist groups while revolutionary syndicalism is used to describe the idea of union self-sufficiency. Thus an anarcho-syndicalist may support a specific anarchist federation to work within the union and outside. In the eyes of other anarchists anarcho-syndicalism in its "pure" (revolutionary syndicalist) form makes the error of confusing the anarchist and union movement and so ensures that the resulting movement can do neither work well. As Malatesta put it, "*[e]very fusion or confusion between the anarchist movement and the trade union movement ends, either in rendering the later unable to carry out its specific task or by weakening, distorting, or extinguishing the anarchist spirit.*" [**Life and Ideas**, p. 123]

This is not to suggest that anarchists should not work in the labour movement. That would be a mistake. Anarchists should work with the rank and file of the labour movement while keeping their own identity as anarchists and organising as anarchists. Thus Malatesta: "*In the past I deplored that the comrades isolated themselves from the working-class movement. Today I deplore that many of us, falling into the contrary extreme, let themselves be swallowed up in the same movement.*" [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 225]

Most anarchists agree with Malatesta when he argued that "*anarchists must not want the Trade Unions to be anarchist, but they must act within their ranks in favour of anarchist aims, as individuals, as groups and as federations of groups. . . [I]n the situation as it is, and recognising that the social development of one's workmates is what it is, the anarchist groups should not expect the workers' organisation to act as if they were anarchist, but should make every effort to induce them to approximate as much as possible to the anarchist method.*" [**Life and Ideas**, pp. 124-5] Given that it appears to be the case that labour unions **are** by nature reformist, they cannot be expected to be enough in themselves when creating a free society. Hence the need for anarchists to organise **as anarchists** as well as alongside their fellow workers as workers in order to spread anarchist ideas on tactics and aims. This activity within existing unions does not mean attempting to "reform" the union in a libertarian manner (although some anarchists would support this approach). Rather it means working with the rank

and file of the unions and trying to create autonomous workplace organisations, independent of the trade union bureaucracy and organised in a libertarian way.

This involves creating anarchist organisations separate from but which (in part) works within the labour movement for anarchist ends. Let us not forget that the syndicalist organisation is the union, it organises all workers regardless of their politics. A "union" which just let anarchists joined would not be a union. It would be an anarchist group organised in workplace. As anarcho-syndicalists themselves are aware, an anarcho-syndicalist union is not the same as a union of anarcho-syndicalists. How can we expect an organisation made up of non-anarchists be totally anarchist? Which raises the question of the conflict between being a labour union or a revolutionary anarchist organisation. Because of this tendencies always appeared within syndicalist unions that were reformist and because of this most anarchists, including many anarcho-syndicalists we must note, argue that there is a need for anarchists to work within the rank and file of the existing unions (along with workers who are **not** in a union) to spread their anarchist ideals and aims, and this implies anarchist organisations separate from the labour movement, each if that movement is based on syndicalist unions. As Bakunin argued, the anarchist organisation *"is the necessary complement to the International [i.e. the union federation]. But the International and the Alliance [the anarchist federation], while having the same ultimate aims, perform different functions. The International endeavours to unify the working masses . . . regardless of nationality or religious and political beliefs, into one compact body: the Alliance, on the other hand, tries to give these masses a really revolutionary direction."* This did not mean that the Alliance is imposing a foreign theory onto the members of the unions, because the *"programs of one and the other . . . differ only in the degree of their revolutionary development . . . The program of the Alliance represents the fullest unfolding of the International."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 157]

Which means for most anarchists that syndicalist unions need to be complemented by anarchist organisations. Which means that the syndicalist union is not sufficient in itself to create an anarchist society (needless to say, popular organisations of all sorts are an essential part of creating an anarchist society, they are the framework within which self-management will be practised). The anarchist group is required to promote anarchist tactics of direct action and solidarity, anarchist types of organisation within the union and anarchist aims (the creation of an anarchist society) within the workplace, as well as outside it. This does not imply that anarchists think that unions and other forms of popular organisations should be controlled by anarchists. Far from it! Anarchists are the strongest supporters of the autonomy of all popular organisations. As we indicated in [section J.3.6](#), anarchists desire to influence popular organisations by the strength of our ideas within the rank and file and **not** by imposing our ideas on them.

In addition to these major points of disagreement, there are minor ones as well. For example, many anarchists dislike the emphasis syndicalists place on the workplace and see *"in syndicalism a shift in focus from the commune to the trade union, from all of the oppressed to the industrial proletariat alone, from the streets to the factories, and, in emphasis at least, from insurrection to the general strike."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 123] However, most anarcho-syndicalists are well aware that life exists outside the workplace and so this disagreement is largely one of emphasis

more than anything else. Similarly, many anarchists disagreed with the early syndicalist argument that a general strike was enough to create a revolution. They argued, with Malatesta in the forefront, that while a general strike would be "*an excellent means for starting the social revolution*" it would be wrong to think that it made "*armed insurrection unnecessary*" since the "*first to die of hunger during a general strike would not be the bourgeois, who dispose of all the stores, but the workers.*" In order for this **not** to occur, the workers would have to take over the stores and the means of production, protected by the police and armed forces and this meant insurrection. [Errico Malatesta, **The Anarchist Reader**, pp. 224-5] Again, however, most modern syndicalists accept this to be the case and see the "*expropriatory general strike,*" in the words of French syndicalist Pierre Besnard, as "*clearly insurrectional.*" [cited by Vernon Richards, **Life and Ideas**, p. 288] We mention this purely to counter Leninist claims that syndicalists subscribe to the same ones they did in the 1890s.

Despite our criticisms we should recognise that the difference between anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists are slight and (often) just a case of emphasis. Most anarchists support anarcho-syndicalist unions where they exist and often take a key role in creating and organising them. Similarly, many self-proclaimed anarcho-syndicalists also support specific organisations of anarchists to work within and outwith the syndicalist union. Anarcho-syndicalist and revolutionary unions, where they still exist, are far more progressive than any other union. Not only do they create democratic unions and create an atmosphere where anarchist ideas are listened to with respect but they also organise and fight in a way that breaks down the divisions into leaders and led, doers and watchers. On its own this is very good but not good enough. For non-syndicalist anarchists, the missing element is an organisation winning support for anarchist ideas and anarchist methods both within revolutionary unions and everywhere else working class people are brought together.

For a further information on the anarchist critic of syndicalism, we can suggest no better source than the writings of Errico Malatesta. **The Anarchist Reader** contains the famous debate between the syndicalist Pierre Monatte and Malatesta at the International Anarchist conference in Amsterdam in 1907. The books **Malatesta: Life and Ideas** and **The Anarchist Revolution** contain Malatesta's viewpoints on anarchism , syndicalism and how anarchists should work within the labour movement.

## I.2 Is this a blueprint for an anarchist society?

No, far from it. There can be no such thing as a "*blueprint*" for a free society. All we can do here is indicate those general features that we believe a free society **must** have in order to qualify as truly libertarian. For example, a society based on hierarchical management in the workplace (like capitalism) would not be libertarian and would soon see private or public states developing to protect the power of those at the top hierarchical positions ("*Anarchy without socialism. . . [is] impossible to us, for in such case it could not be other than the domination of the strongest, and would therefore set in motion right away the organisation and consolidation of this domination, that is to the constitution of government.*" [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 148]). Beyond such general considerations, however, the specifics of how to structure a non-hierarchical society must remain open for discussion and experimentation:

*"Anarchism, meaning Liberty, is compatible with the most diverse economic [and social] conditions, on the premise that these cannot imply, as under capitalist monopoly, the negation of liberty."* [D. A. de Santillan, **After the Revolution**, p. 95]

So, this section of the anarchist FAQ should not be regarded as a detailed plan. Anarchists have always been reticent about spelling out their vision of the future in too much detail for it would be contrary to anarchist principles to be dogmatic about the precise forms the new society must take. Free people will create their own alternative institutions in response to conditions specific to their area and it would be presumptuous of us to attempt to set forth universal policies in advance. In Kropotkin's words:

*"Once expropriation [of social wealth by the masses] has been carried through . . . then, after a period of grouping, there will necessarily arise a new system of organising production and exchange . . . and that system will be a lot more attuned to popular aspirations and the requirements of co-existence and mutual relations than any theory, however splendid, devised by the thinking and imagination of reformers. . ."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 232]

This, however, did not stop him "*predicting right now that [in some areas influenced by anarchists]. . . the foundations of the new organisation will be the free federation of producers' groups and the free federation of Communes and groups in independent Communes.*" [**Ibid.**] This is because what we think now will influence the future just as real experience will influence and change how we think. Moreover, given the ways in which our own unfree society has shaped our ways of thinking, it is probably impossible for us to imagine what new forms will arise once humanity's ingenuity and creativity is unleashed by the removal of its present authoritarian fetters. Thus any attempts to paint a detailed picture of the future will be doomed to failure. Ultimately, anarchists think that "*the new society should be organised with the direct participation of all concerned, from the periphery to the centre, freely and spontaneously, at the prompting of the sentiment of solidarity and under pressure of the natural needs of society.*" [E. Malatesta and A. Hamon, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 20]

Nevertheless, anarchists have been willing to specify some broad principles indicating the general framework within which they expect the institutions of the new society to grow. It is important to emphasise that these principles are not the arbitrary creations of intellectuals in ivory towers. Rather, they are based on the actual political, social and economic structures that have arisen **spontaneously** whenever working class people have attempted to throw off its chains during eras of heightened revolutionary activity, such as the Paris Commune, the Russian Revolution, the Spanish Revolution, and the Hungarian uprising of 1956, to name just a few. Thus, for example, it is clear that self-managed, democratic workers' councils are basic libertarian-socialist forms, since they have appeared during all revolutionary periods -- a fact that is not surprising considering that they are rooted in traditions of communal labour, shared resources, and participatory decision making that stretch back tens of thousands of years, from the clans and tribes of prehistoric times through the "*barbarian*" agrarian village of the post-Roman world to the free medieval city, as Kropotkin documents in his classic study **Mutual Aid**. Ultimately, such organisations are the only alternatives to government. Unless we make our own decisions ourselves, someone else will.

So, when reading these sections, please remember that this is just an attempt to sketch the outline of a possible future. It is in no way an attempt to determine **exactly** what a free society would be like, for such a free society will be the result of the actions of all of society, not just anarchists. As Malatesta argued:

*"None can judge with certainty who is right and who is wrong, who is nearest to the truth, or which is the best way to achieve the greatest good for each and everyone. Freedom, coupled by experience, is the only way of discovering the truth and what is best; and there is no freedom if there is a denial of the freedom to err."* [**Life and Ideas**, p. 49]

And, of course, real life has a habit of over-turning even the most realistic sounding theories, ideas and ideologies. Marxism, Leninism, Monetarism, laissez-faire capitalism (among others) have proven time and time again that ideology applied to real life has effects not predicted by the theory before hand (although in all four cases, their negative effects were predicted by others; in the case of Marxism and Leninism by anarchists). Anarchists are aware of this, which is why we reject ideology in favour of theory and why we are hesitant to create blue-prints for the future. After all, history has proven Proudhon right when he stated that "*every society declines the moment it falls into the hands of the ideologists.*" [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 115]

Only life, as Bakunin stressed, can create and so life must inform theory -- and so if the theory is producing adverse results it is better to revise the theory than deny reality or justify the evil effects it creates on real people. Thus this section of the FAQ is not a blue print, rather it is a series of suggestions (suggestions drawn, we stress, from actual experiences of working class revolt and organisation). These suggestions may be right or wrong and informed by Malatesta's comments that:

*"We do not boast that we possess absolute truth, on the contrary, we believe that **social***



*truth is not a fixed quantity, good for all times, universally applicable or determinable in advance, but that instead, once freedom has been secured, mankind will go forward discovering and acting gradually with the least number of upheavals and with a minimum of friction. Thus our solutions always leave the door open to different and, one hopes, better solutions.*" [Op. Cit., p.21]

It is for this reason that anarchists, to quote Bakunin, think that the *"revolution should not only be made for the people's sake; it should also be made by the people."* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 141] Social problems will be solved in the interests of the working class only if working class people solve them themselves. This applies to a social revolution -- it will only liberate the working class if working class people make it themselves, using their own organisations and power. Indeed, it is the course of struggling for social change, to correct social problems, by, say, strikes, occupations, demonstrations and other forms of direct action, that people can transform their assumptions about what is possible, necessary and desirable. The necessity of organising their struggles and their actions ensures the development of assemblies and other organs of popular power in order to manage their activity. These create, potentially, an alternative means by which society can be organised. As Kropotkin argued, *"[a]ny strike trains the participants for a common management of affairs."* [quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism**, p. 233] The ability of people to manage their own lives, and so society, becomes increasingly apparent and the existence of hierarchical authority, the state, the boss or a ruling class, becomes clearly undesirable and unnecessary. Thus the framework of the free society will be created by the very process of class struggle, as working class people create the organisations required to fight for improvements and change within capitalism (for more discussion, see section [I.2.3](#)).

Thus, the **actual** framework of an anarchist society and how it develops and shapes itself is dependent on the needs and desires of those who live in such a society or are trying to create one. This is why anarchists stress the need for mass assemblies in both the community and workplace and their federation from the bottom up to manage common affairs. Anarchy can only be created by the active participation of the mass of people. In the words of Malatesta, an anarchist society would be based on *"decisions taken at popular assemblies and carried out by groups and individuals who have volunteered or are duly delegated."* The *"success of the revolution"* depends on *"a large number of individuals with initiative and the ability to tackle practical tasks: by accustoming the masses not to leave the common cause in the hands of a few, and to delegate, when delegation is necessary, only for specific missions and for limited duration."* [Life and Ideas, p. 129] This self-management would be the basis on which an anarchist society would change and develop, with the new society created by those who live within it. Thus Bakunin:

*"revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations . . . organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation."* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 172]

And, we must not forget that while we may be able to roughly guess the way an anarchist society could start initially, we cannot pretend to predict how it will develop in the long term. A social revolution is just the beginning of a process that will soon lead to such a different society that we cannot predict how it will look. Unfortunately, we have to start where we are now, not where we hope to end up! Therefore our discussion will, by necessity, reflect the current society as this is the society we will be transforming. While, for some, this outlook may not be of a sufficient qualitative break with the world we now inhabit, it is essential. We need to offer and discuss suggestions for action in the **here and now**, not for some future pie in the sky world which can only possibly exist years, even decades, **after** a successful revolution.

For example, the ultimate goal of anarchism, we stress, is **not** the self-management of existing workplaces or industries. However, a revolution will undoubtedly see the occupation and placing under self-management much of existing industry and we start our discussion assuming a similar set-up as exists today. This does not mean that an anarchist society will continue to be like this, we simply present the initial stages using examples we are all familiar with. It is simply the first stage of transforming industry into something more ecologically safe, socially integrated and individually and collectively empowering for people.

These words of the strikers just before the 1919 Seattle General Strike expresses this perspective well:

*"Labour will not only SHUT DOWN the industries, but Labour will REOPEN, under the management of the appropriate trades, such activities as are needed to preserve public health and public peace. If the strike continues, Labour may feel led to avoid public suffering by reopening more and more activities,*

*"UNDER ITS OWN MANAGEMENT.*

*"And that is why we say that we are starting on a road that leads -- NO ONE KNOWS WHERE!" [quoted by Jeremy Brecher, **Strike!**, p. 110]*

Some people **seriously** seem to think that after a social revolution working people will continue using the same technology, in the same old workplaces, in the same old ways and not change a single thing (except, perhaps, electing their managers). They simply transfer their own lack of imagination onto the rest of humanity. We have little doubt that working people will quickly transform their work, workplaces and society into one suitable for human beings, rejecting the legacy of capitalism and create a society we simply cannot predict. The occupying of workplaces is, we stress, simply the first stage of the process of transforming them and the rest of society.

People's lives in a post-revolutionary society will not centre around fixed jobs and workplaces as they do now. Productive activity will go on, but not in the alienated way it does today. Similarly, in their communities people will apply their imaginations, skills and hopes to transform them into better places to live (the beautification of the commune, as the CNT put it). The first stage, of course, will be to take

over their existing communities and place them under community control. Therefore, it is essential to remember that our discussion can only provide an indication on how an anarchist society will operate in the months and years after a successful revolution, an anarchist society still marked by the legacy of capitalism. However, it would be a great mistake to think that anarchists do not seek to transform all aspects of society to eliminate that legacy and create a society fit for unique individuals to live in. As an anarchist society develops it will, we stress, transform society in ways we cannot guess at now, based on the talents, hopes, dreams and imaginations of those living in it.

Lastly, it could be argued that we spend too much time discussing the "*form*" (i.e. the types of organisation and how they make decisions) rather than the "*content*" of an anarchist society (the nature of the decisions reached). Moreover, the implication of this distinction also extends to the organisations created in the class struggle that would, in all likelihood, become the framework of a free society. However, form is as, perhaps more, important than content. This is because "*form*" and "*content*" are inter-related -- a libertarian, participatory "*form*" of organisation allows the "*content*" of a decision, society or struggle to change. Self-management has an educational effect on those involved, as they are made aware of different ideas, think about them and decide between them (and, of course, formula and present their own ones). Thus the nature of these decisions can and will evolve. Thus form has a decisive impact on "*content*" and so we make no apologies for discussing the form of a free society. As Murray Bookchin argues:

*"To assume that the forms of freedom can be treated merely as forms would be as absurd as to assume that legal concepts can be treated merely as questions of jurisprudence. The form and content of freedom, like law and society, are mutually determined. By the same token, there are forms of organisation that promote and forms that vitiate the goal of freedom . . . To one degree or another, these forms either alter the individual who uses them or inhibit his [or her] further development."* [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, p. 147]

And the **content** of decisions are determined by the individuals involved. Thus participatory, decentralised, self-managed organisations are essential for the development of the content of decisions because they develop the individuals who make them.

## I.2.1 Why discuss what an anarchist society would be like at all?

Partly, in order to indicate why people should become anarchists. Most people do not like making jumps in the dark, so an indication of what anarchists think a desirable society would look like may help those people who are attracted intellectually by anarchism, inspiring them to become committed to its practical realisation. Partly, it's a case of learning from past mistakes. There have been numerous anarchistic social experiments on varying scales, and it's useful to understand what happened, what worked and what did not. In that way, hopefully, we will not make the same mistakes twice.

However, the most important reason for discussing what an anarchist society would look like is to ensure that the creation of such a society is the action of as many people as possible. As Errico Malatesta

indicated in the middle of the Italian revolutionary *"Two Red Years"* (see [section A.5.5](#)), *"either we all apply our minds to thinking about social reorganisation, and right away, at the very same moment that the old structures are being swept away, and we shall have a more humane and more just society, open to future advances, or we shall leave such matters to the 'leaders' and we shall have a new government."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 69]

Hence the importance of discussing what the future will be like in the here and now. The more people who have a fairly clear idea of what a free society would look like the easier it will be to create that society and ensure that no important matters are left to the *"leaders"* to decide for us. The example of the Spanish Revolution comes to mind. For many years before 1936, the C.N.T. and F.A.I. put out publications discussing what an anarchist society would look like (for example, **After the Revolution** by Diego Abel de Santillan and **Libertarian Communism** by Isaac Puente). In fact, anarchists had been organising and educating in Spain for almost seventy years before the revolution. When it finally occurred, the millions of people who participated already shared a similar vision and started to build a society based on it, thus learning firsthand where their books were wrong and which areas of life they did not adequately cover.

So, this discussion of what an anarchist society might look like is not a drawing up of blueprints, nor is it an attempt to force the future into the shapes created in past revolts. It is purely and simply an attempt to start people discussing what a free society would be like and to learn from previous experiments. However, as anarchists recognise the importance of building the new world in the shell of the old, our ideas of what a free society would be like can feed into how we organise and struggle today. And vice versa; for how we organise and struggle today will have an impact on the future.

As Malatesta pointed out, such discussions are necessary and essential, for *"[i]t is absurd to believe that, once government has been destroyed and the capitalists expropriated, 'things will look after themselves' without the intervention of those who already have an idea on what has to be done and who immediately set about doing it. . . . [for] social life, as the life of individuals, does not permit of interruption."* He stresses that *"[t]o neglect all the problems of reconstruction or to pre-arrange complete and uniform plans are both errors, excesses which, by different routes, would led to our defeat as anarchists and to the victory of new or old authoritarian regime. The truth lies in the middle."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 121]

Moreover, the importance of discussing the future can help indicate whether our activities are actually creating a better world. After all, if Karl Marx had been more willing to discuss his vision of a socialist society then the Stalinists would have found it much harder to claim that their hellish system was, in fact, socialism. Unfortunately he failed to understand this. Given that anarchists like Proudhon and Bakunin gave a board outline of their vision of a free society it would have been impossible for anarchism to be twisted as Marxism was.

We hope that this Section of the FAQ, in its own small way, will encourage as many people as possible to discuss what a libertarian society would be like and use that discussion to bring it closer.

## I.2.2 Will it be possible to go straight to an anarchist society from capitalism?

Possibly, it depends what is meant by an anarchist society.

If it is meant a fully classless society (what some people, inaccurately, would call a "*utopia*") then the answer is a clear "*no, that would be impossible.*" Anarchists are well aware that "*class difference do not vanish at the stroke of a pen whether that pen belongs to the theoreticians or to the pen-pushers who set out laws or decrees. Only action, that is to say direct action (not through government) expropriation by the proletarians, directed against the privileged class, can wipe out class difference.*" [Luigi Fabbri, "*Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism*", in **The Poverty of Statism**, pp. 13-49, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 30]

For anarchists, a social revolution is a **process** and not an event (although, of course, a process marked by such events as general strikes, uprisings, insurrections and so on). As Kropotkin argued:

*"It is a whole insurrectionary period of three, four, perhaps five years that we must traverse to accomplish our revolution in the property system and in social organisation."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 72]

His famous work **The Conquest of Bread** aimed, to use his words, at "*prov[ing] that communism -- at least partial -- has more chance of being established than collectivism, especially in communes taking the lead . . . [and] tried . . . to indicate how, during a revolutionary period, a large city -- if its inhabitants have accepted the idea -- could organise itself on the lines of free communism.*" [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 298] Indeed, he stresses in **The Conquest of Bread** that anarchists "*do not believe that in any country the Revolution will be accomplished at a stroke, in the twinkling of a eye, as some socialists dream.*" [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 81] Indeed, he stressed that "*[n]o fallacy more harmful has ever been spread than the fallacy of a 'One-day Revolution.'*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 81f] The revolution, in other words, would progress towards communism after the initial revolt:

*"we know that an **uprising** can overthrow and change a government in one day, while a **revolution** needs three or four years of revolutionary convulsion to arrive at tangible results . . . if we should expect the revolution, from its **earliest** insurrections, to have a communist character, we would have to relinquish the possibility of a revolution, since in that case there would be need of a strong majority to agree on carrying through a change in the direction of communism."* [Kropotkin, quoted by Max Nettlau, **A Short History of Anarchism**, pp. 282-3]

In addition, different areas will develop in different speeds and in different ways, depending on the influences dominant in the area. "*Side by side with the revolutionised communes,*" argued Kropotkin,

*"[other] places would remain in an expectant attitude, and would go on living on the Individualist system . . . revolution would break out everywhere, but revolution under different aspects; in one country State Socialism, in another Federation; everywhere more or less Socialism, not conforming to any particular rule." Thus "the Revolution will take a different character in each of the different European nations; the point attained in the socialisation of wealth will not be everywhere the same." [The Conquest of Bread, pp. 81-2 and p. 81] In this, as we shall see, he followed Bakunin.*

Kropotkin was also aware that a revolution would face many problems, including the disruption of economic activity, civil war and isolation. He argued that it was *"certain that the coming Revolution . . . will burst upon us in the middle of a great industrial crisis . . . There are millions of unemployed workers in Europe at this moment. It will be worse when Revolution has burst upon us . . . The number of the out-of-works will be doubled as soon as barricades are erected in Europe and the United States . . . we know that in time of Revolution exchange and industry suffer most from the general upheaval . . . A Revolution in Europe means, then, the unavoidable stoppage of at least half the factories and workshops."* He stressed that there would be *"the complete disorganisation"* of the capitalist economy and that during a revolution *"[i]nternational commerce will come to a standstill" and "the circulation of commodities and of provisions will be paralysed."* This would, of course, have an impact on the development of a revolution and so the *"circumstances will dictate the measures."* [Op. Cit., pp. 69-70, p. 191 and p. 79]

Thus we have anarcho-communism being introduced *"during a revolutionary period"* rather than instantly and the possibility that it will be *"partial"* in many, if not all areas, depending on the *"circumstances"* encountered. Therefore the (Marxist inspired) claim that anarchists think a fully communist society is possible overnight is simply false -- we recognise that a social revolution takes time to develop after it starts. As Malatesta put it, *"after the revolution, that is after the defeat of the existing powers and the overwhelming victory of the forces of insurrection, . . . then . . . gradualism really comes into operation. We shall have to study all the practical problems of life: production, exchange, the means of communication, relations between anarchist groupings and those living under some kind of authority, between communist collectives and those living in an individualistic way; relations between town and country . . . -- and so on."* [Life and Ideas, p. 173]

However, if by *"anarchist society"* it is meant a society that has abolished the state and started the process of transforming society from below then anarchists argue that such a society is not only possible after a successful revolution, it is essential. Thus the anarchist social revolution would be political (abolition of the state), economic (abolition of capitalism) and social (abolition of hierarchical social relationships). Or, more positively, the introduction of self-management into every aspect of life. In other words, *"political transformation . . . [and] economic transformation . . . must be accomplished together and simultaneously."* [Bakunin, **The Basic Bakunin**, p. 106] This transformation would be based upon the organisations created by working class people in their struggle against capitalism and the state (see [next section](#)). Thus the framework of a free society would be created by the struggle for freedom itself, by the class struggle **within** but **against** hierarchical society. This revolution would come *"from below"* and would expropriate capital as well as smash the state:

*"the revolution must set out from the first to radically and totally destroy the State . . . The natural and necessary consequence of this destruction will be . . . [among others, the] dissolution of army, magistracy, bureaucracy, police and priesthood. . . confiscation of all productive capital and means of production on behalf of workers' associations, who are to put them to use . . . the federative Alliance of all working men's associations . . . will constitute the Commune."* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 170]

As can be seen, anarchists have long argued that a social revolution must be directed against both capitalism **and** the state. Moreover, we have always stressed the key role that workers' councils (or "soviets") would play in a socialist revolution as both a means of struggle and the basis of a free society.

Such a society, as Bakunin argued, will not be "perfect" by any means:

*"I do not say that the peasants [and workers], freely organised from the bottom up, will miraculously create an ideal organisation, confirming in all respects to our dreams. But I am convinced that what they construct will be living and vibrant, a thousands times better and more just than any existing organisation. Moreover, this . . . organisation, being on the one hand open to revolutionary propaganda . . . , and on the other, not petrified by the intervention of the State . . . will develop and perfect itself through free experimentation as fully as one can reasonably expect in our times.*

*"With the abolition of the State, the spontaneous self-organisation of popular life . . . will revert to the communes. The development of each commune will take its point of departure the actual condition of its civilisation . . ."* [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 207]

The degree which a society which has abolished the state can progress towards free communism depends on objective conditions. Bakunin and other collectivists doubted the possibility of introducing a communistic system instantly after a revolution. For Kropotkin and many other anarcho-communists, communistic anarchy can, and must, be introduced as far as possible and as soon as possible in order to ensure a successful revolution. We should mention here that some anarchists, like the individualists, do not support the idea of revolution and instead see anarchist alternatives growing within capitalism and slowly replacing it.

So, clearly, the idea of "one-day revolution" is one rejected as a harmful fallacy by anarchists. We are aware that revolutions are a **process** and not an event (or series of events). However, one thing that anarchists do agree on is that it's essential for both the state and capitalism to be undermined as quickly as possible. It is true that, in the course of social revolution, we anarchists may not be able to stop a new state being created or the old one from surviving. It all depends on the balance of support for anarchist ideas in the population and how willing people are to introduce them. There is no doubt, though, that for a social revolt to be fully anarchist, the state and capitalism must be destroyed and new forms of oppression and exploitation not put in their place. How quickly after such a destruction we move to a fully communist-anarchist society is a moot point, dependent on the conditions the revolution is facing

and the ideas and wants of the people making it.

In other words anarchists agree that an anarchist society cannot be created overnight, for to assume so would be to imagine that anarchists could enforce their ideas on a pliable population. Libertarian socialism can only be created from below, by people who want it and understand it, organising and liberating themselves. "*Communist organisations*," argued Kropotkin, "*must be the work of all, a natural growth, a product of the constructive genius of the great mass. Communism cannot be imposed from above; it could not live even for a few months if the constant and daily co-operation of all did not uphold it. It must be free.*" [Kropotkin's **Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 140] The results of the Russian Revolution should have cleared away long ago any contrary illusions about how to create "socialist" societies. The lesson from every revolution is that the mistakes made by people in liberating themselves and transforming society are always minor compared to the results of creating authorities, who eliminate such "ideological errors" by destroying the freedom to make mistakes (and so freedom as such). Freedom is the only real basis on which socialism can be built ("*Experience through freedom is the only means to arrive at the truth and the best solutions; and there is no freedom if there is not the freedom to be wrong.*" [Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 72]).

Therefore, most anarchists would support Malatesta's claim that "*[t]o organise a [libertarian] communist society on a large scale it would be necessary to transform all economic life radically, such as methods of production, of exchange and consumption; and all this could not be achieved other than gradually, as the objective circumstances permitted and to the extent that the masses understood what advantages could be gained and were able to act for themselves.*" [Malatesta: **Life and Ideas**, p. 36]

This means that while the conditions necessary of a free society would be created in a broad way by a social revolution, it would be utopian to imagine everything will be perfect immediately. Few anarchists have argued that such a jump would be possible -- rather they have argued that revolutions create the conditions for the evolution towards an anarchist society by abolishing state and capitalism. "*Besides*," argued Alexander Berkman, "*you must not confuse the social revolution with anarchy. Revolution, in some of its stages, is a violent upheaval; anarchy is a social condition of freedom and peace. The revolution is the **means** of bringing anarchy about but it is not anarchy itself. It is to pave the road to anarchy, to establish conditions which will make a life of liberty possible.*" However, "*to achieve its purpose the revolution must be imbued with and directed by the anarchist spirit and ideas. The end shapes the means. . . the social revolution must be anarchist in method as in aim.*" [**The ABC of Anarchism**, p. 81]

This means that while acknowledging the possibility of a transitional **society**, anarchists reject the notion of a transitional **state** as confused in the extreme (and, as can be seen from the experience of Marxism, dangerous as well). An anarchist society can only be achieved by anarchist means. Hence French Syndicalist Fernand Pelloutier's comments:

*"Nobody believes or expects that the coming revolution . . . will realise unadulterated anarchist-communism. . . it will erupt, no doubt, before the work of anarchist education*



*has been completed . . . [and as] a result . . . , while we do preach perfect communism, it is not in the certainty or expectation of [libertarian] communism's being the social form of the future: it is in order to further men's [and women's] education . . . so that, by the time of the day of conflagration comes, they will have attained maximum emancipation. But must the transitional state to be endured necessarily or inevitability be the collectivist [i.e. state socialist/capitalist] jail? Might it not consist of libertarian organisation confined to the needs of production and consumption alone, with all political institutions having been done away with?" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, p. 55]*

One thing **is** certain: an anarchist social revolution or mass movement will need to defend itself against attempts by statists and capitalists to defeat it. Every popular movement, revolt, or revolution has had to face a backlash from the supporters of the status quo. An anarchist revolution or mass movement will face (and indeed has faced) such counter-revolutionary movements. However, this does not mean that the destruction of the state and capitalism need be put off until after the forces of reaction are defeated (as Marxists usually claim). For anarchists, a social revolution and free society can only be defended by anti-statist means, for example, by "*arming everyone . . . and of interesting the mass of the population in the victory of the revolution.*" This would involve the "*creation of a voluntary militia, without powers to interfere as militia in the life of the community, but only to deal with any armed attacks by the forces of reaction to re-establish themselves, or to resist outside intervention by countries as yet not in a state of revolution.*" [Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 173 and p. 166] For more discussion of this important subject see sections [I.5.14](#) and [J.7.6](#).

So, given an anarchist revolution which destroys the state, the type and nature of the economic system created by it will depend on local circumstances and the level of awareness in society. The individualists are correct in the sense that what we do now will determine how the future develops. Obviously, any "*transition period*" starts in the **here and now**, as this helps determine the future. Thus, while social anarchists usually reject the idea that capitalism can be reformed away, we agree with the individualists that it is essential for anarchists to be active today in constructing the ideas, ideals and new liberatory institutions of the future society within the current one. The notion of waiting for the "*glorious day*" of total revolution is not one held by anarchists.

Thus, all the positions outlined at the start of this section have a grain of truth in them. This is because, as Malatesta put it, "*[w]e are, in any case, only one of the forces acting in society, and history will advance, as always, in the direction of the resultant of all the [social] forces.*" [**Malatesta: Life and Ideas**, p. 109] This means that different areas will experiment in different ways, depending on the level of awareness which exists there -- as would be expected in a free society which is created by the mass of the people.

Ultimately, the most we can say about the timing and necessary conditions of revolution is that an anarchist society can only come about once people liberate themselves (and this implies an ethical and psychological transformation), but that this does not mean that people need to be "*perfect*" nor that an anarchist society will come about "*overnight*," without a period of self-activity by which individuals

reshape and change themselves as they are reshaping and changing the world about them.

## I.2.3 How is the framework of an anarchist society created?

Anarchists do not abstractly compare a free society with the current one. Rather, we see an **organic** connection between what is and what could be. In other words, anarchists see the initial framework of an anarchist society as being created under statism and capitalism when working class people organise themselves to resist hierarchy. As Kropotkin argued:

*"To make a revolution it is not . . . enough that there should be . . . [popular] risings . . . It is necessary that after the risings there should be something new in the institutions [that make up society], which would permit new forms of life to be elaborated and established."* [The Great French Revolution, vol. 1, p. 200]

Anarchists have seen these new institutions as being linked with the need of working class people to resist the evils of capitalism and statism. In other words, as being the product of the class struggle and attempts by working class people to resist state and capitalist authority. Thus the struggle of working class people to protect and enhance their liberty under hierarchical society will be the basis for a society **without** hierarchy. This basic insight allowed anarchists like Bakunin and Proudhon to predict future developments in the class struggle such as workers' councils (such as those which developed during the 1905 and 1917 Russian Revolutions). As Oskar Anweiler notes in his definitive work on the Russian Soviets (Workers' Councils):

*"Proudhon's views are often directly associated with the Russian councils . . . Bakunin . . ., much more than Proudhon, linked anarchist principles directly to revolutionary action, thus arriving at remarkable insights into the revolutionary process that contribute to an understanding of later events in Russia . . ."*

*"In 1863 Proudhon declared . . . 'All my economic ideas as developed over twenty-five years can be summed up in the words: agricultural-industrial federation. All my political ideas boil down to a similar formula: political federation or decentralisation.' . . . Proudhon's conception of a self-governing state [sic!] founded on producers' corporations [i.e. federations of co-operatives], is certainly related to the idea of 'a democracy of producers' which emerged in the factory soviets. To this extent Proudhon can be regarded as an ideological precursor of the councils . . ."*

*"Bakunin . . . suggested the formation of revolutionary committees with representatives from the barricades, the streets, and the city districts, who would be given binding mandates, held accountable to the masses, and subject to recall. These revolutionary deputies were to form the 'federation of the barricades,' organising a revolutionary commune to immediately unite with other centres of rebellion . . ."*

*"Bakunin proposed the formation of revolutionary committees to elect communal councils, and a pyramidal organisation of society 'through free federation from the bottom upward, the association of workers in industry and agriculture -- first in the communities, then through federation of communities into districts, districts into nations, and nations into international brotherhood.' These proposals are indeed strikingly similar to the structure of the subsequent Russian system of councils . . .*

*"Bakunin's ideas about spontaneous development of the revolution and the masses' capacity for elementary organisation undoubtedly were echoed in part by the subsequent soviet movement. . . Because Bakunin . . . was always very close to the reality of social struggle, he was able to foresee concrete aspects of the revolution. The council movement during the Russian Revolution, though not a result of Bakunin's theories, often corresponded in form and progress to his revolutionary concepts and predictions." [The Soviets, pp. 8-11]*

Paul Avrich also notes this:

*"As early as the 1860's and 1870's, the followers of Proudhon and Bakunin in the First International were proposing the formation of workers' councils designed both as a weapon of class struggle against capitalists and as the structural basis of the future libertarian society." [The Russian Anarchists, p. 73]*

In this sense, anarchy is not some distant goal but rather an aspect of the current struggles against domination, oppression and exploitation (i.e. the class struggle, to use an all-embracing term, although we must stress that anarchists use this term to cover all struggles against domination). *"Anarchism,"* argued Kropotkin, *"is not a mere insight into a remote future. Already now, whatever the sphere of action of the individual, he [or she] can act, either in accordance with anarchist principles or on an opposite line."* It was *"born among the people -- in the struggles of real life"* and *"owes its origin to the constructive, creative activity of the people."* [Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets, p. 75, p. 150 and p. 149]

Thus, *"Anarchism is not . . . a theory of the future to be realised by divine inspiration. It is a living force in the affairs of our life, constantly creating new conditions."* It *"stands for the spirit of revolt"* and so *"[d]irect action against the authority in the shop, direct action against the authority of the law, of direct action against the invasive, meddlesome authority of our moral code, is the logical, consistent method of Anarchism."* [Emma Goldman, **Anarchism and Other Essays**, p. 63 and p. 66]

Anarchism draws upon the autonomous self-activity and spontaneity of working class people in struggle to inform both its political theory and its vision of a free society. The struggle against hierarchy, in other words, teaches us not only how to be anarchists but also gives us a glimpse of what an anarchist society would be like, what its initial framework could be and the experience of managing our own activities which is required for such a society to function successfully.

Therefore, as is clear, anarchists have long had a clear vision of what an anarchist society would look like and, equally as important, where such a society would spring from. Which means, of course, that Lenin's assertion in **The State and Revolution** that anarchists "*have absolutely no clear idea of what the proletariat will put in its [the states] place*" is simply false. [Essential Works of Lenin, p. 358] Anarchists supported the idea of a federation of workers' councils as the means to destroy the state over 50 years before Lenin argued that the soviets would be the basis of his "*workers*" state.

It would, therefore, be useful to give a quick summary of anarchist views on this subject.

Proudhon, for example, looked to the self-activity of French workers, artisans and peasants and used that as the basis of his ideas on anarchism. While seeing such activity as essentially reformist in nature, he saw the germs of anarchy as being the result of "*generating from the bowels of the people, from the depths of labour, a greater authority, a more potent fact, which shall envelop capital and the State and subjugate them*" as "*it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings: an agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave.*" [System of Economical Contradictions, p. 399 and p. 398] What, decades later, Proudhon called an "*agro-industrial federation*" in his **Principal of Federation**.

He argued that workers should follow the example of those already creating Mutual Banks and co-operatives. He stressed the importance of co-operatives:

*"Do not the workmen's unions at this moment serve as the cradle for the social revolution, as the early Christian communities served as the cradle of Catholicity? Are they not always the open school, both theoretical and practical, where the workman learns the science of the production and distribution of wealth, where he studies, without masters and without books, by his own experience solely, the laws of that industrial organisation, which was the ultimate aim of the Revolution of '89 . . . ?"* [The General Idea of the Revolution, p. 78]

Proudhon linked his ideas to what working people were already doing:

*"labour associations . . . hav[e] grasped spontaneously . . . [that] merely by liasing with one another and making loans to one another, [they] have organised labour . . . So that, organisation of credit and organisation of labour amount to one and the same. It is no school and no theoretician that is saying this: the proof of it, rather, lies in current practice, revolutionary practice . . . If it were to come about that the workers were to come to some arrangement throughout the Republic and organise themselves along similar lines, it is obvious that, as masters of labour, constantly generating fresh capital through work, they would soon have wrested alienated capital back again, through their organisation and competition . . . We want the mines, canals, railways handed over to democratically organised workers' associations . . . We want these associations to be models for agriculture, industry and trade, the pioneering core of that vast federation of*

*companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic social Republic.*" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, pp. 59-61]

This linking of the present and the future through the self-activity and self-organisation of working class people is also found in Bakunin. Unlike Proudhon, Bakunin stressed **revolutionary** activity and so he saw the militant labour movement, and the revolution itself, as providing the basic structure of a free society. As he put it, *"the organisation of the trade sections and their representation in the Chambers of Labour . . . bear in themselves the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old one. They are creating not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself."* [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 255]

The needs of the class struggle would create the framework of a new society, a federation of workers councils, as *"strikes indicate a certain collective strength already, a certain understanding among the workers . . . each strike becomes the point of departure for the formation of new groups."* [The Basic Bakunin, pp. 149-50] This pre-revolutionary development would be accelerated by the revolution itself:

*"the federative alliance of all working men's associations . . . [will] constitute the Commune . . . [the] Communal Council [will be] composed of . . . delegates . . . vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates. . . all provinces, communes and associations . . . by first reorganising on revolutionary lines . . . [will] constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces . . . [and] organise a revolutionary force capable defeating reaction . . . [and for] self-defence . . . [The] revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations . . . organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation. . ."* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, pp. 170-2]

Like Bakunin, Kropotkin stressed that revolution transformed those taking part in it. As he noted in his classic account of the French Revolution, *"by degrees, the revolutionary education of the people was being accomplished by the revolution itself."* [Op. Cit., vol. 1, p. 261] Part of this process involved creating new organisations which allowed the mass of people to take part in the decision making of the revolution. He pointed to *"the popular Commune,"* arguing that *"the Revolution began by creating the Commune . . . and through this institution it gained . . . immense power."* He stressed that it was *"by means of the 'districts' [of the Communes] that . . . the masses, accustoming themselves to act without receiving orders from the national representatives, were practising what was to be described later as Direct Self-Government."* Such a system did not imply isolation, for while *"the districts strove to maintain their own independence"* they also *"sought for unity of action, not in subjection to a Central Committee, but in a federative union."* The Commune *"was thus made from below upward, by the federation of the district organisations; it spring up in a revolutionary way, from popular initiative."* [Op. Cit., p. 200 and p. 203]

Thus the process of class struggle, of the needs of the fighting against the existing system, generated the framework of an anarchist society -- *"the districts of Paris laid the foundations of a new, free, social*

organisation." Little wonder he argued that *"the principles of anarchism . . . already dated from 1789, and that they had their origin, not in theoretical speculations, but in the **deeds** of the Great French Revolution"* and that *"the libertarians would no doubt do the same to-day."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 206, p. 204 and p. 206]

Similarly, we discover him arguing in **Mutual Aid** that strikes and labour unions were an expression of mutual aid in capitalist society and of *"the worker's need of mutual support."* [**Mutual Aid**, p. 213] Elsewhere Kropotkin argued that *"labour combinations" like the "Sections" of French revolution were one of the "main popular anarchist currents" in history, expressing the "same popular resistance to the growing power of the few."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 159] For Kropotkin, like Bakunin, libertarian labour unions were *"natural organs for the direct struggle with capitalism and for the composition of the future social order."* [quoted by Paul Avrich, **The Russian Anarchists**, p. 81]

As can be seen, the major anarchist thinkers pointed to forms of organisation autonomously created and managed by the working class as the framework of an anarchist society. Both Bakunin and Kropotkin pointed to militant, direct action based labour unions while Proudhon pointed towards workers' experiments in co-operative production and mutual credit.

Later anarchists followed them. The anarcho-syndicalists, like Bakunin and Kropotkin, pointed to the developing labour movement as the framework of an anarchist society, as providing the basis for the free federation of workers' associations which would constitute the commune. Others, such as the Russians Maximov, Arshinov, Voline and Makhno, saw the spontaneously created workers' councils (soviets) of 1905 and 1917 as the basis of a free society, as another example of Bakunin's federation of workers' associations.

Thus, for all anarchists, the structural framework of an anarchist society was created by the class struggle, by the needs of working class people to resist oppression, exploitation and hierarchy. As Kropotkin stressed, *"[d]uring a revolution new forms of life will always germinate on the ruins of the old forms . . . It is impossible to legislate for the future. All we can do is vaguely guess its essential tendencies and clear the road for it."* [**Evolution and Environment**, pp. 101-2]

These essential tendencies were discovered, in practice, by the needs of the class struggle. The necessity of practising mutual aid and solidarity to survive under capitalism (as in any other hostile environment) makes working people and other oppressed groups organise together to fight their oppressors and exploiters. Thus the co-operation necessary for a libertarian socialist society, like its organisational framework, would be generated by the need to resist oppression and exploitation under capitalism. The process of resistance produces organisation on a wider and wider scale which, in turn, can become the framework of a free society as the needs of the struggle promote libertarian forms of organisation such as decision making from the bottom up, autonomy, federalism, delegates subject to instant recall and so on.

For example, a strikers' assembly would be the basic decision-making forum in a struggle for improved

wages and working conditions. It would create a strike committee to implement its decisions and send delegates to spread the strike. These delegates inspire other strikes, requiring a new organisation to coordinate the struggle. This results in delegates from all the strikes meeting and forming a federation (i.e. a workers' council). The strikers decide to occupy the workplace and the strike assemblies take over the means of production. The strike committees becomes the basis for factory committees which could administer the workplaces, based on workers' self-management via workplace assemblies (the former strikers' assemblies). The federation of strikers' delegates becomes the local communal council, replacing the existing state with a self-managed federation of workers' associations. In this way, the class struggle creates the framework of a free society.

This, obviously, means that any suggestions of how an anarchist society would look like are based on the fact that the *actual* framework of a free society will be the product of *actual* struggles. This means that the form of the free society will be shaped by the process of social change and the organs it creates. This is an important point and worth repeating.

So, as well as changing themselves while they change the world, a people in struggle also create the means by which they can manage society. By having to organise and manage their struggles, they become accustomed to self-management and self-activity and create the possibility of a free society and the organisations which will exist within it. Thus the framework of an anarchist society comes from the class struggle and the process of revolution itself. Anarchy is not a jump into the dark but rather a natural progression of the struggle for freedom in an unfree society. The contours of a free society will be shaped by the process of creating it and, therefore, will not be an artificial construction imposed on society. Rather, it will be created from below up by society itself as working class people start to break free of hierarchy. The class struggle thus transforms those involved as well as society **and** creates the organisational structure and people required for a libertarian society.

This clearly suggests that the **means** anarchists support are important as they have a direct impact on the ends they create. In other words, means influence ends and so our means must reflect the ends we seek and empower those who use them. In the words of Malatesta:

*"In our opinion all action which is directed toward the destruction of economic and political oppression, which serves to raise the moral and intellectual level of the people; which gives them an awareness of their individual rights and their power, and persuades them themselves to act on their own behalf . . . brings us closer to our ends and is therefore a good thing. On the other hand all activity which tends to preserve the present state of affairs, that tends to sacrifice man against his will for the triumph of a principle, is bad because it is a denial of our ends."* [**Life and Ideas**, p. 69]

The present state of affairs is based on the oppression, exploitation and alienation of the working class. This means that any tactics used in the pursuit of a free society must be based on resisting and destroying those evils. This is why anarchists stress tactics and organisations which increase the power, confidence, autonomy, initiative, participation and self-activity of oppressed people. As we indicate in

section J (["What Do Anarchists Do?"](#)) this means supporting direct action, solidarity and self-managed organisations built and run from the bottom-up. Only by fighting our own battles, relying on ourselves and our own abilities and power, in organisations we create and run ourselves, can we gain the power and confidence and experience needed to change society for the better and, hopefully, create a new society in place of the current one.

Needless to say, a revolutionary movement will never, at its start, be purely anarchist:

*"All of the workers' and peasants' movements which have taken place . . . have been movements within the limits of the capitalist regime, and have been more or less tinged with anarchism. This is perfectly natural and understandable. The working class do not act within a world of wishes, but in the real world where they are daily subjected to the physical and psychological blows of hostile forces . . . the workers continually feel the influence of all the real conditions of the capitalist regime and of intermediate groups . . . Consequently it is natural that the struggle which they undertake inevitably carries the stamp of various conditions and characteristics of contemporary society. The struggle can never be born in the finished and perfected anarchist form which would correspond to all the requirements of the ideas . . . When the popular masses engage in a struggle of large dimensions, they inevitably start by committing errors, they allow contradictions and deviations, and only through the process of this struggle do they direct their efforts in the direction of the ideal for which they are struggling."* [Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, pp. 239-40]

The role of anarchists is *"to help the masses to take the right road in the struggle and in the construction of the new society"* and *"support their first constructive efforts, assist them intellectually."* However, the working class *"once it has mastered the struggle and begins its social construction, will no longer surrender to anyone the initiative in creative work. The working class will then direct itself by its own thought; it will create its society according to its own plans."* [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 240-1] All anarchists can do is help this process by being part of it, arguing our case and winning people over to anarchist ideas (see [section J.3](#) for more details). Thus the process of struggle and debate will, hopefully, turn a struggle **against** capitalism and statism into one **for** anarchism. In other words, anarchists seek to preserve and extend the anarchistic elements that exist in every struggle and to help them become consciously libertarian by discussion and debate as members of those struggles.

Lastly, we must stress that it is only the **initial** framework of a free society which is created in the class struggle. As an anarchist society develops, it will start to change and develop in ways we cannot predict. The forms in which people express their freedom and their control over their own lives will, by necessity, change as these requirements and needs change. As Bakunin argued:

*"Even the most rational and profound science cannot divine the form social life will take in the future. It can only determine the **negative** conditions, which follow logically from a rigorous critique of existing society. Thus, by means of such a critique, social and*



*economic science rejected hereditary individual property and, consequently, took the abstract and, so to speak, **negative** position of collective property as a necessary condition of the future social order. In the same way, it rejected the very idea of the state or statism, meaning government of society from above downward . . . Therefore, it took the opposite, or negative, position: anarchy, meaning the free and independent organisation of all the units and parts of the community and their voluntary federation from below upward, not by the orders of any authority, even an elected one, and not by the dictates of any scientific theory, but as the natural development of all the varied demands put forth by life itself.*

*"Therefore no scholar can teach the people or even define for himself how they will and must live on the morrow of the social revolution. That will be determined first by the situation of each people, and secondly by the desires that manifest themselves and operate most strongly within them." [Statism and Anarchy, pp. 198-9]*

Therefore, while it will be reasonable to conclude that, for example, the federation of strike/factory assemblies and their councils/committees will be the framework by which production will initially be organised, this framework will mutate to take into account changing production and social needs. The actual structures created will, by necessity, will be transformed as industry is transformed from below upwards to meet the real needs of society and producers. As Kropotkin argued, *"the 'concentration' [of capital into bigger and bigger units] so much spoken of is often nothing but an amalgamation of capitalists for the purpose of **dominating the market**, not for cheapening the technical process."* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 154] This means that the first task of any libertarian society will be to transform both the structure and nature of work and industry developed under capitalism.

Anarchists have long argued that that capitalist methods cannot be used for socialist ends. In our battle to democratise the workplace, in our awareness of the importance of collective initiatives by the direct producers in transforming the work situation and the economic infrastructure, we show that factories are not merely sites of production, but also of reproduction -- the reproduction of a certain structure of social relations based on the division between those who give orders and those who take them, between those who direct and those who execute. Therefore, under workers' self-management industry, work and the whole structure and organisation of production will be transformed in ways we can only guess at today. We can point the general direction (i.e. self-managed, ecologically balanced, decentralised, federal, empowering, creative and so on) but that is all.

Similarly, as cities and towns are transformed into ecologically integrated communes, the initial community assemblies and their federations will transform along with the transformation of our surroundings. What they will evolve into we cannot predict, but their fundamentals of instant recall, delegation over representation, decision making from the bottom up, and so on will remain.

So, while anarchists see *"the future in the present"* as the initial framework of a free society, we recognise that such a society will evolve and change. However, the fundamental principles of a free

society will not change and so it is useful to present a summary of how such a society could work, based on these principles.

## A.5 What are some examples of "Anarchy in Action"?

Anarchism, more than anything else, is about the efforts of millions of revolutionaries changing the world in the last two centuries. Here we will discuss some of the high points of this movement, all of them of a profoundly anti-capitalist nature.

Anarchism **is** about radically changing the world, not just making the present system less inhuman by encouraging the anarchistic tendencies within it to grow and develop. While no purely anarchist revolution has taken place yet, there have been numerous ones with a highly anarchist character and level of participation. And while these have **all** been destroyed, in each case it has been at the hands of outside force brought against them (backed either by Communists or Capitalists), not because of any internal problems in anarchism itself. These revolutions, despite their failure to survive in the face of overwhelming force, have been both an inspiration for anarchists and proof that anarchism is a viable social theory and can be practised on a large scale.

What these revolutions share is the fact they are, to use Proudhon's term, a "**revolution from below**" -- they were examples of *"collective activity, of popular spontaneity."* It is only a transformation of society from the bottom up by the action of the oppressed themselves that can create a free society. As Proudhon asked, *"[w]hat serious and lasting Revolution was not made **from below**, by the people?"* For this reason an anarchist is a *"revolutionary from below."* Thus the social revolutions and mass movements we discuss in this section are examples of popular self-activity and self-liberation (as Proudhon put it in 1848, *"the proletariat must emancipate itself"*). [quoted by George Woodcock, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography**, p. 143 and p. 125] All anarchists echo Proudhon's idea of revolutionary change from below, the creation of a new society by the actions of the oppressed themselves. Bakunin, for example, argued that anarchists are *"foes . . . of all State organisations as such, and believe that the people can only be happy and free, when, organised from below by means of its own autonomous and completely free associations, without the supervision of any guardians, it will create its own life."* [**Marxism, Freedom and the State**, p. 63] In [section J.7](#) we discuss what anarchists think a social revolution is and what it involves.

Many of these revolutions and revolutionary movements are relatively unknown to non-anarchists. Most people will have heard of the Russian revolution but few will know of the popular movements which were its life-blood before the Bolsheviks seized power or the role that the anarchists played in it. Few will have heard of the Paris Commune, the Italian factory occupations or the Spanish collectives. This is unsurprising for, as Hebert Read notes, history *"is of two kinds -- a record of events that take place publicly, that make the headlines in the newspapers and get embodied in official records -- we might call this overground history"* but *"taking place at the same time, preparing for these public events, anticipating them, is another kind of history, that is not embodied in official records, an invisible underground history."* [quoted by William R. McKercher, **Freedom and Authority**, p. 155] Almost by

definition, popular movements and revolts are part of "*underground history*", the social history which gets ignored in favour of elite history, the accounts of the kings, queens, politicians and wealthy whose fame is the product of the crushing of the many.

This means our examples of "anarchy in action" are part of what the Russian anarchist Voline called "*The Unknown Revolution*." Voline used that expression as the title of his classic account of the Russian revolution he was an active participant of. He used it to refer to the rarely acknowledged independent, creative actions of the people themselves. As Voline put it, "*it is not known how to study a revolution*" and most historians "*mistrust and ignore those developments which occur silently in the depths of the revolution . . . at best, they accord them a few words in passing . . . [Yet] it is precisely these hidden facts which are important, and which throw a true light on the events under consideration and on the period.*" [**The Unknown Revolution**, p. 19] Anarchism, based as it is on revolution from below, has contributed considerably to both the "*underground history*" and the "*unknown revolution*" of the past few centuries and this section of the FAQ will shed some light on its achievements.

It is important to point out that these examples are of wide-scale social experiments and do not imply that we ignore the undercurrent of anarchist practice which exists in everyday life, even under capitalism. Both Peter Kropotkin (in **Mutual Aid**) and Colin Ward (in **Anarchy in Action**) have documented the many ways in which ordinary people, usually unaware of anarchism, have worked together as equals to meet their common interests. As Colin Ward argues, "*an anarchist society, a society which organises itself without authority, is always in existence, like a seed beneath the snow, buried under the weight of the state and its bureaucracy, capitalism and its waste, privilege and its injustices, nationalism and its suicidal loyalties, religious differences and their superstitious separatism.*" [**Anarchy in Action**, p. 14]

Anarchism is not only about a future society, it is also about the social struggle happening today. It is not a condition but a process, which we create by our self-activity and self-liberation.

By the 1960's, however, many commentators were writing off the anarchist movement as a thing of the past. Not only had fascism finished off European anarchist movements in the years before and during the war, but in the post-war period these movements were prevented from recovering by the capitalist West on one hand and the Leninist East on the other. Over the same period of time, anarchism had been repressed in the US, Latin America, China, Korea (where a social revolution with anarchist content was put down before the Korean War), and Japan. Even in the one or two countries that escaped the worst of the repression, the combination of the Cold War and international isolation saw libertarian unions like the Swedish SAC become reformist.

But the 60's were a decade of new struggle, and all over the world the 'New Left' looked to anarchism as well as elsewhere for its ideas. Many of the prominent figures of the massive explosion of May 1968 in France considered themselves anarchists. Although these movements themselves degenerated, those coming out of them kept the idea alive and began to construct new movements. The death of Franco in 1975 saw a massive rebirth of anarchism in Spain, with up to 500,000 people attending the CNT's first

post-Franco rally. The return to a limited democracy in some South American countries in the late 70's and 80's saw a growth in anarchism there. Finally, in the late 80's it was anarchists who struck the first blows against the Leninist USSR, with the first protest march since 1928 being held in Moscow by anarchists in 1987.

Today the anarchist movement, although still weak, organises tens of thousands of revolutionaries in many countries. Spain, Sweden and Italy all have libertarian union movements organising some 250,000 between them. Most other European countries have several thousand active anarchists. Anarchist groups have appeared for the first time in other countries, including Nigeria and Turkey. In South America the movement has recovered massively. A contact sheet circulated by the Venezuelan anarchist group **Corrio A** lists over 100 organisations in just about every country.

Perhaps the recovery is slowest in North America, but there, too, all the libertarian organisations seem to be undergoing significant growth. As this growth accelerates, many more examples of anarchy in action will be created and more and more people will take part in anarchist organisations and activities, making this part of the FAQ less and less important.

However, it is essential to highlight mass examples of anarchism working on a large scale in order to avoid the specious accusation of "utopianism." As history is written by the winners, these examples of anarchy in action are often hidden from view in obscure books. Rarely are they mentioned in the schools and universities (or if mentioned, they are distorted). Needless to say, the few examples we give are just that, a few.

Anarchism has a long history in many countries, and we cannot attempt to document every example, just those we consider to be important. We are also sorry if the examples seem Eurocentric. We have, due to space and time considerations, had to ignore the syndicalist revolt (1910 to 1914) and the shop steward movement (1917-21) in Britain, Germany (1919-21), Portugal (1974), the Mexican revolution, anarchists in the Cuban revolution, the struggle in Korea against Japanese (then US and Russian) imperialism during and after the Second World War, Hungary (1956), the "the refusal of work" revolt in the late 1960's (particularly in "the hot Autumn" in Italy, 1969), the UK miner's strike (1984-85), the struggle against the Poll Tax in Britain (1988-92), the strikes in France in 1986 and 1995, the Italian COBAS movement in the 80's and 90's, the popular assemblies and self-managed occupied workplaces during the Argentine revolt at the start of the 21st century and numerous other major struggles that have involved anarchist ideas of self-management (ideas that usually develop from the movement themselves, without anarchists necessarily playing a major, or "leading", role).

For anarchists, revolutions and mass struggles are "*festivals of the oppressed*," when ordinary people start to act for themselves and change both themselves and the world.

## A.5.1 The Paris Commune

The Paris Commune of 1871 played an important role in the development of both anarchist ideas and the

movement. As Bakunin commented at the time,

*"revolutionary socialism [i.e. anarchism] has just attempted its first striking and practical demonstration in the Paris Commune . . . [It] show[ed] to all enslaved peoples (and are there any masses that are not slaves?) the only road to emancipation and health; Paris inflict[ed] a mortal blow upon the political traditions of bourgeois radicalism and [gave] a real basis to revolutionary socialism."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 263-4]

The Paris Commune was created after France was defeated by Prussia in the Franco-Prussian war. The French government tried to send in troops to regain the Parisian National Guard's cannon to prevent it from falling into the hands of the population. *"Learning that the Versailles soldiers were trying to seize the cannon,"* recounted participant Louise Michel, *"men and women of Montmartre swarmed up the Butte in surprise manoeuvre. Those people who were climbing up the Butte believed they would die, but they were prepared to pay the price."* The soldiers refused to fire on the jeering crowd and turned their weapons on their officers. This was March 18th; the Commune had begun and *"the people wakened . . . The eighteenth of March could have belonged to the allies of kings, or to foreigners, or to the people. It was the people's."* [**Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel**, p. 64]

In the free elections called by the Parisian National Guard, the citizens of Paris elected a council made up of a majority of Jacobins and Republicans and a minority of socialists (mostly Blanquists -- authoritarian socialists -- and followers of the anarchist Proudhon). This council proclaimed Paris autonomous and desired to recreate France as a confederation of communes (i.e. communities). Within the Commune, the elected council people were recallable and paid an average wage. In addition, they had to report back to the people who had elected them and were subject to recall by electors if they did not carry out their mandates.

Why this development caught the imagination of anarchists is clear -- it has strong similarities with anarchist ideas. In fact, the example of the Paris Commune was in many ways similar to how Bakunin had predicted that a revolution would have to occur -- a major city declaring itself autonomous, organising itself, leading by example, and urging the rest of the planet to follow it. (See *"Letter to Albert Richards"* in **Bakunin on Anarchism**). The Paris Commune began the process of creating a new society, one organised from the bottom up. It was *"a blow for the decentralisation of political power."* [Voltairine de Cleyre, *"The Paris Commune,"* **Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth**, p. 67]

Many anarchists played a role within the Commune -- for example Louise Michel, the Reclus brothers, and Eugene Varlin (the latter murdered in the repression afterwards). As for the reforms initiated by the Commune, such as the re-opening of workplaces as co-operatives, anarchists can see their ideas of associated labour beginning to be realised. By May, 43 workplaces were co-operatively run and the Louvre Museum was a munitions factory run by a workers' council. Echoing Proudhon, a meeting of the Mechanics Union and the Association of Metal Workers argued that *"our economic emancipation . . . can only be obtained through the formation of workers' associations, which alone can transform our*

*position from that of wage earners to that of associates."* They instructed their delegates to the Commune's Commission on Labour Organisation to support the following objectives:

*"The abolition of the exploitation of man by man, the last vestige of slavery;*

*"The organisation of labour in mutual associations and inalienable capital."*

In this way, they hoped to ensure that *"equality must not be an empty word"* in the Commune. [**The Paris Commune of 1871: The View from the Left**, Eugene Schulkind (ed.), p. 164] The Engineers Union voted at a meeting on 23rd of April that since the aim of the Commune should be *"economic emancipation"* it should *"organise labour through associations in which there would be joint responsibility"* in order *"to suppress the exploitation of man by man."* [quoted by Stewart Edwards, **The Paris Commune 1871**, pp. 263-4]

As well as self-managed workers' associations, the Communards practised direct democracy in a network popular clubs, popular organisations similar to the directly democratic neighbourhood assemblies (*"sections"*) of the French Revolution. *"People, govern yourselves through your public meetings, through your press"* proclaimed the newspaper of one Club. The commune was seen as an expression of the assembled people, for (to quote another Club) *"Communal power resides in each arrondissement [neighbourhood] wherever men are assembled who have a horror of the yoke and of servitude."* Little wonder that Gustave Courbet, artist friend and follower of Proudhon, proclaimed Paris as *"a true paradise . . . all social groups have established themselves as federations and are masters of their own fate."* [quoted by Martin Phillip Johnson, **The Paradise of Association**, p. 5 and p. 6]

In addition the Commune's *"Declaration to the French People"* which echoed many key anarchist ideas. It saw the *"political unity"* of society as being based on *"the voluntary association of all local initiatives, the free and spontaneous concourse of all individual energies for the common aim, the well-being, the liberty and the security of all."* [quoted by Edwards, **Op. Cit.**, p. 218] The new society envisioned by the communards was one based on the *"absolute autonomy of the Commune. . . assuring to each its integral rights and to each Frenchman the full exercise of his aptitudes, as a man, a citizen and a labourer. The autonomy of the Commune will have for its limits only the equal autonomy of all other communes adhering to the contract; their association must ensure the liberty of France."* [*"Declaration to the French People"*, quoted by George Woodcock, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography**, pp. 276-7] With its vision of a confederation of communes, Bakunin was correct to assert that the Paris Commune was *"a bold, clearly formulated negation of the State."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 264]

Moreover, the Commune's ideas on federation obviously reflected the influence of Proudhon on French radical ideas. Indeed, the Commune's vision of a communal France based on a federation of delegates bound by imperative mandates issued by their electors and subject to recall at any moment echoes Proudhon's ideas (Proudhon had argued in favour of the *"implementation of the binding mandate"* in 1848 [**No Gods, No Masters**, p. 63] and for federation of communes in his work **The Principle of Federation**).

Thus both economically and politically the Paris Commune was heavily influenced by anarchist ideas. Economically, the theory of associated production expounded by Proudhon and Bakunin became consciously revolutionary practice. Politically, in the Commune's call for federalism and autonomy, anarchists see their *"future social organisation. . . [being] carried out from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, starting with associations, then going into the communes, the regions, the nations, and, finally, culminating in a great international and universal federation."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 270]

However, for anarchists the Commune did not go far enough. It did not abolish the state within the Commune, as it had abolished it beyond it. The Communards organised themselves *"in a Jacobin manner"* (to use Bakunin's cutting term). As Peter Kropotkin pointed out, while *"proclaiming the free Commune, the people of Paris proclaimed an essential anarchist principle . . . they stopped mid-course"* and gave *"themselves a Communal Council copied from the old municipal councils."* Thus the Paris Commune did not *"break with the tradition of the State, of representative government, and it did not attempt to achieve within the Commune that organisation from the simple to the complex it inaugurated by proclaiming the independence and free federation of the Communes."* This led to disaster as the Commune council became *"immobilised . . . by red tape"* and lost *"the sensitivity that comes from continued contact with the masses . . . Paralysed by their distancing from the revolutionary centre -- the people -- they themselves paralysed the popular initiative."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 97, p. 93 and p. 97]

In addition, its attempts at economic reform did not go far enough, making no attempt to turn all workplaces into co-operatives (i.e. to expropriate capital) and forming associations of these co-operatives to co-ordinate and support each other's economic activities. Paris, stressed Voltairine de Cleyre, *"failed to strike at economic tyranny, and so came of what it could have achieved"* which was a *"free community whose economic affairs shall be arranged by the groups of actual producers and distributors, eliminating the useless and harmful element now in possession of the world's capital."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 67] As the city was under constant siege by the French army, it is understandable that the Communards had other things on their minds. However, for Kropotkin such a position was a disaster:

*"They treated the economic question as a secondary one, which would be attended to later on, after the triumph of the Commune . . . But the crushing defeat which soon followed, and the blood-thirsty revenge taken by the middle class, proved once more that the triumph of a popular Commune was materially impossible without a parallel triumph of the people in the economic field."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 74]

Anarchists drew the obvious conclusions, arguing that *"if no central government was needed to rule the independent Communes, if the national Government is thrown overboard and national unity is obtained by free federation, then a central **municipal** Government becomes equally useless and noxious. The same federative principle would do within the Commune."* [Kropotkin, **Evolution and Environment**, p. 75] Instead of abolishing the state within the commune by organising federations of directly democratic mass assemblies, like the Parisian "sections" of the revolution of 1789-93 (see Kropotkin's **Great French Revolution** for more on these), the Paris Commune kept representative government and



suffered for it. *"Instead of acting for themselves . . . the people, confiding in their governors, entrusted them the charge of taking the initiative. This was the first consequence of the inevitable result of elections."* The council soon became *"the greatest obstacle to the revolution"* thus proving the *"political axiom that a government cannot be revolutionary."* [**Anarchism**, p. 240, p. 241 and p. 249]

The council become more and more isolated from the people who elected it, and thus more and more irrelevant. And as its irrelevance grew, so did its authoritarian tendencies, with the Jacobin majority creating a *"Committee of Public Safety"* to *"defend"* (by terror) the "revolution." The Committee was opposed by the libertarian socialist minority and was, fortunately, ignored in practice by the people of Paris as they defended their freedom against the French army, which was attacking them in the name of capitalist civilisation and "liberty." On May 21st, government troops entered the city, followed by seven days of bitter street fighting. Squads of soldiers and armed members of the bourgeoisie roamed the streets, killing and maiming at will. Over 25,000 people were killed in the street fighting, many murdered after they had surrendered, and their bodies dumped in mass graves. As a final insult, **Sacré Coeur** was built by the bourgeoisie on the birth place of the Commune, the Butte of Montmartre, to atone for the radical and atheist revolt which had so terrified them.

For anarchists, the lessons of the Paris Commune were threefold. Firstly, a decentralised confederation of communities is the necessary political form of a free society (*"This was the form that the social revolution must take -- the independent commune."* [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 163]). Secondly, *"there is no more reason for a government inside a Commune than for government above the Commune."* This means that an anarchist community will be based on a confederation of neighbourhood and workplace assemblies freely co-operating together. Thirdly, it is critically important to unify political and economic revolutions into a **social** revolution. *"They tried to consolidate the Commune first and put off the social revolution until later, whereas the only way to proceed was to consolidate the Commune by means of the social revolution!"* [Peter Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel** , p. 97]

For more anarchist perspectives on the Paris Commune see Kropotkin's essay *"The Paris Commune"* in **Words of a Rebel** (and **The Anarchist Reader**) and Bakunin's *"The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State"* in **Bakunin on Anarchism**.

## A.5.2 The Haymarket Martyrs

May 1st is a day of special significance for the labour movement. While it has been hijacked in the past by the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, the labour movement festival of May Day is a day of world-wide solidarity. A time to remember past struggles and demonstrate our hope for a better future. A day to remember that an injury to one is an injury to all.

The history of Mayday is closely linked with the anarchist movement and the struggles of working people for a better world. Indeed, it originated with the execution of four anarchists in Chicago in 1886 for organising workers in the fight for the eight-hour day. Thus May Day is a product of *"anarchy in action"* -- of the struggle of working people using direct action in labour unions to change the world.

It began in the 1880s in the USA. In 1884, the **Federation of Organised Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada** (created in 1881, it changed its name in 1886 to the **American Federation of Labor**) passed a resolution which asserted that *"eight hours shall constitute a legal day's work from and after May 1, 1886, and that we recommend to labour organisations throughout this district that they so direct their laws as to conform to this resolution."* A call for strikes on May 1st, 1886 was made in support of this demand.

In Chicago the anarchists were the main force in the union movement, and partially as a result of their presence, the unions translated this call into strikes on May 1st. The anarchists thought that the eight hour day could only be won through direct action and solidarity. They considered that struggles for reforms, like the eight hour day, were not enough in themselves. They viewed them as only one battle in an ongoing class war that would only end by social revolution and the creation of a free society. It was with these ideas that they organised and fought.

In Chicago alone, 400 000 workers went out and the threat of strike action ensured that more than 45 000 were granted a shorter working day without striking. On May 3, 1886, police fired into a crowd of pickets at the McCormick Harvester Machine Company, killing at least one striker, seriously wounding five or six others, and injuring an undetermined number. Anarchists called for a mass meeting the next day in Haymarket Square to protest the brutality. According to the Mayor, *"nothing had occurred yet, or looked likely to occur to require interference."* However, as the meeting was breaking up a column of 180 police arrived and ordered the meeting to end. At this moment a bomb was thrown into the police ranks, who opened fire on the crowd. How many civilians were wounded or killed by the police was never exactly ascertained.

A reign of terror swept over Chicago. Meeting halls, union offices, printing shops and private homes were raided (usually without warrants). Such raids into working-class areas allowed the police to round up all known anarchists and other socialists. Many suspects were beaten up and some bribed. *"Make the raids first and look up the law afterwards"* was the public statement of J. Grinnell, the States Attorney, when a question was raised about search warrants. [*Editor's Introduction*], **The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs**, p. 7]

Eight anarchists were put on trial for accessory to murder. No pretence was made that any of the accused had carried out or even planned the bomb. Instead the jury were told *"Law is on trial. Anarchy is on trial. These men have been selected, picked out by the Grand Jury, and indicted because they were leaders. They are no more guilty than the thousands who follow them. Gentlemen of the jury; convict these men, make examples of them, hang them and you save our institutions, our society."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 8] The jury was selected by a special bailiff, nominated by the State's Attorney and was composed of businessmen and a relative of one of the cops killed. The defence was not allowed to present evidence that the special bailiff had publicly claimed *"I am managing this case and I know what I am about. These fellows are going to be hanged as certain as death."* [**Ibid.**] Not surprisingly, the accused were convicted. Seven were sentenced to death, one to 15 years' imprisonment.

An international campaign resulted in two of the death sentences being commuted to life, but the world wide protest did not stop the US state. Of the remaining five, one (Louis Lingg) cheated the executioner and killed himself on the eve of the execution. The remaining four (Albert Parsons, August Spies, George Engel and Adolph Fischer) were hanged on November 11th 1887. They are known in Labour history as the Haymarket Martyrs. Between 150,000 and 500,000 lined the route taken by the funeral cortege and between 10,000 to 25,000 were estimated to have watched the burial.

In 1889, the American delegation attending the International Socialist congress in Paris proposed that May 1st be adopted as a workers' holiday. This was to commemorate working class struggle and the "*Martyrdom of the Chicago Eight*". Since then Mayday has become a day for international solidarity. In 1893, the new Governor of Illinois made official what the working class in Chicago and across the world knew all along and pardoned the Martyrs because of their obvious innocence and because "*the trial was not fair*".

The authorities had believed at the time of the trial that such persecution would break the back of the labour movement. They were wrong. In the words of August Spies when he addressed the court after he had been sentenced to die:

*"If you think that by hanging us you can stamp out the labour movement . . . the movement from which the downtrodden millions, the millions who toil in misery and want, expect salvation -- if this is your opinion, then hang us! Here you will tread on a spark, but there and there, behind you -- and in front of you, and everywhere, flames blaze up. It is a subterranean fire. You cannot put it out."* [Op. Cit., pp. 8-9]

At the time and in the years to come, this defiance of the state and capitalism was to win thousands to anarchism, particularly in the US itself. Since the Haymarket event, anarchists have celebrated May Day (on the 1st of May -- the reformist unions and labour parties moved its marches to the first Sunday of the month). We do so to show our solidarity with other working class people across the world, to celebrate past and present struggles, to show our power and remind the ruling class of their vulnerability. As Nestor Makhno put it:

*"That day those American workers attempted, by organising themselves, to give expression to their protest against the iniquitous order of the State and Capital of the propertied . . .*

*"The workers of Chicago . . . had gathered to resolve, in common, the problems of their lives and their struggles. . .*

*"Today too . . . the toilers . . . regard the first of May as the occasion of a get-together when they will concern themselves with their own affairs and consider the matter of their emancipation."* [The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays, pp. 59-60]

Anarchists stay true to the origins of May Day and celebrate its birth in the direct action of the oppressed. Oppression and exploitation breed resistance and, for anarchists, May Day is an international symbol of that resistance and power -- a power expressed in the last words of August Spies, chiselled in stone on the monument to the Haymarket martyrs in Waldheim Cemetery in Chicago:

*"The day will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you are throttling today."*

To understand why the state and business class were so determined to hang the Chicago Anarchists, it is necessary to realise they were considered the "leaders" of a massive radical union movement. In 1884, the Chicago Anarchists produced the world's first daily anarchist newspaper, the **Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeitung**. This was written, read, owned and published by the German immigrant working class movement. The combined circulation of this daily plus a weekly (**Vorbote**) and a Sunday edition (**Fackel**) more than doubled, from 13,000 per issues in 1880 to 26,980 in 1886. Anarchist weekly papers existed for other ethnic groups as well (one English, one Bohemian and one Scandinavian).

Anarchists were very active in the Central Labour Union (which included the eleven largest unions in the city) and aimed to make it, in the words of Albert Parsons (one of the Martyrs), *"the embryonic group of the future 'free society.'"* The anarchists were also part of the **International Working People's Association** (also called the *"Black International"*) which had representatives from 26 cities at its founding convention. The I.W.P.A. soon *"made headway among trade unions, especially in the mid-west"* and its ideas of *"direct action of the rank and file"* and of trade unions *"serv[ing] as the instrument of the working class for the complete destruction of capitalism and the nucleus for the formation of a new society"* became known as the *"Chicago Idea"* (an idea which later inspired the **Industrial Workers of the World** which was founded in Chicago in 1905). [*"Editor's Introduction," The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs*, p. 4]

This idea was expressed in the manifesto issued at the I.W.P.A.'s Pittsburgh Congress of 1883:

*"First -- Destruction of the existing class rule, by all means, i.e. by energetic, relentless, revolutionary and international action.*

*"Second -- Establishment of a free society based upon co-operative organisation of production.*

*"Third -- Free exchange of equivalent products by and between the productive organisations without commerce and profit-mongery.*

*"Fourth -- Organisation of education on a secular, scientific and equal basis for both sexes.*

*"Fifth -- Equal rights for all without distinction to sex or race.*

*"Sixth -- Regulation of all public affairs by free contracts between autonomous (independent) communes and associations, resting on a federalistic basis." [Op. Cit., p. 42]*

In addition to their union organising, the Chicago anarchist movement also organised social societies, picnics, lectures, dances, libraries and a host of other activities. These all helped to forge a distinctly working-class revolutionary culture in the heart of the *"American Dream."* The threat to the ruling class and their system was too great to allow it to continue (particularly with memories of the vast uprising of labour in 1877 still fresh. As in 1886, that revolt was also met by state violence -- see **Strike!** by J. Brecher for details of this strike movement as well as the Haymarket events). Hence the repression, kangaroo court, and the state murder of those the state and capitalist class considered "leaders" of the movement.

For more on the Haymarket Martyrs, their lives and their ideas, the **The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs** is essential reading. Albert Parsons, the only American born Martyr, produced a book which explained what they stood for called **Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis**. Historian Paul Avrich's **The Haymarket Tragedy** is a useful in depth account of the events.

### A.5.3 Building the Syndicalist Unions

Just before the turn of the century in Europe, the anarchist movement began to create one of the most successful attempts to apply anarchist organisational ideas in everyday life. This was the building of mass revolutionary unions (also known as syndicalism or anarcho-syndicalism). The syndicalist movement, in the words of a leading French syndicalist militant, was *"a practical schooling in anarchism"* for it was *"a laboratory of economic struggles"* and organised *"along anarchic lines."* By organising workers into *"libertarian organisations,"* the syndicalist unions were creating the *"free associations of free producers"* within capitalism to combat it and, ultimately, replace it. [Fernand Pelloutier, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 57, p. 55 and p. 56]

While the details of syndicalist organisation varied from country to country, the main lines were the same. Workers should form themselves into unions (or *syndicates*, the French for union). While organisation by industry was generally the preferred form, craft and trade organisations were also used. These unions were directly controlled by their members and would federate together on an industrial and geographical basis. Thus a given union would be federated with all the local unions in a given town, region and country as well as with all the unions within its industry into a national union (of, say, miners or metal workers). Each union was autonomous and all officials were part-time (and paid their normal wages if they missed work on union business). The tactics of syndicalism were direct action and solidarity and its aim was to replace capitalism by the unions providing the basic framework of the new, free, society.

Thus, for anarcho-syndicalism, *"the trade union is by no means a mere transitory phenomenon bound up*

*with the duration of capitalist society, it is the germ of the Socialist economy of the future, the elementary school of Socialism in general.*" The *"economic fighting organisation of the workers"* gives their members *"every opportunity for direct action in their struggles for daily bread, it also provides them with the necessary preliminaries for carrying through the reorganisation of social life on a [libertarian] Socialist plan by their own strength."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 59 and p. 62] Anarcho-syndicalism, to use the expression of the I.W.W., aims to build the new world in the shell of the old.

In the period from the 1890's to the outbreak of World War I, anarchists built revolutionary unions in most European countries (particularly in Spain, Italy and France). In addition, anarchists in South and North America were also successful in organising syndicalist unions (particularly Cuba, Argentina, Mexico and Brazil). Almost all industrialised countries had some syndicalist movement, although Europe and South America had the biggest and strongest ones. These unions were organised in a confederal manner, from the bottom up, along anarchist lines. They fought with capitalists on a day-to-day basis around the issue of better wages and working conditions and the state for social reforms, but they also sought to overthrow capitalism through the revolutionary general strike.

Thus hundreds of thousands of workers around the world were applying anarchist ideas in everyday life, proving that anarchy was no utopian dream but a practical method of organising on a wide scale. That anarchist organisational techniques encouraged member participation, empowerment and militancy, and that they also successfully fought for reforms and promoted class consciousness, can be seen in the growth of anarcho-syndicalist unions and their impact on the labour movement. The Industrial Workers of the World, for example, still inspires union activists and has, throughout its long history, provided many union songs and slogans.

However, as a mass movement, syndicalism effectively ended by the 1930s. This was due to two factors. Firstly, most of the syndicalist unions were severely repressed just after World War I. In the immediate post-war years they reached their height. This wave of militancy was known as the "red years" in Italy, where it attained its high point with factory occupations (see [section A.5.5](#)). But these years also saw the destruction of these unions in country after country. In the USA, for example, the I.W.W. was crushed by a wave of repression backed whole-heartedly by the media, the state, and the capitalist class. Europe saw capitalism go on the offensive with a new weapon -- fascism. Fascism arose (first in Italy and, most infamously, in Germany) as an attempt by capitalism to physically smash the organisations the working class had built. This was due to radicalism that had spread across Europe in the wake of the war ending, inspired by the example of Russia. Numerous near revolutions had terrified the bourgeoisie, who turned to fascism to save their system.

In country after country, anarchists were forced to flee into exile, vanish from sight, or became victims of assassins or concentration camps after their (often heroic) attempts at fighting fascism failed. In Portugal, for example, the 100,000 strong anarcho-syndicalist CGT union launched numerous revolts in the late 1920s and early 1930s against fascism. In January 1934, the CGT called for a revolutionary general strike which developed into a five day insurrection. A state of siege was declared by the state,

which used extensive force to crush the rebellion. The CGT, whose militants had played a prominent and courageous role in the insurrection, was completely smashed and Portugal remained a fascist state for the next 40 years. [Phil Mailer, **Portugal: The Impossible Revolution**, pp. 72-3] In Spain, the CNT (the most famous anarcho-syndicalist union) fought a similar battle. By 1936, it claimed one and a half million members. As in Italy and Portugal, the capitalist class embraced fascism to save their power from the dispossessed, who were becoming confident of their power and their right to manage their own lives (see [section A.5.6](#)).

As well as fascism, syndicalism also faced the negative influence of Leninism. The apparent success of the Russian revolution led many activists to turn to authoritarian politics, particularly in English speaking countries and, to a lesser extent, France. Such notable syndicalist activists as Tom Mann in England, William Gallacher in Scotland and William Foster in the USA became Communists (the last two, it should be noted, became Stalinist). Moreover, Communist parties deliberately undermined the libertarian unions, encouraging fights and splits (as, for example, in the I.W.W.). After the end of the Second World War, the Stalinists finished off what fascism had started in Eastern Europe and destroyed the anarchist and syndicalist movements in such places as Bulgaria and Poland. In Cuba, Castro also followed Lenin's example and did what the Batista and Machado dictatorship's could not, namely smash the influential anarchist and syndicalist movements (see Frank Fernandez's **Cuban Anarchism** for a history of this movement from its origins in the 1860s to the 21st century).

So by the start of the second world war, the large and powerful anarchist movements of Italy, Spain, Poland, Bulgaria and Portugal had been crushed by fascism (but not, we must stress, without a fight). When necessary, the capitalists supported authoritarian states in order to crush the labour movement and make their countries safe for capitalism. Only Sweden escaped this trend, where the syndicalist union the SAC is still organising workers. It is, in fact, like many other syndicalist unions active today, growing as workers turn away from bureaucratic unions whose leaders seem more interested in protecting their privileges and cutting deals with management than defending their members. In France, Spain and Italy and elsewhere, syndicalist unions are again on the rise, showing that anarchist ideas are applicable in everyday life.

Finally, it must be stressed that syndicalism has its roots in the ideas of the earliest anarchists and, consequently, was not invented in the 1890s. It is true that development of syndicalism came about, in part, as a reaction to the disastrous "propaganda by deed" period, in which individual anarchists assassinated government leaders in attempts to provoke a popular uprising and in revenge for the mass murders of the Communards and other rebels (see [section A.2.18](#) for details). But in response to this failed and counterproductive campaign, anarchists went back to their roots and to the ideas of Bakunin. Thus, as recognised by the likes of Kropotkin and Malatesta, syndicalism was simply a return to the ideas current in the libertarian wing of the First International.

Thus we find Bakunin arguing that *"it is necessary to organise the power of the proletariat. But this organisation must be the work of the proletariat itself. . . Organise, constantly organise the international militant solidarity of the workers, in every trade and country, and remember that however*

*weak you are as isolated individuals or districts, you will constitute a tremendous, invincible power by means of universal co-operation.*" As one American activist commented, this is *"the same militant spirit that breathes now in the best expressions of the Syndicalist and I.W.W. movements"* both of which express *"a strong world wide revival of the ideas for which Bakunin laboured throughout his life."* [Max Baginski, **Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth**, p. 71] As with the syndicalists, Bakunin stressed the *"organisation of trade sections, their federation . . . bear in themselves the living germs of the new social order, which is to replace the bourgeois world. They are creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself."* [quoted by Rudolf Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 50]

Such ideas were repeated by other libertarians. Eugene Varlin, whose role in the Paris Commune ensured his death, advocated a socialism of associations, arguing in 1870 that syndicates were the *"natural elements"* for the rebuilding of society: *"it is they that can easily be transformed into producer associations; it is they that can put into practice the retooling of society and the organisation of production."* [quoted by Martin Phillip Johnson, **The Paradise of Association**, p. 139] As we discussed in [section A.5.2](#), the Chicago Anarchists held similar views, seeing the labour movement as both the means of achieving anarchy and the framework of the free society. As Lucy Parsons (the wife of Albert) put it *"we hold that the granges, trade-unions, Knights of Labour assemblies, etc., are the embryonic groups of the ideal anarchistic society . . ."* [contained in Albert R. Parsons, **Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis**, p. 110] These ideas fed into the revolutionary unionism of the I.W.W. As one historian notes, the *"proceedings of the I.W.W.'s inaugural convention indicate that the participants were not only aware of the 'Chicago Idea' but were conscious of a continuity between their efforts and the struggles of the Chicago anarchists to initiate industrial unionism."* The Chicago idea represented *"the earliest American expression of syndicalism."* [Salvatore Salerno, **Red November, Black November**, p. 71]

Thus, syndicalism and anarchism are not differing theories but, rather, different interpretations of the same ideas (see for a fuller discussion [section H.2.8](#)). While not all syndicalists are anarchists (some Marxists have proclaimed support for syndicalism) and not all anarchists are syndicalists (see [section J.3.9](#) for a discussion why), all social anarchists see the need for taking part in the labour and other popular movements and encouraging libertarian forms of organisation and struggle within them. By doing this, inside and outside of syndicalist unions, anarchists are showing the validity of our ideas. For, as Kropotkin stressed, the *"next revolution must from its inception bring about the seizure of the entire social wealth by the workers in order to transform it into common property. This revolution can succeed only through the workers, only if the urban and rural workers everywhere carry out this objective themselves. To that end, they must initiate their own action in the period before the revolution; this can happen only if there is a strong workers' organisation."* [Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution, p. 20] Such popular self-managed organisations cannot be anything but *"anarchy in action."*

## A.5.4 Anarchists in the Russian Revolution.

The Russian revolution of 1917 saw a huge growth in anarchism in that country and many experiments



in anarchist ideas. However, in popular culture the Russian Revolution is seen not as a mass movement by ordinary people struggling towards freedom but as the means by which Lenin imposed his dictatorship on Russia. The truth is radically different. The Russian Revolution was a mass movement from below in which many different currents of ideas existed and in which millions of working people (workers in the cities and towns as well as peasants) tried to transform their world into a better place. Sadly, those hopes and dreams were crushed under the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party -- first under Lenin, later under Stalin.

The Russian Revolution, like most history, is a good example of the maxim "history is written by those who win." Most capitalist histories of the period between 1917 and 1921 ignore what the anarchist Voline called "*the unknown revolution*" -- the revolution called forth from below by the actions of ordinary people. Leninist accounts, at best, praise this autonomous activity of workers so long as it coincides with their own party line but radically condemn it (and attribute it with the basest motives) as soon as it strays from that line. Thus Leninist accounts will praise the workers when they move ahead of the Bolsheviks (as in the spring and summer of 1917) but will condemn them when they oppose Bolshevik policy once the Bolsheviks are in power. At worse, Leninist accounts portray the movement and struggles of the masses as little more than a backdrop to the activities of the vanguard party.

For anarchists, however, the Russian Revolution is seen as a classic example of a social revolution in which the self-activity of working people played a key role. In their soviets, factory committees and other class organisations, the Russian masses were trying to transform society from a class-ridden, hierarchical statist regime into one based on liberty, equality and solidarity. As such, the initial months of the Revolution seemed to confirm Bakunin's prediction that the "*future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free associations or federations of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal.*" [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, p. 206] The soviets and factory committees expressed concretely Bakunin's ideas and Anarchists played an important role in the struggle.

The initial overthrow of the Tsar came from the direct action of the masses. In February 1917, the women of Petrograd erupted in bread riots. On February 18th, the workers of the Putilov Works in Petrograd went on strike. By February 22nd, the strike had spread to other factories. Two days later, 200 000 workers were on strike and by February 25th the strike was virtually general. The same day also saw the first bloody clashes between protestors and the army. The turning point came on the 27th, when some troops went over to the revolutionary masses, sweeping along other units. This left the government without its means of coercion, the Tsar abdicated and a provisional government was formed.

So spontaneous was this movement that all the political parties were left behind. This included the Bolsheviks, with the "*Petrograd organisation of the Bolsheviks oppos[ing] the calling of strikes precisely on the eve of the revolution destined to overthrow the Tsar. Fortunately, the workers ignored the Bolshevik 'directives' and went on strike anyway . . . Had the workers followed its guidance, it is doubtful that the revolution would have occurred when it did.*" [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 194]

The revolution carried on in this vein of direct action from below until the new, "socialist" state was powerful enough to stop it.

For the Left, the end of Tsarism was the culmination of years of effort by socialists and anarchists everywhere. It represented the progressive wing of human thought overcoming traditional oppression, and as such was duly praised by leftists around the world. However, **in** Russia things were progressing. In the workplaces and streets and on the land, more and more people became convinced that abolishing feudalism politically was **not** enough. The overthrow of the Tsar made little real difference if feudal exploitation still existed in the economy, so workers started to seize their workplaces and peasants, the land. All across Russia, ordinary people started to build their own organisations, unions, co-operatives, factory committees and councils (or "soviets" in Russian). These organisations were initially organised in anarchist fashion, with recallable delegates and being federated with each other.

Needless to say, all the political parties and organisations played a role in this process. The two wings of the Marxist social-democrats were active (the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks), as were the Social Revolutionaries (a populist peasant based party) and the anarchists. The anarchists participated in this movement, encouraging all tendencies to self-management and urging the overthrow of the provisional government. They argued that it was necessary to transform the revolution from a purely political one into an economic/social one. Until the return of Lenin from exile, they were the only political tendency who thought along those lines.

Lenin convinced his party to adopt the slogan "*All Power to the Soviets*" and push the revolution forward. This meant a sharp break with previous Marxist positions, leading one ex-Bolshevik turned Menshevik to comment that Lenin had "*made himself a candidate for one European throne that has been vacant for thirty years -- the throne of Bakunin!*" [quoted by Alexander Rabinowitch, **Prelude to Revolution**, p. 40] The Bolsheviks now turned to winning mass support, championing direct action and supporting the radical actions of the masses, policies in the past associated with anarchism ("*the Bolsheviks launched . . . slogans which until then had been particularly and insistently voiced by the Anarchists.*" [Voline, **The Unknown Revolution**, p. 210]). Soon they were winning more and more votes in the soviet and factory committee elections. As Alexander Berkman argues, the "*Anarchist mottoes proclaimed by the Bolsheviks did not fail to bring results. The masses relied to their flag.*" [**What is Anarchism?**, p. 120]

The anarchists were also influential at this time. Anarchists were particularly active in the movement for workers self-management of production which existed around the factory committees (see M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers Control** for details). They were arguing for workers and peasants to expropriate the owning class, abolish all forms of government and re-organise society from the bottom up using their own class organisations -- the soviets, the factory committees, co-operatives and so on. They could also influence the direction of struggle. As Alexander Rabinowitch (in his study of the July uprising of 1917) notes:

*"At the rank-and-file level, particularly within the [Petrograd] garrison and at the*

*Kronstadt naval base, there was in fact very little to distinguish Bolshevik from Anarchist. . . The Anarchist-Communists and the Bolsheviks competed for the support of the same uneducated, depressed, and dissatisfied elements of the population, and the fact is that in the summer of 1917, the Anarchist-Communists, with the support they enjoyed in a few important factories and regiments, possessed an undeniable capacity to influence the course of events. Indeed, the Anarchist appeal was great enough in some factories and military units to influence the actions of the Bolsheviks themselves." [Op. Cit., p. 64]*

Indeed, one leading Bolshevik stated in June, 1917 (in response to a rise in anarchist influence), "[b]y fencing ourselves off from the Anarchists, we may fence ourselves off from the masses." [quoted by Alexander Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 102]

The anarchists operated with the Bolsheviks during the October Revolution which overthrew the provisional government. But things changed once the authoritarian socialists of the Bolshevik party had seized power. While both anarchists and Bolsheviks used many of the same slogans, there were important differences between the two. As Voline argued, "[f]rom the lips and pens of the Anarchists, those slogans were sincere and concrete, for they corresponded to their principles and called for action entirely in conformity with such principles. But with the Bolsheviks, the same slogans meant practical solutions totally different from those of the libertarians and did not tally with the ideas which the slogans appeared to express." [**The Unknown Revolution**, p. 210]

Take, for example, the slogan "*All power to the Soviets.*" For anarchists it meant exactly that -- organs for the working class to run society directly, based on mandated, recallable delegates. For the Bolsheviks, that slogan was simply the means for a Bolshevik government to be formed over and above the soviets. The difference is important, "*for the Anarchists declared, if 'power' really should belong to the soviets, it could not belong to the Bolshevik party, and if it should belong to that Party, as the Bolsheviks envisaged, it could not belong to the soviets.*" [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 213] Reducing the soviets to simply executing the decrees of the central (Bolshevik) government and having their All-Russian Congress be able to recall the government (i.e. those with **real** power) does not equal "all power," quite the reverse.

Similarly with the term "*workers' control of production.*" Before the October Revolution Lenin saw "*workers' control*" purely in terms of the "*universal, all-embracing workers' control over the capitalists.*" [**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 52] He did not see it in terms of workers' management of production itself (i.e. the abolition of wage labour) via federations of factory committees. Anarchists and the workers' factory committees did. As S.A. Smith correctly notes, Lenin used "*the term ['workers' control'] in a very different sense from that of the factory committees.*" In fact Lenin's "*proposals . . . [were] thoroughly statist and centralist in character, whereas the practice of the factory committees was essentially local and autonomous.*" [**Red Petrograd**, p. 154] For anarchists, "*if the workers' organisations were capable of exercising effective control [over their bosses], then they also were capable of guaranteeing all production. In such an event, private industry could be eliminated quickly but progressively, and replaced by collective industry. Consequently, the Anarchists rejected the vague nebulous slogan of 'control of production.' They advocated **expropriation -- progressive, but***

*immediate -- of private industry by the organisations of collective production.*" [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 221]

Once in power, the Bolsheviks systematically undermined the popular meaning of workers' control and replaced it with their own, statist conception. "*On three occasions,*" one historian notes, "*in the first months of Soviet power, the [factory] committee leaders sought to bring their model into being. At each point the party leadership overruled them. The result was to vest both managerial **and** control powers in organs of the state which were subordinate to the central authorities, and formed by them.*" [Thomas F. Remington, **Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia**, p. 38] This process ultimately resulted in Lenin arguing for, and introducing, "*one-man management*" armed with "*dictatorial*" power (with the manager appointed from above by the state) in April 1918. This process is documented in Maurice Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, which also indicates the clear links between Bolshevik practice and Bolshevik ideology as well as how both differed from popular activity and ideas.

Hence the comments by Russian Anarchist Peter Arshinov:

*"Another no less important peculiarity is that [the] October [revolution of 1917] has two meanings -- that which the working' masses who participated in the social revolution gave it, and with them the Anarchist-Communists, and that which was given it by the political party [the Marxist-Communists] that captured power from this aspiration to social revolution, and which betrayed and stifled all further development. An enormous gulf exists between these two interpretations of October. The October of the workers and peasants is the suppression of the power of the parasite classes in the name of equality and self-management. The Bolshevik October is the conquest of power by the party of the revolutionary intelligentsia, the installation of its 'State Socialism' and of its 'socialist' methods of governing the masses."* [**The Two Octobers**]

Initially, anarchists had supported the Bolsheviks, since the Bolshevik leaders had hidden their state-building ideology behind support for the soviets (as socialist historian Samuel Farber notes, the anarchists "*had actually been an unnamed coalition partner of the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution.*" [**Before Stalinism**, p. 126]). However, this support quickly "withered away" as the Bolsheviks showed that they were, in fact, not seeking true socialism but were instead securing power for themselves and pushing not for collective ownership of land and productive resources but for government ownership. The Bolsheviks, as noted, systematically undermined the workers' control/self-management movement in favour of capitalist-like forms of workplace management based around "*one-man management*" armed with "*dictatorial powers.*"

As regards the soviets, the Bolsheviks systematically undermining what limited independence and democracy they had. In response to the "*great Bolshevik losses in the soviet elections*" during the spring and summer of 1918 "*Bolshevik armed force usually overthrew the results of these provincial elections.*" Also, the "*government continually postponed the new general elections to the Petrograd Soviet, the term of which had ended in March 1918. Apparently, the government feared that the opposition parties would*

*show gains.*" [Samuel Farber, **Op. Cit.**, p. 24 and p. 22] In the Petrograd elections, the Bolsheviks *"lost the absolute majority in the soviet they had previously enjoyed"* but remained the largest party. However, the results of the Petrograd soviet elections were irrelevant as a *"Bolshevik victory was assured by the numerically quite significant representation now given to trade unions, district soviets, factory-shop committees, district workers conferences, and Red Army and naval units, in which the Bolsheviks had overwhelming strength."* [Alexander Rabinowitch, *"The Evolution of Local Soviets in Petrograd"*, pp. 20-37, **Slavic Review**, Vol. 36, No. 1, p. 36f] In other words, the Bolsheviks had undermined the democratic nature of the soviet by swamping it by their own delegates. Faced with rejection in the soviets, the Bolsheviks showed that for them "soviet power" equalled party power. To stay in power, the Bolsheviks had to destroy the soviets, which they did. The soviet system remained "soviet" in name only. Indeed, from 1919 onwards Lenin, Trotsky and other leading Bolsheviks were admitting that they had created a party dictatorship and, moreover, that such a dictatorship was essential for any revolution (Trotsky supported party dictatorship even after the rise of Stalinism).

The Red Army, moreover, no longer was a democratic organisation. In March of 1918 Trotsky had abolished the election of officers and soldier committees:

*"the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree."* [**Work, Discipline, Order**]

As Maurice Brinton correctly summarises:

*"Trotsky, appointed Commissar of Military Affairs after Brest-Litovsk, had rapidly been reorganising the Red Army. The death penalty for disobedience under fire had been restored. So, more gradually, had saluting, special forms of address, separate living quarters and other privileges for officers. Democratic forms of organisation, including the election of officers, had been quickly dispensed with."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 37]

Unsurprisingly, Samuel Farber notes that *"there is no evidence indicating that Lenin or any of the mainstream Bolshevik leaders lamented the loss of workers' control or of democracy in the soviets, or at least referred to these losses as a retreat, as Lenin declared with the replacement of War Communism by NEP in 1921."* [**Before Stalinism**, p. 44]

Thus after the October Revolution, anarchists started to denounce the Bolshevik regime and call for a *"Third Revolution"* which would finally free the masses from all bosses (capitalist or socialist). They exposed the fundamental difference between the rhetoric of Bolshevism (as expressed, for example, in Lenin's **State and Revolution**) with its reality. Bolshevism in power had proved Bakunin's prediction that the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* would become the *"dictatorship over the proletariat"* by the leaders of the Communist Party.

The influence of the anarchists started to grow. As Jacques Sadoul (a French officer) noted in early

1918:

*"The anarchist party is the most active, the most militant of the opposition groups and probably the most popular . . . The Bolsheviks are anxious."* [quoted by Daniel Guerin, **Anarchism**, pp. 95-6]

By April 1918, the Bolsheviks began the physical suppression of their anarchist rivals. On April 12th, 1918, the Cheka (the secret police formed by Lenin in December, 1917) attacked anarchist centres in Moscow. Those in other cities were attacked soon after. As well as repressing their most vocal opponents on the left, the Bolsheviks were restricting the freedom of the masses they claimed to be protecting. Democratic soviets, free speech, opposition political parties and groups, self-management in the workplace and on the land -- all were destroyed in the name of "socialism." All this happened, we must stress, **before** the start of the Civil War in late May, 1918, which most supporters of Leninism blame for the Bolsheviks' authoritarianism. During the civil war, this process accelerated, with the Bolsheviks' systematically repressing opposition from all quarters -- including the strikes and protests of the very class who they claimed was exercising its "dictatorship" while they were in power!

It is important to stress that this process had started well **before** the start of the civil war, confirming anarchist theory that a "workers' state" is a contraction in terms. For anarchists, the Bolshevik substitution of party power for workers power (and the conflict between the two) did not come as a surprise. The state is the delegation of **power** -- as such, it means that the idea of a "workers' state" expressing "workers' power" is a logical impossibility. If workers **are** running society then power rests in their hands. If a state exists then power rests in the hands of the handful of people at the top, **not** in the hands of all. The state was designed for minority rule. No state can be an organ of working class (i.e. majority) self-management due to its basic nature, structure and design. For this reason anarchists have argued for a bottom-up federation of workers' councils as the agent of revolution and the means of managing society after capitalism and the state have been abolished.

As we discuss in [section H](#), the degeneration of the Bolsheviks from a popular working class party into dictators over the working class did not occur by accident. A combination of political ideas and the realities of state power (and the social relationships it generates) could not help but result in such a degeneration. The political ideas of Bolshevism, with its vanguardism, fear of spontaneity and identification of party power with working class power inevitably meant that the party would clash with those whom it claimed to represent. After all, if the party is the vanguard then, automatically, everyone else is a "backward" element. This meant that if the working class resisted Bolshevik policies or rejected them in soviet elections, then the working class was "wavering" and being influenced by "petty-bourgeois" and "backward" elements. Vanguardism breeds elitism and, when combined with state power, dictatorship.

State power, as anarchists have always stressed, means the delegation of power into the hands of a few. This automatically produces a class division in society -- those with power and those without. As such, once in power the Bolsheviks were isolated from the working class. The Russian Revolution confirmed

Malatesta's argument that a "government, that is a group of people entrusted with making laws and empowered to use the collective power to oblige each individual to obey them, is already a privileged class and cut off from the people. As any constituted body would do, it will instinctively seek to extend its powers, to be beyond public control, to impose its own policies and to give priority to its special interests. Having been put in a privileged position, the government is already at odds with the people whose strength it disposes of." [Anarchy, p. 34] A highly centralised state such as the Bolsheviks built would reduce accountability to a minimum while at the same time accelerating the isolation of the rulers from the ruled. The masses were no longer a source of inspiration and power, but rather an alien group whose lack of "discipline" (i.e. ability to follow orders) placed the revolution in danger. As one Russian Anarchist argued,

*"The proletariat is being gradually enserfed by the state. The people are being transformed into servants over whom there has arisen a new class of administrators -- a new class born mainly from the womb of the so-called intelligentsia . . . We do not mean to say . . . that the Bolshevik party set out to create a new class system. But we do say that even the best intentions and aspirations must inevitably be smashed against the evils inherent in any system of centralised power. The separation of management from labour, the division between administrators and workers flows logically from centralisation. It cannot be otherwise."* [The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution, pp. 123-4]

For this reason anarchists, while agreeing that there is an uneven development of political ideas within the working class, reject the idea that "revolutionaries" should take power on behalf of working people. Only when working people actually run society themselves will a revolution be successful. For anarchists, this meant that "[e]ffective emancipation can be achieved only by the **direct, widespread, and independent action . . . of the workers themselves, grouped . . . in their own class organisations . . . on the basis of concrete action and self-government, helped but not governed**, by revolutionaries working in the very midst of, and not above the mass and the professional, technical, defence and other branches." [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 197] By substituting party power for workers power, the Russian Revolution had made its first fatal step. Little wonder that the following prediction (from November 1917) made by anarchists in Russia came true:

*"Once their power is consolidated and 'legalised', the Bolsheviks who are . . . men of centralist and authoritarian action will begin to rearrange the life of the country and of the people by governmental and dictatorial methods, imposed by the centre. The[y] . . . will dictate the will of the party to all Russia, and command the whole nation. **Your Soviets and your other local organisations will become little by little, simply executive organs of the will of the central government.** In the place of healthy, constructive work by the labouring masses, in place of free unification from the bottom, we will see the installation of an authoritarian and statist apparatus which would act from above and set about wiping out everything that stood in its way with an iron hand."* [quoted by Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 235]

The so-called "workers' state" could not be participatory or empowering for working class people (as the

Marxists claimed) simply because state structures are not designed for that. Created as instruments of minority rule, they cannot be transformed into (nor "new" ones created which are) a means of liberation for the working classes. As Kropotkin put it, Anarchists *"maintain that the State organisation, having been the force to which minorities resorted for establishing and organising their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy these privileges."* [**Anarchism**, p. 170] In the words of an anarchist pamphlet written in 1918:

*"Bolshevism, day by day and step by step, proves that state power possesses inalienable characteristics; it can change its label, its 'theory', and its servitors, but in essence it merely remains power and despotism in new forms."* [quoted by Paul Avrich, *"The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution,"* pp. 341-350, **Russian Review**, vol. 26, issue no. 4, p. 347]

For insiders, the Revolution had died a few months after the Bolsheviks took over. To the outside world, the Bolsheviks and the USSR came to represent "socialism" even as they systematically destroyed the basis of real socialism. By transforming the soviets into state bodies, substituting party power for soviet power, undermining the factory committees, eliminating democracy in the armed forces and workplaces, repressing the political opposition and workers' protests, the Bolsheviks effectively marginalised the working class from its own revolution. Bolshevik ideology and practice were themselves important and sometimes decisive factors in the degeneration of the revolution and the ultimate rise of Stalinism.

As anarchists had predicted for decades previously, in the space of a few months, and before the start of the Civil War, the Bolshevik's "workers' state" had become, like any state, an alien power **over** the working class and an instrument of minority rule (in this case, the rule of the party). The Civil War accelerated this process and soon party dictatorship was introduced (indeed, leading Bolsheviks began arguing that it was essential in any revolution). The Bolsheviks put down the libertarian socialist elements within their country, with the crushing of the uprising at Kronstadt and the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine being the final nails in the coffin of socialism and the subjugation of the soviets.

The Kronstadt uprising of February, 1921, was, for anarchists, of immense importance (see the appendix ["What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?"](#) for a full discussion of this uprising). The uprising started when the sailors of Kronstadt supported the striking workers of Petrograd in February, 1921. They raised a 15 point resolution, the first point of which was a call for soviet democracy. The Bolsheviks slandered the Kronstadt rebels as counter-revolutionaries and crushed the revolt. For anarchists, this was significant as the repression could not be justified in terms of the Civil War (which had ended months before) and because it was a major uprising of ordinary people for *real* socialism. As Voline puts it:

*"Kronstadt was the first entirely independent attempt of the people to liberate themselves of all yokes and carry out the Social Revolution: this attempt was made directly . . . by the working masses themselves, without political shepherds, without leaders or tutors. It was the first step towards the third and social revolution."* [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 537-8]



In the Ukraine, anarchist ideas were most successfully applied. In areas under the protection of the Makhnovist movement, working class people organised their own lives directly, based on their own ideas and needs -- true social self-determination. Under the leadership of Nestor Makhno, a self-educated peasant, the movement not only fought against both Red and White dictatorships but also resisted the Ukrainian nationalists. In opposition to the call for "national self-determination," i.e. a new Ukrainian state, Makhno called instead for working class self-determination in the Ukraine and across the world. Makhno inspired his fellow peasants and workers to fight for real freedom:

*"Conquer or die -- such is the dilemma that faces the Ukrainian peasants and workers at this historic moment . . . But we will not conquer in order to repeat the errors of the past years, the error of putting our fate into the hands of new masters; we will conquer in order to take our destinies into our own hands, to conduct our lives according to our own will and our own conception of the truth."* [quoted by Peter Arshinov, **History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 58]

To ensure this end, the Makhnovists refused to set up governments in the towns and cities they liberated, instead urging the creation of free soviets so that the working people could govern themselves. Taking the example of Aleksandrovsk, once they had liberated the city the Makhnovists *"immediately invited the working population to participate in a general conference . . . it was proposed that the workers organise the life of the city and the functioning of the factories with their own forces and their own organisations . . . The first conference was followed by a second. The problems of organising life according to principles of self-management by workers were examined and discussed with animation by the masses of workers, who all welcomed this ideas with the greatest enthusiasm . . . Railroad workers took the first step . . . They formed a committee charged with organising the railway network of the region . . . From this point, the proletariat of Aleksandrovsk began to turn systematically to the problem of creating organs of self-management."* [Op. Cit., p. 149]

The Makhnovists argued that the *"freedom of the workers and peasants is their own, and not subject to any restriction. It is up to the workers and peasants themselves to act, to organise themselves, to agree among themselves in all aspects of their lives, as they see fit and desire . . . The Makhnovists can do no more than give aid and counsel . . . In no circumstances can they, nor do they wish to, govern."* [Peter Arshinov, quoted by Guerin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 99] In Alexandrovsk, the Bolsheviks proposed to the Makhnovists spheres of action - their Revkom (Revolutionary Committee) would handle political affairs and the Makhnovists military ones. Makhno advised them *"to go and take up some honest trade instead of seeking to impose their will on the workers."* [Peter Arshinov in **The Anarchist Reader**, p. 141]

They also organised free agricultural communes which *"[a]dmittedly . . . were not numerous, and included only a minority of the population . . . But what was most precious was that these communes were formed by the poor peasants themselves. The Makhnovists never exerted any pressure on the peasants, confining themselves to propagating the idea of free communes."* [Arshinov, **History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 87] Makhno played an important role in abolishing the holdings of the landed gentry. The local soviet and their district and regional congresses equalised the use of the land

between all sections of the peasant community. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 53-4]

Moreover, the Makhnovists took the time and energy to involve the whole population in discussing the development of the revolution, the activities of the army and social policy. They organised numerous conferences of workers', soldiers' and peasants' delegates to discuss political and social issues as well as free soviets, unions and communes. They organised a regional congress of peasants and workers when they had liberated Aleksandrovsk. When the Makhnovists tried to convene the third regional congress of peasants, workers and insurgents in April 1919 and an extraordinary congress of several regions in June 1919 the Bolsheviks viewed them as counter-revolutionary, tried to ban them and declared their organisers and delegates outside the law.

The Makhnovists replied by holding the conferences anyway and asking "*[c]an there exist laws made by a few people who call themselves revolutionaries, which permit them to outlaw a whole people who are more revolutionary than they are themselves?*" and "*[w]hose interests should the revolution defend: those of the Party or those of the people who set the revolution in motion with their blood?*" Makhno himself stated that he "*consider[ed] it an inviolable right of the workers and peasants, a right won by the revolution, to call conferences on their own account, to discuss their affairs.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 103 and p. 129]

In addition, the Makhnovists "*fully applied the revolutionary principles of freedom of speech, of thought, of the press, and of political association. In all cities and towns occupied by the Makhnovists, they began by lifting all the prohibitions and repealing all the restrictions imposed on the press and on political organisations by one or another power.*" Indeed, the "*only restriction that the Makhnovists considered necessary to impose on the Bolsheviks, the left Socialist-Revolutionaries and other statists was a prohibition on the formation of those 'revolutionary committees' which sought to impose a dictatorship over the people.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 153 and p. 154]

The Makhnovists rejected the Bolshevik corruption of the soviets and instead proposed "*the free and completely independent soviet system of working people without authorities and their arbitrary laws.*" Their proclamations stated that the "*working people themselves must freely choose their own soviets, which carry out the will and desires of the working people themselves, that is to say. ADMINISTRATIVE, not ruling soviets.*" Economically, capitalism would be abolished along with the state - the land and workshops "*must belong to the working people themselves, to those who work in them, that is to say, they must be socialised.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 271 and p. 273]

The army itself, in stark contrast to the Red Army, was fundamentally democratic (although, of course, the horrific nature of the civil war did result in a few deviations from the ideal -- however, compared to the regime imposed on the Red Army by Trotsky, the Makhnovists were much more democratic movement).

The anarchist experiment of self-management in the Ukraine came to a bloody end when the Bolsheviks turned on the Makhnovists (their former allies against the "Whites," or pro-Tsarists) when they were no

longer needed. This important movement is fully discussed in the appendix ["Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?"](#) of our FAQ. However, we must stress here the one obvious lesson of the Makhnovist movement, namely that the dictatorial policies pursued by the Bolsheviks were not imposed on them by objective circumstances. Rather, the political ideas of Bolshevism had a clear influence in the decisions they made. After all, the Makhnovists were active in the same Civil War and yet did not pursue the same policies of party power as the Bolsheviks did. Rather, they successfully encouraged working class freedom, democracy and power in extremely difficult circumstances (and in the face of strong Bolshevik opposition to those policies). The received wisdom on the left is that there was no alternative open to the Bolsheviks. The experience of the Makhnovists disproves this. What the masses of people, as well as those in power, do and think politically is as much part of the process determining the outcome of history as are the objective obstacles that limit the choices available. Clearly, ideas do matter and, as such, the Makhnovists show that there was (and is) a practical alternative to Bolshevism -- anarchism.

The last anarchist march in Moscow until 1987 took place at the funeral of Kropotkin in 1921, when over 10,000 marched behind his coffin. They carried black banners declaring *"Where there is authority, there is no freedom"* and *"The Liberation of the working class is the task of the workers themselves."* As the procession passed the Butyrki prison, the inmates sang anarchist songs and shook the bars of their cells.

Anarchist opposition within Russia to the Bolshevik regime started in 1918. They were the first left-wing group to be repressed by the new "revolutionary" regime. Outside of Russia, anarchists continued to support the Bolsheviks until news came from anarchist sources about the repressive nature of the Bolshevik regime (until then, many had discounted negative reports as being from pro-capitalist sources). Once these reliable reports came in, anarchists across the globe rejected Bolshevism and its system of party power and repression. The experience of Bolshevism confirmed Bakunin's prediction that Marxism meant *"the highly despotic government of the masses by a new and very small aristocracy of real or pretended scholars. The people are not learned, so they will be liberated from the cares of government and included in entirety in the governed herd."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, pp. 178-9]

From about 1921 on, anarchists outside of Russia started describing the USSR as a *"state-capitalist"* nation to indicate that although individual bosses might have been eliminated, the Soviet state bureaucracy played the same role as individual bosses do in the West (anarchists **within** Russia had been calling it that since 1918). For anarchists, *"the Russian revolution . . . is trying to reach . . . economic equality . . . this effort has been made in Russia under a strongly centralised party dictatorship . . . this effort to build a communist republic on the basis of a strongly centralised state communism under the iron law of a party dictatorship is bound to end in failure. We are learning to know in Russia how **not** to introduce communism."* [**Anarchism**, p. 254]

For more information on the Russian Revolution and the role played by anarchists, see the appendix on ["The Russian Revolution"](#) of the FAQ. As well as covering the Kronstadt uprising and the Makhnovists, it discusses why the revolution failed, the role of Bolshevik ideology played in that failure and whether

there were any alternatives to Bolshevism.

The following books are also recommended: **The Unknown Revolution** by Voline; **The Guillotine at Work** by G.P. Maximov; **The Bolshevik Myth** and **The Russian Tragedy**, both by Alexander Berkman; **The Bolsheviks and Workers Control** by M. Brinton; **The Kronstadt Uprising** by Ida Mett; **The History of the Makhnovist Movement** by Peter Arshinov; **My Disillusionment in Russia** and **Living My Life** by Emma Goldman.

Many of these books were written by anarchists active during the revolution, many imprisoned by the Bolsheviks and deported to the West due to international pressure exerted by anarcho-syndicalist delegates to Moscow who the Bolsheviks were trying to win over to Leninism. The majority of such delegates stayed true to their libertarian politics and convinced their unions to reject Bolshevism and break with Moscow. By the early 1920's all the anarcho-syndicalist union confederations had joined with the anarchists in rejecting the "socialism" in Russia as state capitalism and party dictatorship.

## A.5.5 Anarchists in the Italian Factory Occupations

After the end of the First World War there was a massive radicalisation across Europe and the world. Union membership exploded, with strikes, demonstrations and agitation reaching massive levels. This was partly due to the war, partly to the apparent success of the Russian Revolution. This enthusiasm for the Russian Revolution even reached Individualist Anarchists like Joseph Labadie, who like many other anti-capitalists, saw *"the red in the east [giving] hope of a brighter day"* and the Bolsheviks as making *"laudable efforts to at least try some way out of the hell of industrial slavery."* [quoted by Carlotta R. Anderson, **All-American Anarchist** p. 225 and p. 241]

Across Europe, anarchist ideas became more popular and anarcho-syndicalist unions grew in size. For example, in Britain, the ferment produced the shop stewards' movement and the strikes on Clydeside; Germany saw the rise of IWW inspired industrial unionism and a libertarian form of Marxism called "Council Communism"; Spain saw a massive growth in the anarcho-syndicalist CNT. In addition, it also, unfortunately, saw the rise and growth of both social democratic and communist parties. Italy was no exception.

In Turin, a new rank-and-file movement was developing. This movement was based around the *"internal commissions"* (elected ad hoc grievance committees). These new organisations were based directly on the group of people who worked together in a particular work shop, with a mandated and recallable shop steward elected for each group of 15 to 20 or so workers. The assembly of all the shop stewards in a given plant then elected the "internal commission" for that facility, which was directly and constantly responsible to the body of shop stewards, which was called the *"factory council."*

Between November 1918 and March 1919, the internal commissions had become a national issue within the trade union movement. On February 20, 1919, the Italian Federation of Metal Workers (FIOM) won a contract providing for the election of "internal commissions" in the factories. The workers

subsequently tried to transform these organs of workers' representation into factory councils with a managerial function. By May Day 1919, the internal commissions *"were becoming the dominant force within the metalworking industry and the unions were in danger of becoming marginal administrative units. Behind these alarming developments, in the eyes of reformists, lay the libertarians."* [Carl Levy, **Gramsci and the Anarchists**, p. 135] By November 1919 the internal commissions of Turin were transformed into factory councils.

The movement in Turin is usually associated with the weekly **L'Ordine Nuovo** (The New Order), which first appeared on May 1, 1919. As Daniel Guerin summarises, it was *"edited by a left socialist, Antonio Gramsci, assisted by a professor of philosophy at Turin University with anarchist ideas, writing under the pseudonym of Carlo Petri, and also of a whole nucleus of Turin libertarians. In the factories, the Ordine Nuovo group was supported by a number of people, especially the anarcho-syndicalist militants of the metal trades, Pietro Ferrero and Maurizio Garino. The manifesto of Ordine Nuovo was signed by socialists and libertarians together, agreeing to regard the factory councils as 'organs suited to future communist management of both the individual factory and the whole society.'"* [**Anarchism**, p. 109]

The developments in Turin should not be taken in isolation. All across Italy, workers and peasants were taking action. In late February 1920, a rash of factory occupations broke out in Liguria, Piedmont and Naples. In Liguria, the workers occupied the metal and shipbuilding plants in Sestri Ponente, Cornigliano and Campi after a breakdown of pay talks. For up to four days, under syndicalist leadership, they ran the plants through factory councils.

During this period the Italian Syndicalist Union (USI) grew in size to around 800 000 members and the influence of the Italian Anarchist Union (UAI) with its 20 000 members and daily paper (**Umanita Nova**) grew correspondingly. As the Welsh Marxist historian Gwyn A. Williams points out *"Anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists were the most consistently and totally revolutionary group on the left . . . the most obvious feature of the history of syndicalism and anarchism in 1919-20: rapid and virtually continuous growth . . . The syndicalists above all captured militant working-class opinion which the socialist movement was utterly failing to capture."* [**Proletarian Order**, pp. 194-195] In Turin, libertarians *"worked within FIOM"* and had been *"heavily involved in the Ordine Nuovo campaign from the beginning."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 195] Unsurprisingly, **Ordine Nuovo** was denounced as "syndicalist" by other socialists.

It was the anarchists and syndicalists who first raised the idea of occupying workplaces. Malatesta was discussing this idea in **Umanita Nova** in March, 1920. In his words, *"General strikes of protest no longer upset anyone . . . One must seek something else. We put forward an idea: take-over of factories. . . the method certainly has a future, because it corresponds to the ultimate ends of the workers' movement and constitutes an exercise preparing one for the ultimate act of expropriation."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 134] In the same month, during *"a strong syndicalist campaign to establish councils in Mila, Armando Borghi [anarchist secretary of the USI] called for mass factory occupations. In Turin, the re-election of workshop commissars was just ending in a two-week orgy of passionate discussion and workers caught the fever. [Factory Council] Commissars began to call for occupations."* Indeed, *"the council movement outside Turin was essentially anarcho-*

*syndicalist.*" Unsurprisingly, the secretary of the syndicalist metal-workers *"urged support for the Turin councils because they represented anti-bureaucratic direct action, aimed at control of the factory and could be the first cells of syndicalist industrial unions . . . The syndicalist congress voted to support the councils. . . . Malatesta . . . supported them as a form of direct action guaranteed to generate rebelliousness . . . Umanita Nova and Guerra di Classe [paper of the USI] became almost as committed to the councils as L'Ordine Nuovo and the Turin edition of Avanti."* [Williams, **Op. Cit.**, p. 200, p. 193 and p. 196]

The upsurge in militancy soon provoked an employer counter-offensive. The bosses organisation denounced the factory councils and called for a mobilisation against them. Workers were rebelling and refusing to follow the bosses orders -- "indiscipline" was rising in the factories. They won state support for the enforcement of the existing industrial regulations. The national contract won by the FIOM in 1919 had provided that the internal commissions were banned from the shop floor and restricted to non-working hours. This meant that the activities of the shop stewards' movement in Turin -- such as stopping work to hold shop steward elections -- were in violation of the contract. The movement was essentially being maintained through mass insubordination. The bosses used this infringement of the agreed contract as the means combating the factory councils in Turin.

The showdown with the employers arrived in April, when a general assembly of shop stewards at Fiat called for sit-in strikes to protest the dismissal of several shop stewards. In response the employers declared a general lockout. The government supported the lockout with a mass show of force and troops occupied the factories and mounted machine guns posts at them. When the shop stewards movement decided to surrender on the immediate issues in dispute after two weeks on strike, the employers responded with demands that the shop stewards councils be limited to non-working hours, in accordance with the FIOM national contract, and that managerial control be re-imposed.

These demands were aimed at the heart of the factory council system and Turin labour movement responded with a massive general strike in defence of it. In Turin, the strike was total and it soon spread throughout the region of Piedmont and involved 500 000 workers at its height. The Turin strikers called for the strike to be extended nationally and, being mostly led by socialists, they turned to the CGL trade union and Socialist Party leaders, who rejected their call.

The only support for the Turin general strike came from unions that were mainly under anarcho-syndicalist influence, such as the independent railway and the maritime workers unions (*"The syndicalists were the only ones to move."*). The railway workers in Pisa and Florence refused to transport troops who were being sent to Turin. There were strikes all around Genoa, among dock workers and in workplaces where the USI was a major influence. So in spite of being *"betrayed and abandoned by the whole socialist movement,"* the April movement *"still found popular support"* with *"actions . . . either directly led or indirectly inspired by anarcho-syndicalists."* In Turin itself, the anarchists and syndicalists were *"threatening to cut the council movement out from under"* Gramsci and the **Ordine Nuovo** group. [Williams, **Op. Cit.**, p. 207, p. 193 and p. 194]

Eventually the CGL leadership settled the strike on terms that accepted the employers' main demand for limiting the shop stewards' councils to non-working hours. Though the councils were now much reduced in activity and shop floor presence, they would yet see a resurgence of their position during the September factory occupations.

The anarchists *"accused the socialists of betrayal. They criticised what they believed was a false sense of discipline that had bound socialists to their own cowardly leadership. They contrasted the discipline that placed every movement under the 'calculations, fears, mistakes and possible betrayals of the leaders' to the other discipline of the workers of Sestri Ponente who struck in solidarity with Turin, the discipline of the railway workers who refused to transport security forces to Turin and the anarchists and members of the Unione Sindacale who forgot considerations of party and sect to put themselves at the disposition of the Torinesi."* [Carl Levy, **Op. Cit.**, p. 161] Sadly, this top-down "discipline" of the socialists and their unions would be repeated during the factory occupations, with terrible results.

In September, 1920, there were large-scale stay-in strikes in Italy in response to an owner wage cut and lockout. *"Central to the climate of the crisis was the rise of the syndicalists."* In mid-August, the USI metal-workers *"called for both unions to occupy the factories"* and called for *"a preventive occupation"* against lock-outs. The USI saw this as the *"expropriation of the factories by the metal-workers"* (which must *"be defended by all necessary measures"*) and saw the need *"to call the workers of other industries into battle."* [Williams, **Op. Cit.**, p. 236, pp. 238-9] Indeed, *"[i]f the FIOM had not embraced the syndicalist idea of an occupation of factories to counter an employer's lockout, the USI may well have won significant support from the politically active working class of Turin."* [Carl Levy, **Op. Cit.**, p. 129] These strikes began in the engineering factories and soon spread to railways, road transport, and other industries, with peasants seizing land. The strikers, however, did more than just occupy their workplaces, they placed them under workers' self-management. Soon over 500 000 "strikers" were at work, producing for themselves. Errico Malatesta, who took part in these events, writes:

*"The metal workers started the movement over wage rates. It was a strike of a new kind. Instead of abandoning the factories, the idea was to remain inside without working . . . Throughout Italy there was a revolutionary fervour among the workers and soon the demands changed their characters. Workers thought that the moment was ripe to take possession once [and] for all the means of production. They armed for defence . . . and began to organise production on their own . . . It was the right of property abolished in fact . . .; it was a new regime, a new form of social life that was being ushered in. And the government stood by because it felt impotent to offer opposition."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 134]

Daniel Guerin provides a good summary of the extent of the movement:

*"The management of the factories . . . [was] conducted by technical and administrative workers' committees. Self-management went quite a long way: in the early period assistance was obtained from the banks, but when it was withdrawn the self-management*

*system issued its own money to pay the workers' wages. Very strict self-discipline was required, the use of alcoholic beverages forbidden, and armed patrols were organised for self-defence. Very close solidarity was established between the factories under self-management. Ores and coal were put into a common pool, and shared out equitably.*" [**Anarchism**, p. 109]

Italy was "paralysed, with half a million workers occupying their factories and raising red and black flags over them." The movement spread throughout Italy, not only in the industrial heartland around Milan, Turin and Genoa, but also in Rome, Florence, Naples and Palermo. The "militants of the USI were certainly in the forefront of the movement," while **Umanita Nova** argued that "the movement is very serious and we must do everything we can to channel it towards a massive extension." The persistent call of the USI was for "an extension of the movement to the whole of industry to institute their 'expropriating general strike.'" [Williams, **Op. Cit.**, p. 236 and pp. 243-4] Railway workers, influenced by the libertarians, refused to transport troops, workers went on strike against the orders of the reformist unions and peasants occupied the land. The anarchists whole-heartedly supported the movement, unsurprisingly as the "occupation of the factories and the land suited perfectly our programme of action." [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 135] Luigi Fabbri described the occupations as having "revealed a power in the proletariat of which it had been unaware hitherto." [quoted by Paolo Sprinao, **The Occupation of the Factories**, p. 134]

However, after four weeks of occupation, the workers decided to leave the factories. This was because of the actions of the socialist party and the reformist trade unions. They opposed the movement and negotiated with the state for a return to "normality" in exchange for a promise to extend workers' control legally, in association with the bosses. The question of revolution was decided by a vote of the CGL national council in Milan on April 10-11th, without consulting the syndicalist unions, after the Socialist Party leadership refused to decide one way or the other.

Needless to say, this promise of "workers' control" was not kept. The lack of independent inter-factory organisation made workers dependent on trade union bureaucrats for information on what was going on in other cities, and they used that power to isolate factories, cities, and factories from each other. This led to a return to work, "in spite of the opposition of individual anarchists dispersed among the factories." [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 136] The local syndicalist union confederations could not provide the necessary framework for a fully co-ordinated occupation movement as the reformist unions refused to work with them; and although the anarchists were a large minority, they were still a minority:

*"At the 'interproletarian' convention held on 12 September (in which the Unione Anarchia, the railwaymen's and maritime workers union participated) the syndicalist union decided that 'we cannot do it ourselves' without the socialist party and the CGL, protested against the 'counter-revolutionary vote' of Milan, declared it minoritarian, arbitrary and null, and ended by launching new, vague, but ardent calls to action."* [Paolo Spriano, **Op. Cit.**, p. 94]



Malatesta addressed the workers of one of the factories at Milan. He argued that "*[t]hose who celebrate the agreement signed at Rome [between the Confederazione and the capitalists] as a great victory of yours are deceiving you. The victory in reality belongs to Giolitti, to the government and the bourgeoisie who are saved from the precipice over which they were hanging.*" During the occupation the "*bourgeoisie trembled, the government was powerless to face the situation.*" Therefore:

*"To speak of victory when the Roman agreement throws you back under bourgeois exploitation which you could have got rid of is a lie. If you give up the factories, do this with the conviction [of] hav[ing] lost a great battle and with the firm intention to resume the struggle on the first occasion and to carry it on in a thorough way. . . Nothing is lost if you have no illusion [about] the deceiving character of the victory. The famous decree on the control of factories is a mockery . . . because it tends to harmonise your interests and those of the bourgeois which is like harmonising the interests of the wolf and the sheep. Don't believe those of your leaders who make fools of you by adjourning the revolution from day to day. You yourselves must make the revolution when an occasion will offer itself, without waiting for orders which never come, or which come only to enjoin you to abandon action. Have confidence in yourselves, have faith in your future and you will win."* [quoted by Max Nettlau, **Errico Malatesta: The Biography of an Anarchist**]

Malatesta was proven correct. With the end of the occupations, the only victors were the bourgeoisie and the government. Soon the workers would face Fascism, but first, in October 1920, "*after the factories were evacuated,*" the government (obviously knowing who the real threat was) "*arrested the entire leadership of the USI and UAI. The socialists did not respond*" and "*more-or-less ignored the persecution of the libertarians until the spring of 1921 when the aged Malatesta and other imprisoned anarchists mounted a hunger strike from their cells in Milan.*" [Carl Levy, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 221-2] They were acquitted after a four day trial.

The events of 1920 show four things. Firstly, that workers can manage their own workplaces successfully by themselves, without bosses. Secondly, on the need for anarchists to be involved in the labour movement. Without the support of the USI, the Turin movement would have been even more isolated than it was. Thirdly, anarchists need to be organised to influence the class struggle. The growth of the UAI and USI in terms of both influence and size indicates the importance of this. Without the anarchists and syndicalists raising the idea of factory occupations and supporting the movement, it is doubtful that it would have been as successful and widespread as it was. Lastly, that socialist organisations, structured in a hierarchical fashion, do not produce a revolutionary membership. By continually looking to leaders, the movement was crippled and could not develop to its full potential.

This period of Italian history explains the growth of Fascism in Italy. As Tobias Abse points out, "*the rise of fascism in Italy cannot be detached from the events of the **biennio rosso**, the two red years of 1919 and 1920, that preceded it. Fascism was a preventive counter-revolution . . . launched as a result of the failed revolution*" ["*The Rise of Fascism in an Industrial City*", p. 54, in **Rethinking Italian Fascism**, David Forgacs (ed.), pp. 52-81] The term "*preventive counter-revolution*" was originally coined by the leading anarchist Luigi Fabbri.

As Malatesta argued at the time of the factory occupations, "*[i]f we do not carry on to the end, we will pay with tears of blood for the fear we now instil in the bourgeoisie.*" [quoted by Tobias Abse, **Op. Cit.**, p. 66] Later events proved him right, as the capitalists and rich landowners backed the fascists in order to teach the working class their place. In the words of Tobias Abse:

*"The aims of the Fascists and their backers amongst the industrialists and agrarians in 1921-22 were simple: to break the power of the organised workers and peasants as completely as possible, to wipe out, with the bullet and the club, not only the gains of the **biennio rosso**, but everything that the lower classes had gained . . . between the turn of the century and the outbreak of the First World War."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 54]

The fascist squads attacked and destroyed anarchist and socialist meeting places, social centres, radical presses and Camera del Lavoro (local trade union councils). However, even in the dark days of fascist terror, the anarchists resisted the forces of totalitarianism. "*It is no coincidence that the strongest working-class resistance to Fascism was in . . . towns or cities in which there was quite a strong anarchist, syndicalist or anarcho-syndicalist tradition.*" [Tobias Abse, **Op. Cit.**, p. 56]

The anarchists participated in, and often organised sections of, the **Arditi del Popolo**, a working-class organisation devoted to the self-defence of workers' interests. The Arditi del Popolo organised and encouraged working-class resistance to fascist squads, often defeating larger fascist forces (for example, "*the total humiliation of thousands of Italo Balbo's squadristi by a couple of hundred Arditi del Popolo backed by the inhabitants of the working class districts*" in the anarchist stronghold of Parma in August 1922 [Tobias Abse, **Op. Cit.**, p. 56]).

The Arditi del Popolo was the closest Italy got to the idea of a united, revolutionary working-class front against fascism, as had been suggested by Malatesta and the UAI. This movement "*developed along anti-bourgeois and anti-fascist lines, and was marked by the independence of its local sections.*" [**Red Years, Black Years: Anarchist Resistance to Fascism in Italy**, p. 2] Rather than being just an "anti-fascist" organisation, the Arditi "*were not a movement in defence of 'democracy' in the abstract, but an essentially working-class organisation devoted to the defence of the interests of industrial workers, the dockers and large numbers of artisans and craftsmen.*" [Tobias Abse, **Op. Cit.**, p. 75] Unsurprisingly, the **Arditi del Popolo** "*appear to have been strongest and most successful in areas where traditional working-class political culture was less exclusively socialist and had strong anarchist or syndicalist traditions, for example, Bari, Livorno, Parma and Rome.*" [Antonio Sonnessa, "*Working Class Defence Organisation, Anri-Fascist Resistances and the Arditi del Popolo in Turin, 1919-22,*" pp. 183-218, **European History Quarterly**, vol. 33, no. 2, p. 184]

However, both the socialist and communist parties withdrew from the organisation. The socialists signed a "Pact of Pacification" with the Fascists in August 1921. The communists "*preferred to withdraw their members from the Arditi del Popolo rather than let them work with the anarchists.*" [**Red Years, Black Years**, p. 17] Indeed, "*[o]n the same day as the Pact was signed, **Ordine Nuovo** published a PCd'I*

*[Communist Party of Italy] communication warning communists against involvement" in the Arditi del Popolo. Four days later, the Communist leadership "officially abandoned the movement. Severe disciplinary measures were threatened against those communists who continued to participate in, or liase with," the organisation. Thus by "the end of the first week of August 1921 the PSI, CGL and the PCd'I had officially denounced" the organisation. "Only the anarchist leaders, if not always sympathetic to the programme of the [Arditi del Popolo], did not abandon the movement." Indeed, **Umanita Nova** "strongly supported" it "on the grounds it represented a popular expression of anti-fascist resistance and in defence of freedom to organise." [Antonio Sonnessa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 195 and p. 194]*

However, in spite of the decisions by their leaders, many rank and file socialists and communists took part in the movement. The latter took part in open "defiance of the PCd'I leadership's growing abandonment" of it. In Turin, for example, communists who took part in the **Arditi del Pololo** did so "less as communists and more as part of a wider, working-class self-identification . . . This dynamic was re-enforced by an important socialist and anarchist presence" there. The failure of the Communist leadership to support the movement shows the bankruptcy of Bolshevik organisational forms which were unresponsive to the needs of the popular movement. Indeed, these events show the "libertarian custom of autonomy from, and resistance to, authority was also operated against the leaders of the workers' movement, particularly when they were held to have misunderstood the situation at grass roots level." [Sonnessa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 200, p. 198 and p. 193]

Thus the Communist Party failed to support the popular resistance to fascism. The Communist leader Antonio Gramsci explained why, arguing that "the party leadership's attitude on the question of the Arditi del Popolo . . . corresponded to a need to prevent the party members from being controlled by a leadership that was not the party's leadership." Gramsci added that this policy "served to disqualify a mass movement which had started from below and which could instead have been exploited by us politically." [**Selections from Political Writings (1921-1926)**, p. 333] While being less sectarian towards the Arditi del Popolo than other Communist leaders, "[i]n common with all communist leaders, Gramsci awaited the formation of the PCd'I-led military squads." [Sonnessa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 196] In other words, the struggle against fascism was seen by the Communist leadership as a means of gaining more members and, when the opposite was a possibility, they preferred defeat and fascism rather than risk their followers becoming influenced by anarchism.

As Abse notes, "it was the withdrawal of support by the Socialist and Communist parties at the national level that crippled" the Arditi. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 74] Thus "social reformist defeatism and communist sectarianism made impossible an armed opposition that was widespread and therefore effective; and the isolated instances of popular resistance were unable to unite in a successful strategy." And fascism could have been defeated: "Insurrections at Sarzanna, in July 1921, and at Parma, in August 1922, are examples of the correctness of the policies which the anarchists urged in action and propaganda." [**Red Years, Black Years**, p. 3 and p. 2] Historian Tobias Abse confirms this analysis, arguing that "[w]hat happened in Parma in August 1922 . . . could have happened elsewhere, if only the leadership of the Socialist and Communist parties thrown their weight behind the call of the anarchist Malatesta for a united revolutionary front against Fascism." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 56]

In the end, fascist violence was successful and capitalist power maintained:

*"The anarchists' will and courage were not enough to counter the fascist gangs, powerfully aided with material and arms, backed by the repressive organs of the state. Anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists were decisive in some areas and in some industries, but only a similar choice of direct action on the parts of the Socialist Party and the General Confederation of Labour [the reformist trade union] could have halted fascism."* [Red Years, Black Years, pp. 1-2]

After helping to defeat the revolution, the Marxists helped ensure the victory of fascism.

Even after the fascist state was created, anarchists resisted both inside and outside Italy. Many Italians, both anarchist and non-anarchist, travelled to Spain to resist Franco in 1936 (see Umberto Marzochhi's **Remembering Spain: Italian Anarchist Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War** for details). During the Second World War, anarchists played a major part in the Italian Partisan movement. It was the fact that the anti-fascist movement was dominated by anti-capitalist elements that led the USA and the UK to place known fascists in governmental positions in the places they "liberated" (often where the town had already been taken by the Partisans, resulting in the Allied troops "liberating" the town from its own inhabitants!).

Given this history of resisting fascism in Italy, it is surprising that some claim Italian fascism was a product or form of syndicalism. This is even claimed by some anarchists. According to Bob Black the *"Italian syndicalists mostly went over to Fascism"* and references David D. Roberts 1979 study **The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism** to support his claim. [Anarchy after Leftism, p. 64] Peter Sabatini in a review in **Social Anarchism** makes a similar statement, saying that syndicalism's *"ultimate failure"* was *"its transformation into a vehicle of fascism."* [Social Anarchism, no. 23, p. 99] What is the truth behind these claims?

Looking at Black's reference we discover that, in fact, most of the Italian syndicalists did not go over to fascism, if by syndicalists we mean members of the USI (the Italian Syndicalist Union). Roberts states that:

*"The vast majority of the organised workers failed to respond to the syndicalists' appeals and continued to oppose [Italian] intervention [in the First World War], shunning what seemed to be a futile capitalist war. The syndicalists failed to convince even a majority within the USI. . . the majority opted for the neutralism of Armando Borghi, leader of the anarchists within the USI. Schism followed as De Ambris led the interventionist minority out of the confederation."* [The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism, p. 113]

However, if we take "syndicalist" to mean some of the intellectuals and "leaders" of the pre-war movement, it was a case that the *"leading syndicalists came out for intervention quickly and almost unanimously"* [Roberts, **Op. Cit.**, p. 106] after the First World War started. Many of these pro-war

"leading syndicalists" did become fascists. However, to concentrate on a handful of "leaders" (which the majority did not even follow!) and state that this shows that the *"Italian syndicalists mostly went over to Fascism"* staggers belief. What is even worse, as seen above, the Italian anarchists and syndicalists were the most dedicated and successful fighters against fascism. In effect, Black and Sabatini have slandered a whole movement.

What is also interesting is that these "leading syndicalists" were not anarchists and so not anarcho-syndicalists. As Roberts notes *"[i]n Italy, the syndicalist doctrine was more clearly the product of a group of intellectuals, operating within the Socialist party and seeking an alternative to reformism."* They *"explicitly denounced anarchism"* and *"insisted on a variety of Marxist orthodoxy."* The *"syndicalists genuinely desired -- and tried -- to work within the Marxist tradition."* [Op. Cit., p. 66, p. 72, p. 57 and p. 79] According to Carl Levy, in his account of Italian anarchism, *"[u]nlike other syndicalist movements, the Italian variation coalesced inside a Second International party. Supporters were partially drawn from socialist intransigents . . . the southern syndicalist intellectuals pronounced republicanism . . . Another component . . . was the remnant of the Partito Operaio."* ["Italian Anarchism: 1870-1926" in **For Anarchism: History, Theory, and Practice**, David Goodway (Ed.), p. 51]

In other words, the Italian syndicalists who turned to fascism were, firstly, a small minority of intellectuals who could not convince the majority within the syndicalist union to follow them, and, secondly, Marxists and republicans rather than anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists or even revolutionary syndicalists.

According to Carl Levy, Roberts' book *"concentrates on the syndicalist intelligentsia"* and that *"some syndicalist intellectuals . . . helped generate, or sympathetically endorsed, the new Nationalist movement . . . which bore similarities to the populist and republican rhetoric of the southern syndicalist intellectuals."* He argues that there *"has been far too much emphasis on syndicalist intellectuals and national organisers"* and that syndicalism *"relied little on its national leadership for its long-term vitality."* [Op. Cit., p. 77, p. 53 and p. 51] If we do look at the membership of the USI, rather than finding a group which *"mostly went over to fascism,"* we discover a group of people who fought fascism tooth and nail and were subject to extensive fascist violence.

To summarise, Italian Fascism had nothing to do with syndicalism and, as seen above, the USI fought the Fascists and was destroyed by them along with the UAI, Socialist Party and other radicals. That a handful of pre-war Marxist-syndicalists later became Fascists and called for a "National-Syndicalism" does not mean that syndicalism and fascism are related (any more than some anarchists later becoming Marxists makes anarchism "a vehicle" for Marxism!).

It is hardly surprising that anarchists were the most consistent and successful opponents of Fascism. The two movements could not be further apart, one standing for total statism in the service of capitalism while the other for a free, non-capitalist society. Neither is it surprising that when their privileges and power were in danger, the capitalists and the landowners turned to fascism to save them. This process is

a common feature in history (to list just four examples, Italy, Germany, Spain and Chile).

## A.5.6 Anarchism and the Spanish Revolution.

As Noam Chomsky notes, *"a good example of a really large-scale anarchist revolution -- in fact the best example to my knowledge -- is the Spanish revolution in 1936, in which over most of Republican Spain there was a quite inspiring anarchist revolution that involved both industry and agriculture over substantial areas . . . And that again was, by both human measures and indeed anyone's economic measures, quite successful. That is, production continued effectively; workers in farms and factories proved quite capable of managing their affairs without coercion from above, contrary to what lots of socialists, communists, liberals and other wanted to believe."* The revolution of 1936 was *"based on three generations of experiment and thought and work which extended anarchist ideas to very large parts of the population."* [**Radical Priorities**, p. 212]

Due to this anarchist organising and agitation, Spain in the 1930's had the largest anarchist movement in the world. At the start of the Spanish "Civil" war, over one and one half million workers and peasants were members of the CNT (the *National Confederation of Labour*), an anarcho-syndicalist union federation, and 30,000 were members of the FAI (the *Anarchist Federation of Iberia*). The total population of Spain at this time was 24 million.

The social revolution which met the Fascist coup on July 18th, 1936, is the greatest experiment in libertarian socialism to date. Here the last mass syndicalist union, the CNT, not only held off the fascist rising but encouraged the widespread take-over of land and factories. Over seven million people, including about two million CNT members, put self-management into practise in the most difficult of circumstances and actually improved both working conditions and output.

In the heady days after the 19th of July, the initiative and power truly rested in the hands of the rank-and-file members of the CNT and FAI. It was ordinary people, undoubtedly under the influence of Faistas (members of the FAI) and CNT militants, who, after defeating the fascist uprising, got production, distribution and consumption started again (under more egalitarian arrangements, of course), as well as organising and volunteering (in their tens of thousands) to join the militias, which were to be sent to free those parts of Spain that were under Franco. In every possible way the working class of Spain were creating by their own actions a new world based on their own ideas of social justice and freedom -- ideas inspired, of course, by anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism.

George Orwell's eye-witness account of revolutionary Barcelona in late December, 1936, gives a vivid picture of the social transformation that had begun:

*"The Anarchists were still in virtual control of Catalonia and the revolution was still in full swing. To anyone who had been there since the beginning it probably seemed even in December or January that the revolutionary period was ending; but when one came straight from England the aspect of Barcelona was something startling and*

*overwhelming. It was the first time that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle. Practically every building of any size had been seized by the workers and was draped with red flags or with the red and black flag of the Anarchists; every wall was scrawled with the hammer and sickle and with the initials of the revolutionary parties; almost every church had been gutted and its images burnt. Churches here and there were being systematically demolished by gangs of workman. Every shop and cafe had an inscription saying that it had been collectivised; even the bootblacks had been collectivised and their boxes painted red and black. Waiters and shop-walkers looked you in the face and treated you as an equal. Servile and even ceremonial forms of speech had temporarily disappeared. Nobody said 'Señor' or 'Don' or even 'Usted'; everyone called everyone else 'Comrade' or 'Thou', and said 'Salud!' instead of 'Buenos dias'. . . Above all, there was a belief in the revolution and the future, a feeling of having suddenly emerged into an era of equality and freedom. Human beings were trying to behave as human beings and not as cogs in the capitalist machine." [Homage to Catalonia, pp. 2-3]*

The full extent of this historic revolution cannot be covered here. It will be discussed in more detail in [Section I.8](#) of the FAQ. All that can be done is to highlight a few points of special interest in the hope that these will give some indication of the importance of these events and encourage people to find out more about it.

All industry in Catalonia was placed either under workers' self-management **or** workers' control (that is, either totally taking over **all** aspects of management, in the first case, or, in the second, controlling the old management). In some cases, whole town and regional economies were transformed into federations of collectives. The example of the Railway Federation (which was set up to manage the railway lines in Catalonia, Aragon and Valencia) can be given as a typical example. The base of the federation was the local assemblies:

*"All the workers of each locality would meet twice a week to examine all that pertained to the work to be done... The local general assembly named a committee to manage the general activity in each station and its annexes. At [these] meetings, the decisions (direccion) of this committee, whose members continued to work [at their previous jobs], would be subjected to the approval or disapproval of the workers, after giving reports and answering questions."*

The delegates on the committee could be removed by an assembly at any time and the highest co-ordinating body of the Railway Federation was the "**Revolutionary Committee**," whose members were elected by union assemblies in the various divisions. The control over the rail lines, according to Gaston Leval, "did not operate from above downwards, as in a statist and centralised system. The Revolutionary Committee had no such powers. . . The members of the. . . committee being content to supervise the general activity and to co-ordinate that of the different routes that made up the network." [Gaston Leval, **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 255]

On the land, tens of thousands of peasants and rural day workers created voluntary, self-managed collectives. The quality of life improved as co-operation allowed the introduction of health care, education, machinery and investment in the social infrastructure. As well as increasing production, the collectives increased freedom. As one member puts it, *"it was marvelous. . . to live in a collective, a free society where one could say what one thought, where if the village committee seemed unsatisfactory one could say. The committee took no big decisions without calling the whole village together in a general assembly. All this was wonderful."* [Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 360]

We discuss the revolution in more detail in [section I.8](#). For example, sections [I.8.3](#) and [I.8.4](#) discuss in more depth how the industrial collectives. The rural collectives are discussed in sections [I.8.5](#) and [I.8.6](#). We must stress that these sections are summaries of a vast social movement, and more information can be gathered from such works as Gaston Leval's **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, Sam Dolgoff's **The Anarchist Collectives**, Jose Peirats' **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution** and a host of other anarchist accounts of the revolution.

On the social front, anarchist organisations created rational schools, a libertarian health service, social centres, and so on. The *Mujeres Libres* (free women) combated the traditional role of women in Spanish society, empowering thousands both inside and outside the anarchist movement (see **The Free Women of Spain** by Martha A. Ackelsberg for more information on this very important organisation). This activity on the social front only built on the work started long before the outbreak of the war; for example, the unions often funded rational schools, workers centres, and so on.

The voluntary militias that went to free the rest of Spain from Franco were organised on anarchist principles and included both men and women. There was no rank, no saluting and no officer class. Everybody was equal. George Orwell, a member of the POUM militia (the POUM was a dissident Marxist party, influenced by Leninism but not, as the Communists asserted, Trotskyist) makes this clear:

*"The essential point of the [militia] system was the social equality between officers and men. Everyone from general to private drew the same pay, ate the same food, wore the same clothes, and mingled on terms of complete equality. If you wanted to slap the general commanding the division on the back and ask him for a cigarette, you could do so, and no one thought it curious. In theory at any rate each militia was a democracy and not a hierarchy. It was understood that orders had to be obeyed, but it was also understood that when you gave an order you gave it as comrade to comrade and not as superior to inferior. There were officers and N.C.O.s, but there was no military rank in the ordinary sense; no titles, no badges, no heel-clicking and saluting. They had attempted to produce within the militias a sort of temporary working model of the classless society. Of course there was not perfect equality, but there was a nearer approach to it than I had ever seen or that I would have thought conceivable in time of war. . . "* [Op. Cit., p. 26]

In Spain, however, as elsewhere, the anarchist movement was smashed between Stalinism (the Communist Party) on the one hand and Capitalism (Franco) on the other. Unfortunately, the anarchists



placed anti-fascist unity before the revolution, thus helping their enemies to defeat both them and the revolution. Whether they were forced by circumstances into this position or could have avoided it is still being debated (see [section I.8.10](#) for a discussion of why the CNT-FAI collaborated and [section I.8.11](#) on why this decision was **not** a product of anarchist theory).

Orwell's account of his experiences in the militia's indicates why the Spanish Revolution is so important to anarchists:

*"I had dropped more or less by chance into the only community of any size in Western Europe where political consciousness and disbelief in capitalism were more normal than their opposites. Up here in Aragon one was among tens of thousands of people, mainly though not entirely of working-class origin, all living at the same level and mingling on terms of equality. In theory it was perfect equality, and even in practice it was not far from it. There is a sense in which it would be true to say that one was experiencing a foretaste of Socialism, by which I mean that the prevailing mental atmosphere was that of Socialism. Many of the normal motives of civilised life -- snobbishness, money-grubbing, fear of the boss, etc. -- had simply ceased to exist. The ordinary class-division of society had disappeared to an extent that is almost unthinkable in the money-tainted air of England; there was no one there except the peasants and ourselves, and no one owned anyone else as his master. . . One had been in a community where hope was more normal than apathy or cynicism, where the word 'comrade' stood for comradeship and not, as in most countries, for humbug. One had breathed the air of equality. I am well aware that it is now the fashion to deny that Socialism has anything to do with equality. In every country in the world a huge tribe of party-hacks and sleek little professors are busy 'proving' that Socialism means no more than a planned state-capitalism with the grab-motive left intact. But fortunately there also exists a vision of Socialism quite different from this. The thing that attracts ordinary men to Socialism and makes them willing to risk their skins for it, the 'mystique' of Socialism, is the idea of equality; to the vast majority of people Socialism means a classless society, or it means nothing at all . . . In that community where no one was on the make, where there was a shortage of everything but no boot-licking, one got, perhaps, a crude forecast of what the opening stages of Socialism might be like. And, after all, instead of disillusioning me it deeply attracted me. . ."* [Op. Cit., pp. 83-84]

For more information on the Spanish Revolution, the following books are recommended: **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution** by Vernon Richards; **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution** and **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution** by Jose Peirats; **Free Women of Spain** by Martha A. Ackelsberg; **The Anarchist Collectives** edited by Sam Dolgoff; *"Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship"* by Noam Chomsky (in **The Chomsky Reader**); **The Anarchists of Casas Viejas** by Jerome R. Mintz; and **Homage to Catalonia** by George Orwell.

## A.5.7 The May-June Revolt in France, 1968.

The May-June events in France placed anarchism back on the radical landscape after a period in which many people had written the movement off as dead. This revolt of ten million people grew from humble beginnings. Expelled by the university authorities of Nanterre in Paris for anti-Vietnam War activity, a group of anarchists (including Daniel Cohn-Bendit) promptly called a protest demonstration. The arrival of 80 police enraged many students, who quit their studies to join the battle and drive the police from the university.

Inspired by this support, the anarchists seized the administration building and held a mass debate. The occupation spread, Nanterre was surrounded by police, and the authorities closed the university down. The next day, the Nanterre students gathered at the Sorbonne University in the centre of Paris. Continual police pressure and the arrest of over 500 people caused anger to erupt into five hours of street fighting. The police even attacked passers-by with clubs and tear gas.

A total ban on demonstrations and the closure of the Sorbonne brought thousands of students out onto the streets. Increasing police violence provoked the building of the first barricades. Jean Jacques Lebel, a reporter, wrote that by 1 a.m., "*[l]iterally thousands helped build barricades. . . women, workers, bystanders, people in pyjamas, human chains to carry rocks, wood, iron.*" An entire night of fighting left 350 police injured. On May 7th, a 50,000-strong protest march against the police was transformed into a day-long battle through the narrow streets of the Latin Quarter. Police tear gas was answered by molotov cocktails and the chant "*Long Live the Paris Commune!*"

By May 10th, continuing massive demonstrations forced the Education Minister to start negotiations. But in the streets, 60 barricades had appeared and young workers were joining the students. The trade unions condemned the police violence. Huge demonstrations throughout France culminated on May 13th with one million people on the streets of Paris.

Faced with this massive protest, the police left the Latin Quarter. Students seized the Sorbonne and created a mass assembly to spread the struggle. Occupations soon spread to every French University. From the Sorbonne came a flood of propaganda, leaflets, proclamations, telegrams, and posters. Slogans such as "*Everything is Possible,*" "*Be Realistic, Demand the Impossible,*" "*Life without Dead Times,*" and "*It is Forbidden to Forbid*" plastered the walls. "*All Power to the Imagination*" was on everyone's lips. As Murray Bookchin pointed out, "*the motive forces of revolution today. . . are not simply scarcity and material need, but also quality of everyday life,.. the attempt to gain control of one's own destiny.*" [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 249-250]

Many of the most famous slogans of those days originated from the Situationists. The **Situationist International** had been formed in 1957 by a small group of dissident radicals and artists. They had developed a highly sophisticated (if jargon riddled) and coherent analysis of modern capitalist society and how to supersede it with a new, freer one. Modern life, they argued, was mere survival rather than living, dominated by the economy of consumption in which everyone, everything, every emotion and relationship becomes a commodity. People were no longer simply alienated producers, they were also alienated consumers. They defined this kind of society as the "*Spectacle.*" Life itself had been stolen

and so revolution meant recreating life. The area of revolutionary change was no longer just the workplace, but in everyday existence:

*"People who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints, such people have a corpse in their mouth."* [quoted by Clifford Harper, **Anarchy: A Graphic Guide**, p. 153]

Like many other groups whose politics influenced the Paris events, the situationists argued that *"the workers' councils are the only answer. Every other form of revolutionary struggle has ended up with the very opposite of what it was originally looking for."* [quoted by Clifford Harper, **Op. Cit.**, p. 149] These councils would be self-managed and not be the means by which a "revolutionary" party would take power. Like the anarchists of **Noire et Rouge** and the libertarian socialists of **Socialisme ou Barbarie**, their support for a self-managed revolution from below had a massive influence in the May events and the ideas that inspired it. **Beneath the Paving Stones** by Dark Star is a good anthology of situationist works relating to Paris 68 which also contains an eye-witness account of events.

On May 14th, the Sud-Aviation workers locked the management in its offices and occupied their factory. They were followed by the Cleon-Renault, Lockheed-Beauvais and Mucel-Orleans factories the next day. That night the National Theatre in Paris was seized to become a permanent assembly for mass debate. Next, France's largest factory, Renault-Billancourt, was occupied. Often the decision to go on indefinite strike was taken by the workers without consulting union officials. By May 17th, a hundred Paris Factories were in the hands of their workers. The weekend of the 19th of May saw 122 factories occupied. By May 20th, the strike and occupations were general and involved six million people. Print workers said they did not wish to leave a monopoly of media coverage to TV and radio, and agreed to print newspapers as long as the press *"carries out with objectivity the role of providing information which is its duty."* In some cases print-workers insisted on changes in headlines or articles before they would print the paper. This happened mostly with the right-wing papers such as *'Le Figaro'* or *'La Nation'*.

With the Renault occupation, the Sorbonne occupiers immediately prepared to join the Renault strikers, and led by anarchist black and red banners, 4,000 students headed for the occupied factory. The state, bosses, unions and Communist Party were now faced with their greatest nightmare -- a worker-student alliance. Ten thousand police reservists were called up and frantic union officials locked the factory gates. The Communist Party urged their members to crush the revolt. They united with the government and bosses to craft a series of reforms, but once they turned to the factories they were jeered out of them by the workers.

The struggle itself and the activity to spread it was organised by self-governing mass assemblies and co-ordinated by action committees. The strikes were often run by assemblies as well. As Murray Bookchin argues, the *"hope [of the revolt] lay in the extension of self-management in all its forms -- the general assemblies and their administrative forms, the action committees, the factory strike committees -- to all*

*areas of the economy, indeed to all areas of life itself.*" [Op. Cit., pp. 251-252] Within the assemblies, *"a fever of life gripped millions, a reworking of senses that people never thought they possessed."* [Op. Cit., p. 251] It was not a workers' strike or a student strike. It was a **peoples'** strike that cut across almost all class lines.

On May 24th, anarchists organised a demonstration. Thirty thousand marched towards the Palace de la Bastille. The police had the Ministries protected, using the usual devices of tear gas and batons, but the Bourse (Stock Exchange) was left unprotected and a number of demonstrators set fire to it.

It was at this stage that some left-wing groups lost their nerve. The Trotskyist JCR turned people back into the Latin Quarter. Other groups such as UNEF and Parti Socialiste Unifie (United Socialist Party) blocked the taking of the Ministries of Finance and Justice. Cohn-Bendit said of this incident *"As for us, we failed to realise how easy it would have been to sweep all these nobodies away. . . .It is now clear that if, on 25 May, Paris had woken to find the most important Ministries occupied, Gaullism would have caved in at once. . . ."* Cohn-Bendit was forced into exile later that very night.

As the street demonstrations grew and occupations continued, the state prepared to use overwhelming means to stop the revolt. Secretly, top generals readied 20,000 loyal troops for use on Paris. Police occupied communications centres like TV stations and Post Offices. By Monday, May 27th, the Government had guaranteed an increase of 35% in the industrial minimum wage and an all round-wage increase of 10%. The leaders of the CGT organised a march of 500,000 workers through the streets of Paris two days later. Paris was covered in posters calling for a *"Government of the People."* Unfortunately the majority still thought in terms of changing their rulers rather than taking control for themselves.

By June 5th most of the strikes were over and an air of what passes for normality within capitalism had rolled back over France. Any strikes which continued after this date were crushed in a military-style operation using armoured vehicles and guns. On June 7th, they made an assault on the Flins steelworks which started a four-day running battle which left one worker dead. Three days later, Renault strikers were gunned down by police, killing two. In isolation, those pockets of militancy stood no chance. On June 12th, demonstrations were banned, radical groups outlawed, and their members arrested. Under attack from all sides, with escalating state violence and trade union sell-outs, the General Strike and occupations crumbled.

So why did this revolt fail? Certainly not because "vanguard" Bolshevik parties were missing. It was infested with them. Fortunately, the traditional authoritarian left sects were isolated and outraged. Those involved in the revolt did not require a vanguard to tell them what to do, and the "workers' vanguards" frantically ran after the movement trying to catch up with it and control it.

No, it was the lack of independent, self-managed confederal organisations to co-ordinate struggle which resulted in occupations being isolated from each other. So divided, they fell. In addition, Murray Bookchin argues that *"an awareness among the workers that the factories had to be **worked**, not merely*

*occupied or struck,"* was missing. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 269]

This awareness would have been encouraged by the existence of a strong anarchist movement before the revolt. The anti-authoritarian left, though very active, was too weak among striking workers, and so the idea of self-managed organisations and workers self-management was not widespread. However, the May-June revolt shows that events can change very rapidly. The working class, fused by the energy and bravado of the students, raised demands that could not be catered for within the confines of the existing system. The General Strike displays with beautiful clarity the potential power that lies in the hands of the working class. The mass assemblies and occupations give an excellent, if short-lived, example of anarchy in action and how anarchist ideas can quickly spread and be applied in practice.

## J.7 What do anarchists mean by "*social revolution*"?

In anarchist theory, "*social revolution*" means far more than just revolution. For anarchists, a true revolution is far more than just a change in the political makeup, structure or form of a society. It must transform all aspects of a society -- political, economic, social, interpersonal relationships, sexual and so on -- and the individuals who comprise it. Indeed, these two transformations go hand in hand, complementing each other and supporting each other -- individuals, while transforming society, transform themselves in the process.

As Alexander Berkman put it, "*there are revolutions and revolutions. Some revolutions change only the governmental form by putting a new set of rulers in place of the old. These are political revolutions, and as such they are often met with little resistance. But a revolution that aims to abolish the entire system of wage slavery must also do away with the power of one class to oppress another. That is, it is not any more a mere change of rulers, of government, not a political revolution, but one that seeks to alter the whole character of society. That would be a **social** revolution.*" [ABC of Anarchism, p. 34]

It means two related things. Firstly, it means transforming all aspects of society and not just tinkering with certain aspects of the current system. Where political revolution means, in essence, changing bosses, social revolution means changing society. Thus social revolution signifies a change in the social, economic and cultural and sexual in a libertarian direction, a transformation in the way society is organised and run. Social revolution, in other words, does not aim to alter one form of subjection for another, but to do away with everything that can enslave and oppress the individual. Secondly, it means bringing about this fundamental change **directly** by the mass of people in society, rather than relying on political means of achieving this end, in the style of Marxist-Leninists and other authoritarian socialists. For anarchists, such an approach is a political revolution only and doomed to failure. Hence the "*actual, positive work of the social revolution must . . . be carried out by the toilers themselves, by the labouring people.*" [Alexander Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 45]

That is not to say that an anarchist social revolution is not political in content -- far from it; it should be obvious to anyone reading this FAQ that there are considerable political theories at work within anarchism. What we **are** saying, however, is that anarchists do not seek to seize power and attempt, through control of law enforcement and the military (in the style of governments) to bring change about from the top-down. Rather, we seek to bring change upward from below, and in so doing, make such a revolution inevitable and not contingent on the machinations of a political vanguard. As Durruti argued, "*[w]e never believed that the revolution consisted of the seizure of power by a minority which would impose a dictatorship on the people . . . We want a revolution by and for the people. Without this no revolution is possible. It would be a Coup d'Etat, nothing more.*" [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, pp. 135-7]

Thus, for anarchists, a social revolution is a movement from below, of the oppressed and exploited struggling for their own freedom. Moreover, such a revolution does not appear as if by magic. Rather, it is the case that revolutions *"are not improvised. They are not made at will by individuals. They come about through the force of circumstance and are independent of any deliberate will or conspiracy."* [Michael Bakunin, quote by Brian Morris, **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 139] They are, in fact, a product of social evolution and of social struggle. As Malatesta reminds us:

*"the oppressed masses . . . have never completely resigned themselves to oppression and poverty, and who today more than ever than ever show themselves thirsting for justice, freedom and wellbeing, are beginning to understand that they will not be able to achieve their emancipation except by union and solidarity with all the oppressed, with the exploited everywhere in the world. And they also understand that the indispensable condition for their emancipation which cannot be neglected is the possession of the means of production, of the land and of the instruments of labour."* [**Anarchy**, p. 30]

Thus any social revolution proceeds from the daily struggles of working class people (just as anarchism does). It is not an event, rather it is a **process** -- a process which is occurring at this moment. Thus, for anarchists, a social revolution is not something in the future but an process which is occurring in the here and now. As German Anarchist Gustav Landauer put it:

*"The State is not something that can be destroyed by a revolution, but it is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently."* [quoted by George Woodcock, **Anarchism**, p. 421]

This does not mean that anarchists do not recognise that a revolution will be marked by, say, insurrectionary events (such as a general strike, wide scale occupations of land, housing, workplaces, etc., actual insurrections and so on). Of course not, it means that we place these events in a process, within social movements and that they do not occur in isolation from history or the evolution of ideas and movements within society.

Berkman echoes this point when he argued that while *"a social revolution is one that entirely changes the foundation of society, its political, economic and social character,"* such a change *"must first take place in the ideas and opinions of the people, in the minds of men [and women]."* This means that *"the social revolution must be prepared. Prepared in these sense of furthering evolutionary process, of enlightening the people about the evils of present-day society and convincing them of the desirability and possibility, of the justice and practicability of a social life based on liberty."* [Alexander Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 38] And such preparation would be the result of social struggle in the here and now, social struggle based on direct action, solidarity and self-managed organisations. While Berkman concentrates on the labour movement in his classic work, but his comments are applicable to all social movements:

*"In the daily struggle of the proletariat such an organisation [a syndicalist union] would*

*be able to achieve victories about which the conservative union, as at present built, cannot even dream. . . . Such a union would soon become something more than a mere defender and protector of the worker. It would gain a vital realisation of the meaning of unity and consequent power, of labour solidarity. The factory and shop would serve as a training camp to develop the worker's understanding of his proper role in life, to cultivate his [or her] self-reliance and independence, teach him [or her] mutual help and co-operation, and make him [or her] conscious of his [or her] responsibility. He will learn to decide and act on his [or her] own judgement, not leaving it to leaders or politicians to attend to his [or her] affairs and look out for his [or her] welfare. . . . He [or she] will grow to understand that present economic and social arrangements are wrong and criminal, and he [or she] will determine to change them. The shop committee and union will become the field of preparation for a new economic system, for a new social life." [Op. Cit., p. 59]*

In other words, the struggle against authority, exploitation, oppression and domination in the here and now is the start of the social revolution. It is this daily struggle which creates free people and the organisations it generates *"bear . . . the living seed of the new society which is to replace the old one. They are creating not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself."* [Michael Bakunin, **Bakunin On Anarchism**, p. 255] Hence Bakunin's comment that anarchists think socialism will be attained only *"by the development and organisation, not of the political but of the social organisation (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses as much in the towns as in the countryside."* [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, pp. 197-8] Such social power is expressed in economic and community organisations such as self-managed unions and workplace/community assemblies (see [section J.5](#)).

Anarchists try and follow the example of our Spanish comrades in the C.N.T. and F.A.I. who, when *"faced with the conventional opposition between reformism and revolution, they appear, in effect, to have put forward a third alternative, seeking to obtain immediate practical improvements through the actual development, in practice, of autonomous, libertarian forms of self-organisation."* [Nick Rider, *"The Practice of Direct Action: The Barcelona Rent Strike of 1931"*, in **For Anarchism**, pp. 79-105, David Goodway (ed.), p. 99] While doing this, anarchists must also *"beware of ourselves becoming less anarchist because the masses are not ready for anarchy."* [Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 162]

Therefore, revolution and anarchism is the product of struggle, a social process in which anarchist ideas spread and develop. However, *"[t]his does not mean. . . that to achieve anarchy we must wait till everyone becomes an anarchist. On the contrary. . . under present conditions only a small minority, favoured by specific circumstances, can manage to conceive what anarchy is. It would be wishful thinking to hope for a general conversion before a change actually took place in the kind of environment in which authoritarianism and privilege now flourish. It is precisely for this reason that [we] . . . need to organise for the bringing about of anarchy, or at any rate that degree of anarchy which could become gradually feasible, as soon as a sufficient amount of freedom has been won and a nucleus of anarchists somewhere exists that is both numerically strong enough and able to be self-sufficient and to spread its influence locally."* [Errico Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, pp. 83-4]



Thus anarchists influence the struggle, the revolutionary process by encouraging anarchistic tendencies within those who are not yet anarchists but are instinctively acting in a libertarian manner. Anarchists spread the anarchist message to those in struggle and support libertarian tendencies in it as far as they can. In this way, more and more people will become anarchists and anarchy will become increasingly possible. We discuss the role of anarchists in a social revolution in [section J.7.4](#) and will not do so now.

For anarchists, a social revolution is the end product of years of social struggle. It is marked by the transformation of a given society and the breaking down of all forms of oppression and the creation of new ways of living, new forms of self-managed organisation, a new attitude to live itself. Moreover, we do not wait for the future to introduce such transformations in our daily life. Rather, we try and create as much anarchistic tendencies in today's society as possible in the firm belief that in so doing we are pushing the creation of a free society nearer.

So anarchists, including revolutionary ones, try to make the world more libertarian and so bring us closer to freedom. Few anarchists think of anarchy as something in (or for) the distant future, rather it is something we try and create in the here and now by living and struggling in a libertarian manner. Once enough people do this, then a more extensive change towards anarchy (i.e. a revolution) is inevitable.

## J.7.1 Are all anarchists revolutionaries?

No, far from it. While most anarchists do believe that a social revolution is required to create a free society, some reject the idea. This is because they think that revolutions are by their very nature violent and coercive and so are against anarchist principles. In the words of Proudhon (in reply to Marx):

*"Perhaps you still hold the opinion that no reform is possible without a helping **coup de main**, without what used to be called a revolution but which is quite simply a jolt. I confess that my most recent studies have led me to abandon this view, which I understand and would willingly discuss, since for a long time I held it myself. I do not think that this is what we need in order to succeed, and consequently we must not suggest **revolutionary** action as the means of social reform because this supposed means would simply be an appeal to force and to arbitrariness. In brief, it would be a contradiction."* [Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, p. 151]

Also they point to the fact that the state is far better armed than the general population, better trained and (as history proves) more than willing to slaughter as many people as required to restore "order." In face of this power, they argue, revolution is doomed to failure.

Those opposed to revolution come from all tendencies of the movement. Traditionally, Individualist anarchists are usually against the idea of revolution, as was Proudhon. However, with the failure of the Russian Revolution and the defeat of the C.N.T.-F.A.I. in Spain, some social anarchists have rethought support for revolution. Rather than seeing revolution as the key way of creating a free society they

consider it doomed to failure as the state is too strong a force to be overcome by insurrection. Instead of revolution, such anarchists support the creation of alternatives, such as co-operatives, mutual banks and so on, which will help transform capitalism into libertarian socialism. Such alternative building, combined with civil disobedience and non-payment of taxes, is seen as the best way to creating anarchy.

Most revolutionary anarchists agree on the importance of building libertarian alternatives in the here and now. They would agree with Bakunin when he argued that such organisations as libertarian unions, co-operatives and so on are essential *"so that when the Revolution, brought about by the natural force of circumstances, breaks out, there will be a real force at hand which knows what to do and by virtue thereof is capable of taking the Revolution into its own hands and imparting to it a direction salutary for the people: a serious, international organisation of worker's organisations of all countries, capable of replacing the departing political world of the States and the bourgeoisie."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 323] Thus, for most anarchists, the difference of evolution and revolution is one of little import -- anarchists should support libertarian tendencies within society as they support revolutionary situations when they occur.

Moreover, revolutionary anarchists argue that, ultimately, capitalism cannot be reformed away nor will the state wither away under the onslaught of libertarian institutions and attitudes. They do not consider it possible to *"burn Property little by little"* via *"some system of economics"* which will *"put back into society . . . the wealth which has been taken out of society by another system of economics"*, to use Proudhon's expression. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 151] Therefore, libertarian tendencies within capitalism may make life better under that system but they cannot, ultimately, get rid of it. This implies a social revolution, they argue. Such anarchists agree with Alexander Berkman when he writes:

*"This is no record of any government or authority, of any group or class in power having given up its mastery voluntarily. In every instance it required the use of force, or at least the threat of it."* [**ABC of Anarchism**, p. 32]

Even the end of State capitalism ("Communism") in the Eastern Block does not contradict this argument. Without the mass action of the population, the regime would have continued. Faced with a massive popular revolt, the Commissars realised that it was better to renounce power than have it taken from them. Thus mass rebellion, the start of any true revolution, was required.

Moreover, the argument that the state is too powerful to be defeated has been proven wrong time and time again. Every revolution has defeated a military machine which previously been claimed to be unbeatable. For example, the people armed in Spain defeated the military in two-thirds of the country. Ultimately, the power of the state rests on its troops following orders. If those troops rebel, then the state is powerless. That is why anarchists have always produced anti-militarist propaganda urging troops to join strikers and other people in revolt. Revolutionary anarchists, therefore, argue that any state can be defeated, if the circumstances are right and the work of anarchists is to encourage those circumstances.

In addition, revolutionary anarchists argue that even if anarchists did not support revolutionary change,

this would not stop such events happening. Revolutions are the product of developments in human society and occur whether we desire them or not. They start with small rebellions, small acts of refusal by individuals, groups, workplaces, communities and grow. These acts of rebellion are inevitable in any hierarchical society, as is their spreading wider and wider. Revolutionary anarchists argue that anarchists must, by the nature of our politics and our desire for freedom, support such acts of rebellion and, ultimately, social revolution. Not to do so means ignoring people in struggle against our common enemy and ignoring the means by which anarchists ideas and attitudes will grow within existing society. Thus Alexander Berkman is right when he wrote:

*"That is why it is no prophecy to foresee that some day it must come to decisive struggle between the masters of life and the dispossessed masses.*

*"As a matter of fact, that struggle is going on all the time. There is a continuous warfare between capital and labour. That warfare generally proceeds within so-called legal forms. But even these erupt now and then in violence, as during strikes and lockouts, because the armed fist of government is always at the service of the masters, and that fist gets into action the moment capital feels its profits threatened: then it drops the mask of 'mutual interests' and 'partnership' with labour and resorts to the final argument of every master, to coercion and force.*

*"It is therefore certain that government and capital will not allow themselves to be quietly abolished if they can help it; nor will they miraculously 'disappear' of themselves, as some people pretend to believe. It will require a revolution to get rid of them." [Op. Cit., p. 33]*

However, all anarchists are agreed that any revolution should be as non-violent as possible. Violence is the tool of oppression and, for anarchists, violence is only legitimate as a means of self-defence against authority. Therefore revolutionary anarchists do not seek "violent revolution" -- they are just aware that when people refuse to kow-tow to authority then that authority will use violence against them. This use of violence has been directed against non-violent forms of direct action and so those anarchists who reject revolution will not avoid state violence directed against.

Nor do revolutionary anarchists think that revolution is in contradiction to the principles of anarchism. As Malatesta put it, "*[f]or two people to live in peace they must both want peace; if one insists on using force to oblige the other to work for him and serve him, then the other, if he wishes to retain his dignity as a man and not be reduced to abject slavery, will be obliged, in spite of his love of peace, to resist force with adequate means.*" [Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 54] Under any hierarchical system, those in authority do not leave those subject to them in peace. The boss does not treat his/her workers as equals, working together by free agreement without differences in power. Rather, the boss orders the worker about and uses the threat of sanctions to get compliance. Similarly with the state. Under these conditions, revolution cannot be authoritarian -- for it is not authoritarian to destroy authority! To quote Rudolf Rocker:

*"We . . . know that a revolution cannot be made with rosewater. And we know, too, that the owning classes will never yield up their privileges spontaneously. On the day of victorious revolution the workers will have to impose their will on the present owners of the soil, of the subsoil and of the means of production, which cannot be done -- let us be clear on this -- without the workers taking the capital of society into their own hands, and, above all, without their having demolished the authoritarian structure which is, and will continue to be, the fortress keeping the masses of the people under dominion. Such an action is, without doubt, an act of liberation; a proclamation of social justice; the very essence of social revolution, which has nothing in common with the utterly bourgeois principle of dictatorship." [Anarchism and Sovietism]*

Errico Malatesta comments reflect well the position of revolutionary anarchists with regards to the use of force:

*"We neither seek to impose anything by force nor do we wish to submit to a violent imposition.*

*"We intend to use force against government, because it is by force that we are kept in subjection by government.*

*"We intend to expropriate the owners of property because it is by force that they withhold the raw materials and wealth, which is the fruit of human labour, and use it to oblige others to work in their interest.*

*"We shall resist with force whoever would wish by force, to retain or regain the means to impose his will and exploit the labour of others. . .*

*"With the exception of these cases, in which the use of violence is justified as a defence against force, we are always against violence, and for self-determination." [Op. Cit., p. 56]*

This is the reason why most anarchists are revolutionaries. They do not think it against the principles of anarchism and consider it the only real means of creating a free society -- a society in which the far greater, and permanent, violence which keeps the majority of humanity in servitude can be ended once and for all.

## J.7.2 Is social revolution possible?

One objection to the possibility of social revolution is based on what we might call "the paradox of social change." This argument goes as follows: authoritarian institutions reward and select people with an authoritarian type of personality for the most influential positions in society; such types of people have both (a) an interest in perpetuating authoritarian institutions (from which they benefit) and (b) the

power to perpetuate them; hence they create a self-sustaining and tightly closed system which is virtually impervious to the influence of non-authoritarian types. Therefore, institutional change presupposes individual change, which presupposes institutional change, and so on. Unless it can be shown, then, that institutions and human psychology can both be changed **at the same time**, hope for a genuine social revolution (instead of just another rotation of elites) appears to be unrealistic.

Connected with this problem is the fact that the psychological root of the hierarchical society is addiction to power -- over other people, over nature, over the body and human emotions -- and that this addiction is highly contagious. That is, as soon as any group of people anywhere in the world becomes addicted to power, those within range of their aggression also feel compelled to embrace the structures of power, including centralised control over the use of deadly force, in order to protect themselves from their neighbours. But once these structures of power are adopted, authoritarian institutions become self-perpetuating.

In this situation, fear becomes the underlying emotion behind the conservatism, conformity, and mental inertia of the majority, who in that state become vulnerable to the self-serving propaganda of authoritarian elites alleging the necessity of the state, strong leaders, militarism, "law and order," capitalist bosses, etc. Hence the simultaneous transformation of institutions and individual psychology becomes even more difficult to imagine.

Serious as these obstacles may be, they do not warrant despair. To see why, let's note first that "paradigm shifts" in science have not generally derived from new developments in one field alone but from a convergence of cumulative developments in several different fields at once. For example, the Einsteinian revolution which resulted in the overthrow of the Newtonian paradigm was due to simultaneous progress in mathematics, physics, astronomy and other sciences that all influenced, reacted on, and cross-fertilised each other (see Thomas Kuhn, **The Structure of Scientific Revolutions**, 1962). Similarly, if there is going to be a "paradigm shift" in the social realm, i.e. from hierarchical to non-hierarchical institutions, it is likely to emerge from the convergence of a number of different socio-economic and political developments at the same time. We have discussed these developments in [section J.4](#) and so will not repeat ourselves here. In a hierarchical society, the oppression which authority produces resistance, and so hope. The "*instinct for freedom*" cannot be repressed forever.

That is why anarchists stress the importance of direct action and self-help (see sections [J.2](#) and [J.4](#)). By the very process of struggle, by practising self-management, direct action, solidarity people create the necessary "paradigm shift" in both themselves and society as a whole. In the words of Malatesta, "*[o]nly freedom or the struggle for freedom can be the school for freedom.*" [**Life and Ideas**, p. 59] Thus the struggle against authority is the school of anarchy -- it encourages libertarian tendencies in society and the transformation of individuals into anarchists. In a revolutionary situation, this process is accelerated. It is worth quoting Murray Bookchin at length on this subject:

*"Revolutions are profoundly educational processes, indeed veritable cauldrons in which all kinds of conflicting ideas and tendencies are sifted out in the minds of a revolutionary*

people. . .

*"Individuals who enter into a revolutionary process are by no means the same after the revolution as they were before it began. Those who encounter a modicum of success in revolutionary times learn more within a span of a few weeks or months than they might have learned over their lifetime in non-revolutionary times. Conventional ideas fall away with extraordinary rapidity; values and prejudices that were centuries in the making disappear almost overnight. Strikingly innovative ideas are quickly adopted, tested, and, where necessary, discarded. Even newer ideas, often flagrantly radical in character, are adopted with an elan that frightens ruling elites -- however radical the latter may profess to be -- and they soon become deeply rooted in the popular consciousness. Authorities hallowed by age-old tradition are suddenly divested of their prestige, legitimacy, and power to govern. . .*

*"So tumultuous socially and psychologically are revolutions in general that they constitute a standing challenge to ideologues, including sociobiologists, who assert that human behaviour is fixed and human nature predetermined. Revolutionary changes reveal a remarkable flexibility in 'human nature,' yet few psychologists have elected to study the social and psychological tumult of revolution as well as the institutional changes it so often produces. Thus much must be said with fervent emphasis: **to continue to judge the behaviour of a people during and after a revolution by the same standards one judged them by beforehand is completely myopic.***

*"I wish to argue [like all anarchists] that the capacity of a revolution to produce far-reaching ideological and moral changes in a people stems primarily from the opportunity it affords ordinary, indeed oppressed, people to exercise popular self-management -- to enter directly, rapidly, and exhilaratingly into control over most aspects of their social and personal lives. To the extent that an insurrectionary people takes over the reins of power from the formerly hallowed elites who oppressed them and begins to restructure society along radically populist lines, individuals grow aware of latent powers within themselves that nourish their previously suppressed creativity, sense of self-worth, and solidarity. They learn that society is neither immutable nor sanctified, as inflexible custom had previously taught them; rather, it is malleable and subject, within certain limits, to change according to human will and desire." [The Third Revolution, vol. 1, pp. 6-7]*

So, social revolutions are possible. Anarchists anticipate successful co-operation within certain circumstance. People who are in the habit of taking orders from bosses are not capable of creating a new society. Tendencies towards freedom, self-management, co-operation and solidarity are not simply an act of ethical will which overcomes the competitive and hierarchical behaviour capitalism generates within those who live in it. Capitalism is, as Malatesta argued, based on competition -- and this includes the working class. Thus conflict is endemic to working class life under capitalism. However, **co-operation** is stimulated within our class by our struggles to survive in and resist the system. This tendency for co-operation generated by struggle against capitalism also produces the habits required for

a free society -- by struggling to change the world (even a small part of it), people also change themselves. Direct action produces empowered and self-reliant people who can manage their own affairs themselves. It is on the liberating effects of struggle, the tendencies towards individual and collective self-management and direct action it generates, the needs and feelings for solidarity and creative solutions to pressing problems it produces that anarchists base their positive answer on whether social revolution is possible. History has shown that we are right. It will do so again.

### J.7.3 Doesn't revolution mean violence?

While many try and paint revolutions (and anarchists) as being violent by their very nature, the social revolution desired by anarchists is essentially non-violent. This is because, to quote Bakunin, "*[i]n order to launch a radical revolution, it is . . . necessary to attack positions and things and to destroy [the institution of] property and the State, but there will be no need to destroy men and to condemn ourselves to the inevitable reaction which is unfailingly produced in every society by the slaughter of men.*" [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, pp. 168-9]

As Bakunin noted elsewhere, the end of property is also non-violent:

*"How to smash the tyranny of capital? Destroy capital? But that would be to destroy all the riches accumulated on earth, all primary materials, all the instruments of labour, all the means of labour. . . Thus capital cannot and must not be destroyed. It must be preserved. . . there is but a single solution -- **the intimate and complete union of capital and labour** . . . the workers must obtain not individual but **collective** property in capital . . . the collective property of capital . . . [is] the absolutely necessary conditions for of the emancipation of labour and of the workers."* [The Basic Bakunin, pp. 90-1]

The essentially non-violent nature of anarchist ideas of social revolution can be seen from the Seattle General Strike of 1919. Here is a quote from the Mayor of Seattle (we do not think we need to say that he was not on the side of the strikers):

*"The so-called sympathetic Seattle strike was an attempted revolution. That there was no violence does not alter the fact . . . The intent, openly and covertly announced, was for the overthrow of the industrial system; here first, then everywhere . . . True, there were no flashing guns, no bombs, no killings. Revolution, I repeat, doesn't need violence. The general strike, as practised in Seattle, is of itself the weapon of revolution, all the more dangerous because quiet. To succeed, it must suspend everything; stop the entire life stream of a community . . . That is to say, it puts the government out of operation. And that is all there is to revolt -- no matter how achieved."* [quoted by Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, pp. 370-1]

If the strikers had occupied their workplaces and local communities can created popular assemblies then the attempted revolution would have become an actual one without any use of violence at all. This

indicates the strength of ordinary people and the relative weakness of government and capitalism -- they only work when they can force people to respect them.

In Italy, a year latter, the occupations of the factories and land started. As Malatesta pointed out, "*in Umanita Nova [the daily anarchist newspaper] we . . . said that if the movement spread to all sectors of industry, that is workers and peasants followed the example of the metallurgists, of getting rid of the bosses and taking over the means of production, the revolution would succeed without shedding a single drop of blood.*" Thus the "*occupation of the factories and the land suited perfectly our programme of action.*" [**Life and Ideas**, p. 135]

Therefore the notion that a social revolution is necessarily violent is a false one. For anarchists, social revolution is essentially an act of self-liberation (of both the individuals involved and society as a whole). It has nothing to do with violence, quite the reverse, as anarchists see it as the means to end the rule and use of violence in society. Therefore anarchists hope that any revolution is essentially non-violent, with any violence being defensive in nature.

Of course, many revolutions are marked by violence. However, as Alexander Berkman argues, this is not the aim of anarchism or the revolution and has far more to do with previous repression and domination than anarchist ideas:

*"We know that revolution begins with street disturbances and outbreaks; it is the initial phase which involves force and violence. But that is merely the spectacular prologue of the real revolution. The age long misery and indignity suffered by the masses burst into disorder and tumult, the humiliation and injustice meekly borne for decades find vents in facts of fury and destruction. That is inevitable, and it is solely the master class which is responsible for this preliminary character of revolution. For it is even more true socially than individually that 'whoever sows the wind will reap the whirlwind;' the greater the oppression and wretchedness to which the masses had been made to submit, the fiercer the rage [of] the social storm. All history proves it . . ."* [**ABC of Anarchism**, p. 50]

He also argues that "*[m]ost people have very confused notions about revolution. To them it means just fighting, smashing things, destroying. It is the same as if rolling up your sleeves for work should be considered the work itself that you have to do. The fighting bit of the revolution is merely the rolling up of your sleeves.*" The task of the revolution is the "*destruction of the existing conditions*" and "**conditions** are not destroyed [by] breaking and smashing things. You can't destroy wage slavery by wrecking the machinery in the mills and factories . . . You won't destroy government by setting fire to the White House." He correctly points out that to think of revolution "*in terms of violence and destruction is to misinterpret and falsify the whole idea of it. In practical application such a conception is bound to lead to disastrous results.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 40-1]

Thus when anarchists like Bakunin speak of revolution as "destruction" they mean that the idea of authority and obedience must be destroyed, along with the institutions that are based on such ideas. We



do not mean, as can be clearly seen, the destruction of people or possessions. Nor do we imply the glorification of violence -- quite the reserve, as anarchists seek to limit violence to that required for self-defence against oppression and authority.

Therefore a social revolution **may** involve some violence. It may also mean no-violence at all. It depends on the revolution and how widely anarchist ideas are spread. One thing is sure, for anarchists social revolution is **not** synonymous violence. Indeed, violence usually occurs when the ruling class resists the action of the oppressed -- that is, when those in authority act to protect their social position.

The wealthy and their state will do anything in their power to prevent having a large enough percentage of anarchists in the population to simply "ignore" the government and property out of existence. If things got that far, the government would suspend the legal rights, elections and round up influential subversives. The question is, what do anarchists do in response to these actions? If anarchists are in the majority or near it, then defensive violence would likely succeed. For example, "*the people armed*" crushed the fascist coup of July 19th, 1936 in Spain and resulted in one of the most important experiments in anarchism the world has ever seen. This should be contrasted with the aftermath of the factory occupations in Italy in 1920 and the fascist terror which crushed the labour movement. In other words, you cannot just ignore the state even if the majority are acting, you need to abolish it and organise self-defence against attempts to re-impose it or capitalism.

We discuss the question of self-defence and the protection of the revolution in [section J.7.6](#).

## J.7.4 What would a social revolution involve?

Social revolution necessitates putting anarchist ideas into daily practice. Therefore it implies that direct action, solidarity and self-management become increasingly the dominant form of living in a society. It implies the transformation of society from top to bottom. We can do no better than quote Errico Malatesta on what revolution means:

*"The Revolution is the creation of new living institutions, new groupings, new social relationships; it is the destruction of privileges and monopolies; it is the new spirit of justice, of brotherhood, of freedom which must renew the whole of social life, raise the moral level and the material conditions of the masses by calling on them to provide, through their direct and conscious action, for their own futures. Revolution is the organisation of all public services by those who in them in their own interest as well as the public's; Revolution is the destruction of all of coercive ties; it is the autonomy of groups, of communes, of regions; Revolution is the free federation brought about by a desire for brotherhood, by individual and collective interests, by the needs of production and defence; Revolution is the constitution of innumerable free groupings based on ideas, wishes, and tastes of all kinds that exist among the people; Revolution is the forming and disbanding of thousands of representative, district, communal, regional, national bodies which, without having any legislative power, serve to make known and to co-ordinate the*

*desires and interests of people near and far and which act through information, advice and example. Revolution is freedom proved in the crucible of facts -- and lasts so long as freedom lasts. . .*" [Life and Ideas, p. 153]

This, of course, presents a somewhat wide vision of the revolutionary process. We will need to give some more concrete examples of what a social revolution would involve. However, before so doing, we stress that these are purely examples drawn from previous revolutions and are not written in stone. Every revolution creates its own forms of organisation and struggle. The next one will be no different. Just as we argued in [section I](#), an anarchist revolution will create its own forms of freedom, forms which may share aspects with previous forms but which are unique to themselves. All we do here is give a rough overview of what we expect (based on previous revolutions) to see occur in a social revolution. We are not predicting the future. As Kropotkin put it:

*"A question which we are often asked is: 'How will you organise the future society on Anarchist principles?' If the question were put to . . . someone who fancies that a group of men [or women] is able to organise society as they like, it would seem natural. But in the ears of an Anarchist, it sounds very strangely, and the only answer we can give to it is: 'We cannot organise you. It will depend upon **you** what sort of organisation you choose.'"* [Act for Yourselves, p. 32]

And organise themselves they have. In each social revolution, the oppressed have organised themselves into many different self-managed organisations. These bodies include the Sections during the Great French Revolution, the workers councils ("soviets" or "rate") during the Russian and German revolutions, the industrial and rural collectives during the Spanish Revolution, the workers councils during the Hungarian revolution of 1956, assemblies and action committees during the 1968 revolt in France, and so on. These bodies were hardly uniform in nature and some were more anarchistic than others, but the tendency towards self-management and federation existing in them all. This tendency towards anarchistic solutions and organisation is not unsurprising, for, as Nestor Makhno argued, "*[i]n carrying through the revolution, under the impulsion of the anarchism that is innate in them, the masses of humanity search for free associations. Free assemblies always command their sympathy. The revolutionary anarchist must help them to formulate this approach as best they can.*" [The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays, p. 85]

In addition, we must stress that we are discussing an **anarchist** social revolution in this section. As we noted in [section I.2.2](#), anarchists recognise that any revolution will take on different forms in different areas and develop in different ways and at different speeds. We leave it up to others to describe their vision of revolution (for Marxists, the creation of a "workers' state" and the seizure of power by the "proletarian" vanguard or party, and so on).

So what would a libertarian social revolution involve? Firstly, a revolution *"it is not the work of one day. It means a whole period, mostly lasting for several years, during which the country is in a state of effervescence; when thousands of formerly indifferent spectators take a lively part in public affairs . .*

*[and] criticises and repudiates the institutions which are a hindrance to free development; when it boldly enters upon problems which formerly seemed insoluble.*" [Peter Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 25-6] Thus, it would be a **process** in which revolutionary attitudes, ideas, actions and organisations spread in society until the existing system is overthrown and a new one takes its place. It does not come overnight. Rather it is an accumulative development, marked by specific events of course, but fundamentally it goes on in the fabric of society. For example, the **real** Russian revolution went on during the period between the 1917 February and October insurrections when workers took over their workplaces, peasants seized their land and new forms of social life (soviets, factory committees, co-operatives, etc.) were formed and people lost their previous submissive attitudes to authority by using direct action to change their lives for the better (see **The Unknown Revolution** by Voline for more details and evidence of this revolutionary process in action). Similarly, the Spanish Revolution occurred after the 19th of July, 1936, when workers again took over their workplaces, peasants formed collectives and militias were organised to fight fascism (see **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution** by Gaston Leval for details).

Secondly, *"there **must** be a rapid modification of outgrown economical and political institutions, an overthrow of the injustices accumulated by centuries past, a displacement of wealth and political power."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 25]

This aspect is the key one. Without the abolition of the state and capitalism, not real revolution has taken place. As Bakunin argued, *"the program of social revolution" is "the abolition of all exploitation and all political or juridical as well as governmental and bureaucratic oppression, in other words, to the abolition of all classes through the equalisation of economic conditions, and the abolition of their last buttress, the state."* That is, *"the total and definitive liberation of the proletariat from economic exploitation and state oppression."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, pp. 48-9]

We should stress here that, regardless of what Marxists may say, anarchists see the destruction of capitalism occurring **at the same time as** the destruction of the state. We do not aim to abolish the state first, then capitalism as Engels asserted we did. This perspective of a simultaneous political and economic revolution is clearly seen when Bakunin wrote that a city in revolt would *"naturally make haste to organise itself as best it can, in revolutionary style, after the workers have joined into associations and made a clean sweep of all the instruments of labour and every kind of capital and building; armed and organised by streets and **quartiers**, they will form the revolutionary federation of all the **quartiers**, the federative commune. . . All . . .the revolutionary communes will then send representatives to organise the necessary services and arrangements for production and exchange . . . and to organise common defence against the enemies of the Revolution."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 179]

As can be seen from Bakunin's comments just quoted that an essential part of a social revolution is the *"expropriation of landowners and capitalists for the benefit of all."* This would be done by workers occupying their workplaces and placing them under workers' self-management. Individual self-managed workplaces would then federate on a local and industrial basis into workers' councils to co-ordinate joint activity, discuss common interests and issues as well as ensuring common ownership and universalising

self-management. *"We must push the workers to take possession of the factories, to federate among themselves and work for the community, and similarly the peasants should take over the land and the produce usurped by the landlords, and come to an agreement with the industrial workers on the necessary exchange of goods."* [Errico Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 198 and p. 165]

In this way capitalism is replaced by new economic system based on self-managed work. The end of hierarchy in the economy, in other words. These workplace assemblies and local, regional, etc., federations would start to organise production to meet human needs rather than capitalist profit. While most anarchists would like to see the introduction of communistic relations begin as quickly as possible in such an economy, most are realistic enough to recognise that tendencies towards libertarian communism will be depend on local conditions. As Malatesta argued:

*"It is then that graduation really comes into operation. We shall have to study all the practical problems of life: production, exchange, the means of communication, relations between anarchist groupings and those living under some kind of authority, between communist collectives and those living in an individualistic way; relations between town and country, the utilisation for the benefit of everyone of all natural resources of the different regions [and so on] . . . And in every problem [anarchists] should prefer the solutions which not only are economically superior but which satisfy the need for justice and freedom and leave the way open for future improvements, which other solutions might not."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 173]

No central government could organise such a transformation. No centralised body could comprehend the changes required and decide between the possibilities available to those involved. Hence the very complexity of life, and the needs of social living, will push a social revolution towards anarchism. *"Unavoidably,"* argued Kropotkin, *"the Anarchist system of organisation -- free local action and free grouping -- will come into play."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 72] Without this local action and the free agreement between local groups to co-ordinate activity, a revolution would be dead in the water and fit only to produce a new bureaucratic class structure, as the experience of the Russian Revolution proves. Unless the economy is transformed from the bottom up by those who work within it, socialism is impossible. If it is re-organised from the top-down by a centralised body all that will be achieved is state capitalism and rule by bureaucrats instead of capitalists.

Therefore, the key economic aspect of a social revolution is the end of capitalist oppression by the direct action of the workers themselves and their re-organisation of their work and the economy by their own actions, organisations and initiative from the bottom-up. As Malatesta argued:

*"To destroy radically this oppression without any danger of it re-emerging, all people must be convinced of their right to the means of production, and be prepared to exercise this basic right by expropriating the landowners, the industrialists and financiers, and putting all social wealth at the disposal of the people."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 167]

However, the economic transformation is but part of the picture. As Kropotkin argued, *"throughout history we see that each change in the economic relations of a community is accompanied by a corresponding change in what may be called political organisation . . . Thus, too, it will be with Socialism. If it contemplates a new departure in economics it **must** be prepared for a new departure in what is called political organisation."* [Op. Cit., p. 39] Thus the anarchist social revolution also aims to abolish the state and create a confederation of self-governing communes to ensure its final elimination. To really destroy something you must replace it with something better. Hence anarchism will destroy the state by a confederation of self-managed, free communities (or communes).

This destruction of the state is essential. This is because *"those workers who want to free themselves, or even only to effectively improve their conditions, will be forced to defend themselves from the government . . . which by legalising the right to property and protecting it with brute force, constitutes a barrier to human progress, which must be beaten down . . . if one does not wish to remain indefinitely under present conditions or even worse."* Therefore, *"[f]rom the economic struggle one must pass to the political struggle, that is to the struggle against government."* [Malatesta, Op. Cit., p. 195]

Thus a social revolution will have to destroy the state bureaucracy and the states forces of violence and coercion (the police, armed forces, intelligence agencies, and so on). If this is not done then the state will come back and crush the revolution. Such a destruction of the state does not involve violence against individuals, but rather the end of hierarchical organisations, positions and institutions. It would involve, for example, the disbanding of the police, army, navy, state officialdom etc. and the transformation of police stations, army and naval bases, state bureaucracy's offices into something more useful (or, as in the case of prisons, their destruction). Town halls would be occupied and used by community and industrial groups, for example. Mayors' offices could be turned into creches, for example. Police stations, if they have not been destroyed, could, perhaps, be turned into storage centres for goods. In William Morris' utopian novel, **News from Nowhere**, the Houses of Parliament were turned into a manure storage facility. And so on. Those who used to work in such occupations would be asked to pursue a more fruitful way of life or leave the community. In this way, all harmful and useless institutions would be destroyed or transformed into something useful and of benefit to society.

In addition, as well as the transformation/destruction of the buildings associated with the old state, the decision making process for the community previously usurped by the state would come back into the hands of the people. Alternative, self-managed organisations would be created in every community to manage community affairs. From these community assemblies, confederations would spring up to co-ordinate joint activities and interests. These neighbourhood assemblies and confederations would be means by which power would be dissolved in society and government finally eliminated in favour of freedom (both individual and collective).

Ultimately, anarchism means creating positive alternatives to existing institutions which provide some useful function. For example, we propose self-management as an alternative to capitalist production. We propose self-governing communes to organise social life instead of the state. *"One only destroys, and effectively and permanently,"* argued Malatesta, *"that which one replaces by something else; and to put off to a later date the solution of problems which present themselves with the urgency of necessity,*

would be to give time to the institutions one is intending to abolish to recover from the shock and reassert themselves, perhaps under other names, but certainly with the same structure." [Op. Cit., p. 159] This was the failure of the Spanish Revolution, which ignored the state rather than abolish it via new, self-managed organisations (see [section I.8](#)).

Hence a social revolution would see the "[o]rganisation of social life by means of free association and federations of producers and consumers, created and modified according to the wishes of their members, guided by science and experience, and free from any kind of imposition which does not spring from natural needs, to which everyone, convinced by a feeling of overriding necessity, voluntarily submits." [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 184]

These organisations, we must stress, are usually products of the revolution and the revolutionary process itself:

*"Assembly and community must arise from within the revolutionary process itself; indeed, the revolutionary process must **be** the formation of assembly and community, and with it, the destruction of power. Assembly and community must become 'fighting words,' not distinct panaceas. They must be created as **modes of struggle** against existing society . . . The future assemblies of people in the block, the neighbourhood or the district -- the revolutionary sections to come -- will stand on a higher social level than all the present-day committees, syndicates, parties and clubs adorned by the most resounding 'revolutionary' titles. They will be the living nuclei of utopia in the decomposing body of bourgeois society" In this way, the "specific gravity of society . . . [will] be shifted to its base -- the armed people in permanent assembly." [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, pp. 167-8 and pp. 168-9]*

Such organisations are required because, in the words of Murray Bookchin, "[f]reedom has its forms . . . a liberatory revolution always poses the question of what social forms will replace existing ones. At one point or another, a revolutionary people must deal with how it will manage the land and the factories from which it requires the means of life. It must deal with the manner in which it will arrive at decisions that affect the community as a whole. Thus if revolutionary thought is to be taken at all seriously, it must speak directly to the problems and forms of social management." [Op. Cit., p. 143] If this is not done, capitalism and the state will not be destroyed and the social revolution will fail. Only by destroying hierarchical power by abolishing state and capitalism by self-managed organisations can individuals free themselves and society.

As well as these economic and political changes, there would be other changes as well -- far too many to chronicle here. For example, "[w]e will see to it that all empty and under-occupied houses are used so that no one will be without a roof over his [or her] head. We will hasten to abolish banks and title deeds and all that represents and guarantees the power of the State and capitalist privilege. And we will try to reorganise things in such a way that it will be impossible for bourgeois society to be reconstituted." [Malatesta, Op. Cit., p. 165] Similarly, free associations will spring up on a whole range

of issues and for a whole range of interests and needs. Social life will become transformed, as will many aspects of personal life and personal relationships. We cannot say in which way, but there will be a general libertarian movement in all aspects of life as women resist and overcome sexism, gays resist and end homophobia, the young will expect to be treated as individuals, not property, and so on.

Society will become more diverse, open, free and libertarian in nature. And, hopefully, it and the struggle that creates it will be **fun** -- anarchism is about making life worth living and so any struggle must reflect that. The use of fun in the struggle is important. There is no incongruity in conducting serious business and having fun. We are sure this will piss off the "serious" Left no end. The aim of revolution is to emancipate **individuals** not abstractions like "the proletariat," "society," "history" and so on. And having fun is part and parcel of that liberation. As Emma Goldman said, *"If I can't dance, it's not my revolution."* Revolutions should be *"festivals of the oppressed"* -- we cannot *"resolve the anarchic, intoxicating phase that opens all the great revolutions of history merely into an expression of class interest and the opportunity to redistribute social wealth."* [Murray Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 277f]

Therefore a social revolution involves a transformation of society from the bottom up by the creative action of working class people. This transformation would be conducted through self-managed organisations which will be the basis for abolishing hierarchy, state and capitalism. *"There can be no separation of the revolutionary process from the revolutionary goal. A society based on self-administration must be achieved by means of self-administration. . . . If we define 'power' as the power of man over man, power can only be destroyed by the very process in which man acquires power over his own life and in which he not only 'discovers' himself, but, more meaningfully, formulates his selfhood in all its social dimensions."* [Murray Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 167]

## J.7.5 What is the role of anarchists in a social revolution?

All the great social revolutions have been spontaneous. Indeed, it is cliché that the revolutionaries are usually the most surprised when a revolution breaks out. Nor do anarchists assume that a revolution will initially be libertarian in nature. All we assume is that there will be libertarian tendencies which anarchists work within and try to strengthen. Therefore the role of anarchists and anarchist organisations is to try and push a revolution towards a social revolution by encouraging the tendencies we discussed in the [last section](#) and by arguing for anarchist ideas and solutions. In the words of Vernon Richards:

*"We do not for one moment assume that all social revolutions are necessarily anarchist. But whatever form the revolution against authority takes, the role of anarchists is clear: that of inciting the people to abolish capitalistic property and the institutions through which it exercises its power for the exploitation of the majority by a minority."* [**Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, p. 44]

For anarchists, their role in a social revolution is clear. They try to spread anarchist ideas and encourage autonomous organisation and activity by the oppressed. For example, during the Russian Revolution

anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists played a key role in the factory committee movement for workers' self-management. They combated Bolshevik attempts to substitute state control for workers' self-management and encouraged workplace occupations and federations of factory committees (see Maurice Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control** for a good introduction to the movement for workers' self-management during the Russian Revolution and Bolshevik hostility to it). Similarly, they supported the soviets (councils elected by workers in their workplaces) but opposed their transformation from revolutionary bodies into state organs (and so little more than organs of the Communist Party and so the enemies of self-management). The anarchists tried to *"work for their conversion from centres of authority and decrees into non-authoritarian centres, regulating and keeping things in order but not suppressing the freedom and independence of local workers' organisations. They must become centres which link together these autonomous organisations."* [G. P. Maksimov in Paul Avrich (ed.) **The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, p. 105]

Therefore, the anarchist role, as Murray Bookchin puts it, is to *"preserve and extend the anarchic phase that opens all the great social revolutions"* by working *"within the framework of the forms created by the revolution, not within the forms created by the party. What this means is that their commitment is to the revolutionary organs of self-management . . . to the social forms, not the political forms. Anarcho-communists [and other revolutionary anarchists] seek to persuade the factory committees, assemblies or soviets to make themselves into genuine organs of popular self-management, not to dominate them, manipulate them, or hitch them to an all-knowing political party."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 215 and p. 217]

Equally as important, *"is that the people, all people, should lose their sheeplike instincts and habits with which their minds have been inculcated by an age-long slavery, and that they should learn to think and act freely. It is to this great task of spiritual liberation that anarchists must especially devote their attention."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 160-1] Unless people think and act for themselves, no social revolution is possible and anarchy will remain just a tendency with authoritarian societies.

Practically, this means the encouragement of self-management and direct action. Anarchists thus *"push the people to expropriate the bosses and put all goods in common and organise their daily lives themselves, through freely constituted associations, without waiting for orders from outside and refusing to nominate or recognise any government or constituted body in whatever guise . . . even in a provisional capacity, which ascribes to itself the right to lay down the law and impose with force its will on others."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 197] This is because, to quote Bakunin, anarchists do *"not accept, even in the process of revolutionary transition, either constituent assemblies, provisional governments or so-called revolutionary dictatorships; because we are convinced that revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses, and that when it is concentrated in those of a few ruling individuals it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 237]

As the history of every revolution shows, *"revolutionary government"* is a contradiction in terms. Government bodies mean *"the transferring of initiative from the armed workers to a central body with executive powers. By removing the initiative from the workers, the responsibility for the conduct of the*



*struggle and its objectives [are] also transferred to a governing hierarchy, and this could have no other than an adverse effect on the morale of the revolutionary fighters.*" [Vernon Richards, **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, pp. 42-3] Such a centralisation of power means the suppression of local initiatives, the replacing of self-management with bureaucracy and the creation of a new, exploitative and oppressive class of officials and party hacks. Only when power rests in the hands of everyone can a social revolution exist and a free society created. If this is not done, if the state replaces the self-managed associations of a free people, all that happens is the replacement of one class system by another. This is because the state is an instrument of minority rule -- it can never become an instrument of majority rule, its centralised, hierarchical and authoritarian nature excludes such a possibility (see [section H.3.7](#) for more discussion on this issue).

Therefore an important role of anarchists is to undermine hierarchical organisation by creating self-managed ones, by keeping the management and direction of a struggle or revolution in the hands of those actually conducting it. It is **their** revolution, **not** a party's and so they should control and manage it. They are the ones who have to live with the consequences of it. *"The revolution is safe, it grows and becomes strong,"* correctly argues Alexander Berkman, *"as long as the masses feel that they are direct participants in it, that they are fashioning their own lives, that they are making the revolution, that they are the revolution. But the moment that their activities are usurped by a political party or are centred in some special organisation, revolutionary effort becomes limited to a comparatively small circle from the which the large masses are practically excluded. The natural result of that [is that] popular enthusiasm is dampened, interest gradually weakens, initiative languishes, creativeness wanes, and the revolution becomes the monopoly of a clique which presently turns dictator."* [Op. Cit., p. 65]

The history of every revolution proves this point, we feel, and so the role of anarchists (like those described in [section J.3](#)) is clear -- to keep a revolution revolutionary by encouraging libertarian ideas, organisation, tactics and activity. To requote Emma Goldman:

*"No revolution can ever succeed as factor of liberation unless the MEANS used to further it be identical in spirit and tendency with the PURPOSE to be achieved."* [**Patterns of Anarchy**, p. 113]

Anarchists, therefore, aim to keep the means in line with the goal and their role in any social revolution is to combat authoritarian tendencies and parties while encouraging working class self-organisation, self-activity and self-management and the spreading of libertarian ideas and values within society.

## J.7.6 How could an anarchist revolution defend itself?

To some, particularly Marxists, this section may seem in contradiction with anarchist ideas. After all, did Marx not argue in a diatribe against Proudhon that anarchist *"abolishing the state"* implies the *"laying down of arms"* by the working class? However, as will become very clear nothing could be further from the truth. Anarchists have always argued for defending a revolution -- by force, if necessary. Anarchists do not think that abolishing the state involves *"laying down arms."* We argue that Marx (and Marxists)

confuse self-defence by "*the people armed*" with the state, a confusion which has horrific implications (as the history of the Russian Revolution shows -- see the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#) for details).

So how would an anarchist revolution (and by implication, society) defend itself? Firstly, we should note that it will **not** defend itself by creating a centralised body, a new state. If it did this then the revolution will have failed and a new class society would have been created (a society based on state bureaucrats and oppressed workers as in the Soviet Union). Thus we reject Marx's notion of "*a revolutionary and transitory form*" of state as confused in the extreme. [Marx quoted by Lenin, **Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 315] Rather, we seek libertarian means to defend a libertarian revolution. What would these libertarian means be?

History, as well as theory, points to them. In all the major revolutions of this century which anarchists took part in they formed militias to defend freedom. For example, anarchists in many Russian cities formed "Black Guards" to defend their expropriated houses and revolutionary freedoms. In the Ukraine, Nestor Makhno helped organise a peasant-worker army to defend the social revolution against authoritarians of right and left. In the Spanish Revolution, the C.N.T. and F.A.I. organised militias to free those parts of Spain under fascist rule after the military coup in 1936.

(As an aside, we **must** point out that these militias had nothing in common -- bar the name -- with the present "militia movement" in the United States. The anarchist militias were organised in a libertarian manner and aimed to defend an anti-statist, anti-capitalist revolution from pro-state, pro-capitalist forces. In contrast, the US "militia movement" is organised in a military fashion, defend property rights and want to create their own governments.)

These anarchist militias were as self-managed as possible, with any "officers" elected and accountable to the troops and having the same pay and living conditions as them. Nor did they impose their ideas on others. When a militia liberated a village, town or city they called upon the population to organise their own affairs, as they saw fit. All the militia did was present suggestions and ideas to the population. For example, when the Makhnovists passed through a district they would put on posters announcing:

*"The freedom of the workers and the peasants is their own, and not subject to any restriction. It is up to the workers and peasants to act, to organise themselves, to agree among themselves in all aspects of their lives, as they themselves see fit and desire. . . . The Makhnovists can do no more than give aid and counsel . . . . In no circumstances can they, nor do they wish to, govern."* [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 473]

Needless to say, the Makhnovists counselled the workers and peasants "*to set up free peasants' and workers' councils*" as well as to expropriate the land and means of production. They argued that "*[f]reedom of speech, of the press and of assembly is the right of every toiler and any gesture contrary to that freedom constitutes an act of counter-revolution.*" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, pp. 157-8] The

Makhnovists also organised regional congresses of peasants and workers to discuss revolutionary and social issues (a fact that annoyed the Bolsheviks, leading to Trotsky trying to ban one congress and arguing that "*participation in said congress will be regarded as an act of high treason.*" [Op. Cit., p. 151] Little wonder workers' democracy withered under the Bolsheviks!).

The Makhnovists declared principles were voluntary enlistment, the election of officers and self-discipline according to the rules adopted by each unit themselves. Remarkably effective, the Makhnovists were the force that defeated Denikin's army and helped defeat Wrangel. After the Whites were defeated, the Bolsheviks turned against the Makhnovists and betrayed them. However, while they existed the Makhnovists defended the freedom of the working class to organise themselves against both right and left statists. See Voline's **The Unknown Revolution** and Peter Arshinov's **History of the Makhnovist Movement** for more information or the appendix on "[Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?](#)" of this FAQ.

A similar situation developed in Spain. After defeating the military/fascist coup on 19th of July, 1936, the anarchists organised self-managed militias to liberate those parts of Spain under Franco. These groups were organised in a libertarian fashion from the bottom up:

*"The establishment of war committees is acceptable to all confederal militias. We start from the individual and form groups of ten, which come to accommodations among themselves for small-scale operations. Ten such groups together make up one **centuria**, which appoints a delegate to represent it. Thirty **centurias** make up one column, which is directed by a war committee, on which the delegates from the **centurias** have their say. . . although every column retains its freedom of action, we arrive at co-ordination of forces, which is not the same thing as unity of command."* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, pp. 256-7]

Like the Makhnovists, the anarchist militias in Spain were not only fighting against reaction, they were fighting for a better world. As Durruti argued, "*Our comrades on the front know for whom and for what they fight. They feel themselves revolutionaries and they fight, not in defence of more or less promised new laws, but for the conquest of the world, of the factories, the workshops, the means of transportation, their bread and the new culture.*" [Op. Cit., p. 248]

When they liberated towns and villages, the militia columns urged workers and peasants to collectivise the land and means of production, to re-organise life in a libertarian fashion. All across anti-Fascist Spain workers and peasants did exactly that (see [section I.8](#) for more information). The militias only defended the workers' and peasants' freedom to organise their own lives as they saw fit and did not force them to create collectives or dictate their form.

Unfortunately, like the Makhnovists, the C.N.T. militias were betrayed by their so-called allies on the left. The anarchist troops were not given enough arms and were left on the front to rot in inaction. The "unified" command by the Republican State preferred not to arm libertarian troops as they would use

these arms to defend themselves and their fellow workers against the Republican and Communist led counter-revolution. Ultimately, the "*people in arms*" won the revolution and the "People's army" which replaced it lost the war. See Abel Paz's **Durruti: The People Armed**, Vernon Richards **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution** and George Orwell's **Homage to Catalonia** for more information.

While the cynic may point out that, in the end, these revolutions and militias were defeated, it does not mean that their struggle was in vain or a future revolution will not succeed. That would be like arguing in 1940 that democracy is inferior to fascism because the majority of democratic states had been (temporarily) defeated by fascism or fascist states. It does not mean that these methods will fail in the future or that we should embrace apparently more "successful" approaches which end in the creation of a society the total opposite of what we desire (means determine ends, after all, and statist means will create statist ends and apparent "successes" -- like Bolshevism -- are the greatest of failures in terms of our ideas and ideals). All we are doing here is pointing how anarchists have defended revolutions in the past and that these methods were successful for a long time in face of tremendous opposition forces.

Thus, in practice, anarchists have followed Malatesta's argument for the "*creation of a voluntary militia, without powers to interfere as militia in the life of the community, but only to deal with any armed attacks by the forces of reaction to re-establish themselves, or to resist outside intervention by countries as yet not in a state of revolution.*" [Op. Cit., p. 166] This militia would be based on an armed population and "[t]he power of the people in arms can only be used in the defence of the revolution and the freedoms won by their militancy and their sacrifices." [Vernon Richards, **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, p. 44] It does not seek to impose a revolution, for you cannot impose freedom or force people to be free against their will.

Hence anarchists would seek to defend a revolution because, while anarchism "*is opposed to any interference with your liberty . . . [and] against all invasion and violence*" it recognises that when "*any one attacks you, then it is he who is invading you, he who is employing violence against you. You have a right to defend yourself. More than that, it is your duty, as an anarchist to protect your liberty, to resist coercion and compulsion. . . In other words, the social revolution will attack no one, but it will defend itself against invasion from any quarter.*" [Alexander Berkman, **ABC of Anarchism**, p. 81]

As Berkman stresses, this revolutionary defence "*must be in consonance with th[e] spirit [of anarchism]. Self-defence excludes all acts of coercion, of persecution or revenge. It is concerned only with repelling attack and depriving the enemy of opportunity to invade you.*" Any defence would be based on "*the strength of the revolution . . . First and foremost, in the support of the people . . . If they feel that they themselves are making the revolution, that they have become masters of their lives, that they have gained freedom and are building up their welfare, then in that very sentiment you have the greatest strength of the revolution. . . Let them believe in the revolution, and they will defend it to the death.*" Thus the "*armed workers and peasants are the only effective defence of the revolution.*" [Op. Cit., pp. 81-81]

Part of this strength lies in liberty, so no attempt would be made to "defend" the revolution against mere

talk, against the mere expression of an opinion. To *"suppress speech and press is not only a theoretical offence against liberty; it is a direct blow at the very foundations of the revolution. . . It would generate fear and distrust, would hatch conspiracies, and culminate in a reign of terror which has always killed revolution in the pass."* [Op. Cit., p. 83]

Moreover, in the case of foreign intervention, the importance of international solidarity is important. As Bakunin argued, *"a social revolution cannot be a revolution in one nation alone. It is by nature an international revolution."* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 49] Thus any foreign intervention would face the problems of solidarity actions and revolts on its own doorstep and not dare send its troops abroad for long, if at all. Ultimately, the only way to support a revolution is to make your own.

Within the revolutionary area, it is the actions of liberated people than will defend it. Firstly, the population would be armed and so counter-revolutionaries would face stiff opposition to their attempts to recreate authority. Secondly, they would face liberated individuals who would reject their attempts:

*"The only way in which a state of Anarchy can be obtained is for each man [or woman] who is oppressed to act as if he [or she] were at liberty, in defiance of all authority to the contrary . . . In practical fact, territorial extension is necessary to ensure permanency to any given individual revolution. In speaking of the Revolution, we signify the aggregate of so many successful individual and group revolts as will enable every person within the revolutionised territory to act in perfect freedom . . . without having to constantly dread the prevention or the vengeance of an opposing power upholding the former system . . . Under these circumstance it is obvious that any visible reprisal could and would be met by a resumption of the same revolutionary action on the part of the individuals or groups affected, and that the **maintenance** of a state of Anarchy in this manner would be far easier than the gaining of a state of Anarchy by the same methods and in the face of hitherto unshaken opposition."* [Kropotkin, Op. Cit., pp. 87-8]

Thus any authoritarian would face the direct action of a free people, of free individuals, who would refuse to co-operate with the would-be authorities and join in solidarity with their friends and fellow workers to resist them. The only way a counter-revolution could spread internally is if the mass of the population can become alienated from the revolution and this is impossible in an anarchist revolution as power remains in their hands. If power rests in their hands, there is no danger from counter-revolutionaries.

In the end, an anarchist revolution can be defended only by applying its ideas as widely as possible. Its defence rests in those who make it. If the revolution is an expression of their needs, desires and hopes then it will be defended with the full passion of a free people. Such a revolution **may** be defeated by superior force, who can tell? But the possibility is that it will not and that is what makes it worth trying. To not act because of the possibility of failure is to live half a life. Anarchism calls upon everyone to live the kind of life they deserve as unique individuals and desire as human beings. Individually we can make a difference, together we can change the world.

J.7 What do anarchists mean by "social revolution"?

## J.4 What trends in society aid anarchist activity?

In this section we will examine some modern trends which we regard as being potential openings for anarchists to organise. These trends are of a general nature, partly as a product of social struggle, partly as a response to economic and social crisis, partly involving people's attitudes to big government and big business partly in relation to the communications revolution we are currently living through, and so on. We do this because, as Kropotkin argued, the anarchist "*studies human society as it is now and was in the past. . . He [or she] studies society and tries to discover its **tendencies**, past and present, its growing needs, intellectual and economical, and in his ideal he merely points out in which direction evolution goes.*" [**Anarchism and Anarchist Communism**, p. 24] In this section we highlight just a few of the tendencies in modern society which point in an anarchist direction.

Of course, looking at modern society we see multiple influences, changes which have certain positive aspects in some directions but negative ones in others. For example, the business-inspired attempts to decentralise or reduce (certain) functions of governments. In the abstract, such developments should be welcomed by anarchists for they lead to the reduction of government. In practice such a conclusion is deeply suspect simply because these developments are being pursued to increase the power and influence of business and capital and undermine working class power and autonomy. Similarly, increases in self-employment can be seen, in the abstract, as reducing wage slavery. However, if, in practice, this increase is due to corporations encouraging "independent" contractors to cut wages and worsen working conditions, increase job insecurity and undermine paying for health and other employee packages then is hardly a positive sign. Obviously increases in self-employment would be different if such an increase was the result of an increase in the number of co-operatives, for example.

Thus few anarchists celebrate many apparently "libertarian" developments as they are not the product of social movements and activism, but are the product of elite lobbying for private profit and power. Decreasing the power of the state in (certain) areas while leaving (or increasing) the power of capital is a retrograde step in most, if not all, ways. Needless to say, this "rolling back" of the state does not bring into question its role as defender of property and the interests of the capitalist class -- nor could it, as it is the ruling class who introduces and supports these developments.

As an example of these multiple influences, we can point to the economic crisis which has staggered on since 1973 in many Western countries. This crisis, when it initially appeared, led to calls to reduce taxation (at least for the wealthy, in most countries the tax-burden was shifted even more onto the working class -- as was the case in Thatcher's Britain). In most countries, as a result, government "got off the back" of the wealthy (and got even more comfy on **our** back!). This (along with slower growth) helped to create declining revenue bases in the advanced capitalist nations has given central governments an excuse to cut social services, leaving a vacuum that regional and local governments have had to fill along with voluntary organisations, thus producing a tendency toward decentralisation that dovetails with anarchist ideals.

As Murray Bookchin points out, a sustainable ecological society must shift emphasis away from nation-states as the basic units of administration and focus instead on municipalities -- towns, villages, and human-scale cities. Interestingly, the ongoing dismantling of the welfare state is producing such a shift by itself. By forcing urban residents to fend for themselves more than ever before in meeting transportation, housing, social welfare, and other needs, the economic crisis is also forcing them to relearn the arts of teamwork, co-operation, and self-reliance (see his **Remaking Society: Pathways to a Green Future**, p. 183).

Of course the economic crisis also has a downside for anarchists. As hardships and dislocations continue to swell the ranks and increase the militancy of progressive social movements, the establishment is being provoked to use ever more authoritarian methods to maintain control (see D.9). As the crisis deepens over the next few decades, the reactionary tendencies of the state will be reinforced (particularly as the neo-liberal consensus helps atomise society via the market mechanism and the resulting destruction of community and human relationships). However, this is not inevitable. The future depends on our actions in the here and now. In this section of the FAQ we highlight some developments which do, or could, work to the advantage of anarchists. Many of these examples are from the US, but they apply equally to Britain and many other advanced industrial states.

In this section, we aim to discuss tendencies from **below**, not above -- tendencies which can truly "roll back" the state rather than reduce its functions purely to that of the armed thug of Capital. The tendencies we discuss here are not the be all nor end all of anarchist activism or tendencies. We discuss many of the more traditionally anarchist "openings" in [section J.5](#) (such as industrial and community unionism, mutual credit, co-operatives, modern schools and so on) and so will not do so here. However, it is important to stress here that such "traditional" openings are not being downplayed -- indeed, much of what we discuss here can only become fully libertarian in combination with these more "traditional" forms of "*anarchy in action.*"

For a lengthy discussion of anarchistic trends in society, we recommend Colin Ward's classic book **Anarchy in Action**. Ward's excellent book covers many areas in which anarchistic tendencies have been expressed, far more than we can cover here. The libertarian tendencies in society are many. No single work could hope to do them justice.

## J.4.1 Why is social struggle a good sign?

Simply because it shows that people are unhappy with the existing society and, more importantly, are trying to change at least some part of it. It suggests that certain parts of the population have reflected on their situation and, potentially at least, seen that **by their own actions** they can influence and change it for the better.

Given that the ruling minority draws its strength of the acceptance and acquiescence of the majority, the fact that a part of that majority no longer accepts and acquiesces is a positive sign. After all, if the majority did not accept the status quo and acted to change it, the class and state system could not



survive. Any hierarchical society survives because those at the bottom follow the orders of those above it. Social struggle suggests that some people are considering their own interests, thinking for themselves and saying "no" and this, by its very nature, is an important, indeed, the most important, tendency towards anarchism. It suggests that people are rejecting the old ideas which hold the system up, acting upon this rejection and creating new ways of doing things.

*"Our social institutions,"* argues Alexander Berkman, *"are founded on certain ideas; as long as the latter are generally believed, the institutions built upon them are safe. Government remains strong because people think political authority and legal compulsion necessary. Capitalism will continue as long as such an economic system is considered adequate and just. The weakening of the ideas which support the evil and oppressive present-day conditions means the ultimate breakdown of government and capitalism."* [**The ABC of Anarchism**, p. xv]

Social struggle is the most obvious sign of this change of perspective, this change in ideas, this progress towards freedom.

Social struggle is expressed by direct action. We have discussed both social struggle and direct action before (in sections [J.1](#) and [J.2](#) respectively) and some readers may wonder why we are covering this again here. We do so for two reasons. Firstly, as we are discussing what trends in society help anarchist activity, it would be wrong **not** to highlight social struggle and direct action here. This is because these factors are key tendencies towards anarchism as anarchism will be created by people and social struggle is the means by which people create the new world in the shell of the old. Secondly, social struggle and direct action are key aspects of anarchist theory and we cannot truly present a picture of what anarchism is about without making clear what these are.

So social struggle is a good sign as it suggests that people are thinking for themselves, considering their own interests and working together collectively to change things for the better. As the French syndicalist Emile Pouget argues:

*"Direct action . . . means that the working class, forever bridling at the existing state of affairs, expects nothing from outside people, powers or forces, but rather creates its own conditions of struggle and looks to itself for its methodology . . . Direct Action thus implies that the working class subscribes to notions of freedom and autonomy instead of genuflecting before the principle of authority. Now, it is thanks to this authority principle, the pivot of the modern world - democracy being its latest incarnation - that the human being, tied down by a thousand ropes, moral as well as material, is bereft of any opportunity to display will and initiative."* [**Direct Action**]

Social struggle means that people come into opposition with the boss and other authorities such as the state and the dominant morality. This challenge to existing authorities generates two related processes: the tendency of those involved to begin taking over the direction of their own activities and the development of solidarity with each other. Firstly, in the course of a struggle, such as a strike,

occupation, boycott, and so on, the ordinary life of people, in which they act under the constant direction of the bosses or state, ceases, and they have to think, act and co-ordinate their actions for themselves. This reinforces the expression towards autonomy that the initial refusal that lead to the struggle indicates. Thus struggle re-enforces the initial act of refusal and autonomy by forcing those involved to act for themselves. Secondly, in the process of struggle those involved learn the importance of solidarity, of working with others in a similar situation, in order to win. This means the building of links of support, of common interests, of organisation. The practical need for solidarity to help win the struggle is the basis for the solidarity required for a free society to be viable.

Therefore the real issue in social struggle is that it is an attempt by people to wrestle at least part of the power over their own lives away from the managers, state officials and so on who currently have it and exercise it themselves. This is, by its very nature, anarchistic and libertarian. Thus we find politicians and, of course, managers and property owners, often denouncing strikes and other forms of direct action. This is logical. As direct action challenges the real power-holders in society and because, if carried to its logical conclusion, it would have to replace them, social struggle and direct action can be considered in essence a revolutionary process.

Moreover, the very act of using direct action suggests a transformation within the people using it. *"Direct action's very powers to fertilise,"* argues Pouget, *"reside in such exercises in imbuing the individual with a sense of his own worth and in extolling such worth. It marshals human resourcefulness, tempers characters and focuses energies. It teaches self-confidence! And self-reliance! And self-mastery! And shifting for oneself!"* Moreover, *"direct action has an unmatched educational value: It teaches people to reflect, to make decisions and to act. It is characterised by a culture of autonomy, an exaltation of individuality and is a fillip to initiative, to which it is the leaven. And this superabundance of vitality and burgeoning of 'self' in no way conflicts with the economic fellowship that binds the workers one with another and far from being at odds with their common interests, it reconciles and bolsters these: the individual's independence and activity can only erupt into splendour and intensity by sending its roots deep into the fertile soil of common agreement."* [Pouget, **Op. Cit.**]

Emma Goldman also recognised the transforming power of direct action. Anarchists, she argues, *"believe with Stirner that man has as much liberty as he is willing to take. Anarchism therefore stands for direct action, the open defiance of, and resistance to, all laws and restrictions, economic, social and moral. But defiance and resistance are illegal. Therein lies the salvation of man. Everything illegal necessitates integrity, self-reliance, and courage. In short, it calls for free independent spirits. . ."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 61-2]

Social struggle is the beginning of a transformation of the people involved and their relationships to each other. While its external expression lies in contesting the power of existing authorities, its inner expression is the transformation of people from passive and isolated competitors into empowered, self-directing, self-governing co-operators. Moreover, this process widens considerably what people think is "possible." Through struggle, by collective action, the fact people **can** change things is driven home, that **they** have the power to govern themselves and the society they live in. Thus struggle can change people's conception of "what is possible" and encourage them to try and create a better world. As

Kropotkin argued:

*"since the times of the [first] International Working Men's Association, the anarchists have always advised taking an active part in those workers' organisations which carry on the **direct** struggle of labour against capital and its protector -- the State.*

*"Such a struggle, they say, . . . permits the worker to obtain some temporary improvements. . . , while it opens his [or her] eyes to the evil that is done by capitalism and the State. . . , and wakes up his thoughts concerning the possibility of organising consumption, production, and exchange without the intervention of the capitalist and the State." [Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets, p. 171]*

In other words, social struggle has a **radicalising** and **politicising** effect, an effect which brings into a new light existing society and the possibilities of a better world ("*direct action*", in Pouget's words, "*develops the feeling for human personality as well as the spirit of initiative . . . it shakes people out of their torpor and steers them to consciousness.*"). The practical need to unite and resist the boss also helps break down divisions within the working class. Those in struggle start to realise that they need each other to give them the power necessary to get improvements, to change things. Thus solidarity spreads and overcomes divisions between black and white, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual, trades, industries, nationalities and so on. The real need for solidarity to win the fight helps to undermine artificial divisions and show that there are only two groups in society, the oppressed and the oppressors.

Moreover, struggle as well as transforming those involved is also the basis for transforming society as a whole simply because, as well as producing transformed individuals, it also produces new forms of organisation, organisations created to co-ordinate their struggle and which can, potentially at least, become the framework of a libertarian socialist society.

Thus anarchists argue that social struggle opens the eyes of those involved to self-esteem and a sense of their own strength, and the groupings it forms at its prompting are living, vibrant associations where libertarian principles usually come to the fore. We find almost all struggles developing new forms of organisation, forms which are often based on direct democracy, federalism and decentralisation. If we look at every major revolution, we find people creating mass organisations such as workers' councils, factory committees, neighbourhood assemblies and so on as a means of taking back the power to govern their own lives, communities and workplaces. In this way social struggle and direct action lays the foundations for the future. By actively taking part in social life, people are drawn into creating new forms of organisation, new ways of doing things. In this way they educate themselves in participation, in self-government, in initiative and in asserting themselves. They begin to realise that the only alternative to management by others is self-management and organise to achieve thus.

Given that remaking society has to begin at the bottom, this finds its expression in direct action, individuals taking the initiative, building new, more libertarian forms of organisation and using the

power they have just generated by collective action and organisation to change things by their own efforts. Social struggle is therefore a two way transformation -- the external transformation of society by the creation of new organisations and the changing of the power relations within it and the internal transformation of those who take part in the struggle. And because of this, social struggle, "*[w]hatever may be the practical results of the struggle for immediate gains, the greatest value lies in the struggle itself. For thereby workers learn that the bosses interests are opposed to theirs and that they cannot improve their conditions, and much less emancipate themselves, except by uniting and becoming stronger than the bosses. If they succeed in getting what they demand, they will be better off. . . and immediately make greater demands and have greater needs. If they do not succeed they will be led to study the causes of their failure and recognise the need for closer unity and greater activism and they will in the end understand that to make their victory secure and definitive, it is necessary to destroy capitalism. The revolutionary cause, the cause of the moral elevation and emancipation of the workers must benefit by the fact that workers unite and struggle for their interests.*" [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 191]

Hence Nestor Makhno's comment that "*[i]n fact, it is only through that struggle for freedom, equality and solidarity that you reach an understanding of anarchism.*" [**The Struggle Against the State and other Essays**, p. 71] The creation of an anarchist society is a **process** and social struggle is the key anarchistic tendency within society which anarchists look for, encourage and support. Its radicalising and transforming nature is the key to the growth of anarchist ideas, the creation of libertarian structures and alternatives within capitalism (structures which may, one day, replace capitalism and state) and the creation of anarchists and those sympathetic to anarchist ideas. Its importance cannot be underestimated!

## J.4.2 Won't social struggle do more harm than good?

It is often argued that social struggle, by resisting the powerful and the wealthy, will just do more harm than good. Employers often use this approach in anti-union propaganda, for example, arguing that creating a union will force the company to close and move to less "militant" areas.

There is, of course, some truth in this. Yes, social struggle can lead to bosses moving to more compliant workforces -- but, of course, this also happens in periods lacking social struggle too! If we look at the down-sizing mania that gripped the U.S. in the 1980s and 1990s, we see companies down-sizing tens of thousands of people during a period where unions were weak, workers scared about losing their jobs and class struggle basically becoming mostly informal and "underground." Moreover, this argument actually indicates the need for anarchism. It is a damning indictment of any social system that it requires people to kow-tow to their masters otherwise they will suffer economic hardship. It boils down to the argument "*do what you are told, otherwise you will regret it.*" Any system based on that maxim is an affront to human dignity!

It would, in a similar fashion, be easy to "prove" that slave rebellions are against the long term interests of the slaves. After all, by rebelling the slaves will face the anger of their masters. Only by submitting to their master can they avoid this fate and, perhaps, be rewarded by better conditions. Of course, the evil

of slavery would continue but by submitting to it they can ensure their life can become better. Needless to say, any thinking and feeling person would quickly dismiss this reasoning as missing the point and being little more than apologetics for an evil social system that treated human beings as things. The same can be said for the argument that social struggles within capitalism do more harm than good. It betrays a slave mentality unfitting for human beings (although fitting for those who desire to live off the backs of workers or desire to serve those who do).

Moreover, this kind of argument ignores a few key points. Firstly, by resistance the conditions of the oppressed can be maintained or even improved. After all, if the boss knows that their decisions will be resisted they may be less inclined to impose speed-ups, longer hours and so on. If they know that their employees will agree to anything then there is every reason to expect them to impose all kinds of oppressions, just as a state will impose draconian laws if it knows that it can get away with it. History is full of examples of non-resistance producing greater evils in the long term and of resistance producing numerous important reforms and improvements (such as higher wages, shorter hours, the right to vote for working class people and women, freedom of speech, the end of slavery, trade union rights and so on).

So social struggle has been proven time and time again to gain successful reforms. For example, before the 8 hour day movement of 1886 in America, for example, most companies argued they could not introduce that reform without doing bust. However, after displaying a militant mood and conducting an extensive strike campaign, hundreds of thousands of workers discovered that their bosses had been lying and they got shorter hours. Indeed, the history of the labour movement shows what bosses say they can afford and the reforms workers can get via struggle are somewhat at odds. Given the asymmetry of information between workers and bosses, this is unsurprising. Workers can only guess at what is available and bosses like to keep their actual finances hidden. Even the threat of labour struggle can be enough to gain improvements. For example, Henry Ford's \$5 day is often used as an example of capitalism rewarding good workers. However, this substantial pay increase was largely motivated by the unionisation drive by the **Industrial Workers of the World** among Ford workers in the summer of 1913 [Harry Braverman, **Labour and Monopoly Capitalism**, p. 144]. More recently, it was the mass non-payment campaign against the poll-tax in Britain during the late 1980s and early 1990s which helped ensure its defeat (and the 1990 poll-tax riot in London also helped and ensured that the New Zealand government did not introduce a similar scheme in their country too!). In the 1990s, France also saw the usefulness of direct action. Two successive prime ministers (Edouard Balladur and Alain Juppe) tried to impose large scale "reform" programmes that swiftly provoked mass demonstrations and general strikes amongst students, workers, farmers and others. Confronted by crippling disruptions, both governments gave in. Compared to the experience of, say Britain, France's tradition of direct action politics proved more effective in maintaining existing conditions or even improving on them.

Secondly, and in some ways more importantly, it ignores that by resistance those who take part can the social system they live in can be **changed**. This radicalising effect of social struggle can open new doors for those involved, liberate their minds, empower them and create the potential for deep social change. Without resistance to existing forms of authority a free society cannot be created as people adjust themselves to authoritarian structures and accept what is as the only possibility. By resisting, people

transform and empower themselves, as well as transforming society. In addition, new possibilities can be seen (possibilities before dismissed as "utopian") and, via the organisation and action required to win reforms, the framework for these possibilities (i.e. of a new, libertarian, society) created. The transforming and empowering effect of social struggle is expressed well by the ex-IWW and UAW-CIO shop steward Nick DeGaetano in his experiences in the 1930s:

*"the workers of my generation from the early days up to now had what you might call a labour insurrection in changing from a plain, humble, submissive creature into a man. The union made a man out of him. . . I am not talking about benefits . . . I am talking about the working conditions and how they affected the man in plant. . . Before they were submissive. Today they are men."* [quoted in **Industrial Democracy in America**, Nelson Lichtenstein and Holwell John Harris (eds.), p. 204]

Other labour historians note the same radicalising process elsewhere (modern day activists could give more examples!):

*"The contest [over wages and conditions] so pervaded social life that the ideology of acquisitive individualism, which explained and justified a society regulated by market mechanisms and propelled by the accumulation of capital, was challenged by an ideology of mutualism, rooted in working-class bondings and struggles. . . Contests over pennies on or off existing piece rates had ignited controversies over the nature and purpose of the American republic itself."* [David Montgomery, **The Fall of the House of Labour**, p. 171]

This radicalising effect is far more dangerous to authoritarian structures than better pay, more liberal laws and so on as they need submissiveness to work. Little wonder that direct action is usually denounced as pointless or harmful by those in power or their spokespersons, for direct action will, taken to its logical conclusion, put them out of a job! Struggle, therefore, holds the possibility of a free society as well as of improvements in the here and now. It also changes the perspectives of those involved, creating new ideas and values to replace the ones of capitalism.

Thirdly, it ignores the fact that such arguments do not imply the end of social struggle and working class resistance and organisation, but rather its **extension**. If, for example, your boss argues that they will move to Mexico if you do not "shut up and put up" then the obvious solution is to make sure the workers in Mexico are also organised! Bakunin argued this basic point over one hundred years ago, and it is still true -- *"in the long run the relatively tolerable position of workers in one country can be maintained only on condition that it be more or less the same in other countries."* If, for example, workers in Mexico have worse wages and conditions than you do, these same conditions will be used against you as the *"conditions of labour cannot get worse or better in any particular industry without immediately affecting the workers in other industries, and that workers of all trades are inter-linked with real and indissoluble ties of solidarity,"* ties which can be ignored only at your own peril. Ultimately, *"in those countries the workers work longer hours for less pay; and the employers there can sell their products cheaper,*

*successfully competing against conditions where workers working less earn more, and thus force the employers in the latter countries to cut wages and increase the hours of their workers.*" Bakunin's solution was to organise internationally, to stop this undercutting of conditions by solidarity between workers. As recent history shows, his argument was correct [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 306-7]. Thus it is **not** social struggle or militancy which is bad, just **isolated** militancy, struggle which ignores the ties of solidarity required to win, extent and keep reforms and improvements. In other words, our resistance must be as transnational as capitalism is.

The idea that social struggle and working class organisation are harmful was expressed constantly in the 1970s. If we look at the arguments of the right in the 1970s, we also find evidence that the "struggle does more harm than good" viewpoint is flawed. With the post-war Keynesian consensus crumbling, the "New Right" argued that trade unions (and strikes) hampered growth and that wealth redistribution (i.e. welfare schemes which returned some of the surplus value workers produced back into their own hands) hindered "wealth creation" (i.e. economic growth). Do not struggle over income, they argued, let the market decide and everyone will be better off.

This argument was dressed up in populist clothes. Thus we find the right-wing guru F.A. von Hayek arguing that, in the case of Britain, the *"legalised powers of the unions have become the biggest obstacle to raising the standards of the working class as a whole. They are the chief cause of the unnecessarily big differences between the best- and worse-paid workers."* He maintained that *"the elite of the British working class. . . derive their relative advantages by keeping workers who are worse off from improving their position."* Moreover, he *"predict[ed] that the average worker's income would rise fastest in a country where relative wages are flexible, and where the exploitation of workers by monopolistic trade union organisations of specialised workers are effectively outlawed."* ["1980s Unemployment and the Unions" reproduced in **The Economic Decline of Modern Britain**, p. 107, p. 108, p. 110]

Now, if von Hayek's claims were true we could expect that in the aftermath of Thatcher government's trade union reforms we would have seen: a rise in economic growth (usually considered as **the** means to improve living standards for workers by the right); a decrease in the differences between high and low paid workers; a reduction in the percentage of low paid workers as they improved their positions when freed from union *"exploitation"*; and that wages rise fastest in countries with the highest wage flexibility. Unfortunately for von Hayek, the actual trajectory of the British economy exposes his claims as nonsense.

Looking at each of his claims in turn we discover that rather than "exploit" other workers, trade unions are an essential means to shift income from capital to labour (which is way capital fights labour organisers tooth and nail). And, equally important, labour militancy aids **all** workers by providing a floor under which wages cannot drop (non-unionised/militant firms in the same industry or area have to offer similar programs to prevent unionisation and be able to hire workers) and by maintaining aggregate demand. This positive role of unions/militancy in aiding **all** workers can be seen by comparing Britain before and after Thatcher's von Hayek inspired trade union and labour market reforms.

As far as economic growth goes, there has been a steady fall since trade union reforms. In the "bad old days" of the 1970s, with its strikes and "militant unions" growth was 2.4% in Britain. It fell to 2% in the 1980s and fell again to 1.2% in the 1990s [Larry Elliot and Dan Atkinson, **The Age of Insecurity**, p. 236]. So the rate of "wealth creation" (economic growth) has steadily fallen as unions were "reformed" in line with von Hayek's ideology (and falling growth means that the living standards of the working class as a whole do not rise as fast as they did under the "exploitation" of the "monopolistic" trade unions). If we look at the differences between the highest and lowest paid workers, we find that rather than decrease, they have in fact shown *"a dramatic widening out of the distribution with the best-workers doing much better"* since Thatcher was elected in 1979 [Andrew Glyn and David Miliband (eds.), **Paying for Inequality**, p. 100]

Given that inequality has also increased, the condition of the average worker must have suffered. For example, Ian Gilmore states that *"[i]n the 1980s, for the first time for fifty years. . . the poorer half of the population saw its share of total national income shirk."* [**Dancing with Dogma**, p. 113] According to Noam Chomsky, *"[d]uring the Thatcher decade, the income share of the bottom half of the population fell from one-third to one-fourth"* and the between 1979 and 1992, the share of total income of the top 20% grew from 35% to 40% while that of the bottom 20% fell from 10% to 5%. In addition, the number of UK employees with weekly pay below the Council of Europe's *"decency threshold"* increased from 28.3% in 1979 to 37% in 1994 [**World Orders, Old and New**, p. 144, p. 145] Moreover, *"[b]ack in the early 1960s, the heaviest concentration of incomes fell at 80-90 per cent of the mean. . . But by the early 1990s there had been a dramatic change, with the peak of the distribution falling at just 40-50 per cent of the mean. One-quarter of the population had incomes below half the average by the early 1990s as against 7 per cent in 1977 and 11 per cent in 1961. . ."* [Elliot and Atkinson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 235] "Overall," notes Takis Fotopoulos, *"average incomes increased by 36 per cent during this period [1979-1991/2], but 70 per cent of the population had a below average increase in their income."* [**Towards an Inclusive Democracy**, p. 113]

Looking at the claim that trade union members gained their *"relative advantage by keeping workers who are worse off from improving their position"* it would be fair to ask whether the percentage of workers in low-paid jobs decreased in Britain after the trade union reforms. In fact, the percentage of workers below the Low Pay Unit's definition of low pay (namely two-thirds of men's median earnings) **increased** -- from 16.8% in 1984 to 26.2% in 1991 for men, 44.8% to 44.9% for women. For manual workers it rose by 15% to 38.4%, and for women by 7.7% to 30.7% (for non-manual workers the figures were 5.4% rise to 13.7% for men and a 0.5% rise to 36.6%). If unions **were** gaining at the expense of the worse off, you would expect a **decrease** in the number in low pay, **not** an increase. [**Paying for Inequality**, p.102] An OECD study concluded that *"[t]ypically, countries with high rates of collective bargaining and trade unionisation tend to have low incidence of low paid employment."* [**OECD Employment Outlook**, 1996, p. 94]

Nor did unemployment fall after the trade union reforms. As Elliot and Atkinson point out, *"[b]y the time Blair came to power [in 1997], unemployment in Britain was falling, although it still remained higher than it had been when the [the last Labour Government of] Callaghan left office in May 1979."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 258] Von Hayek did argue that falls in unemployment would be *"a slow process"*



but over 10 years of higher unemployment is moving at a snail's pace! And we must note that part of this fall in unemployment towards its 1970s level was due to Britain's labour force shrinking (and so, as the July 1997 Budget Statement correctly notes, *"the lower 1990s peak [in unemployment] does not in itself provide convincing evidence of improved labour performance."* [p. 77]).

As far as von Hayek's prediction on wage flexibility leading to the *"average worker's income"* rising fastest in a country where relative wages are flexible, it has been proved totally wrong. Between 1967 and 1971, real wages grew (on average) by 2.95% per year (nominal wages grew by 8.94%) [P. Armstrong, A. Glyn and John Harrison, **Capitalism Since World War II**, p.272]. In comparison, in the 1990s real wages grew by 1.1 per cent, according to a TUC press release entitled **Productivity Record, how the UK compares** released in March 1999.

Needless to say, these are different eras so it would also be useful to compare the UK (often praised as a flexible economy after Thatcher's "reforms") to France (considered far less flexible) in the 1990s. Here we find that the "flexible" UK is behind the "inflexible" France. Wages and benefits per worker rose by almost 1.2 per cent per year compared to 0.7% for the UK. France's GDP grew at a faster rate than Britain's, averaging 1.4 per cent per year, compared with 1.2 per cent. Worker productivity is also behind, since 1979 (Thatcher's arrival) Britain's worker productivity has been 1.9 per cent per year compared to France's 2.2 per cent [Seth Ackerman, *"The Media Vote for Austerity"*, **Extra!**, September/October 1997]. And as Seth Ackerman also notes, *"[w]hile France's dismal record of job creation is on permanent exhibit, it is never mentioned that Britain's is even more dismal."* [Ibid.]

Moving further afield, we find von Hayek's prediction falsified yet again. If we look at the USA, frequently claimed as a model economy in terms of wage flexibility and union weakness, we discover that the real wages of the average worker has **decreased** since 1973 (the weekly and hourly earnings of US production and non-supervisory workers, which accounts for 80% of the US workforce, have fallen in real terms by 19.2% and 13.4% respectively [**Economic Report of the President 1995**, Table B-45]). If we look at figures from U.S. Bureau of the Census (Current Population Survey) we can see how increased flexibility has affected income:

**Income Growth by Quintile**

Quintile	1950-1978	1979-1993
Lowest 20%	138%	-15%
2nd 20%	98	-7
3rd 20%	106	-3
4th 20%	111	5
Highest 20%	99	18

As can be seen, flexible wages and weaker unions have resulted in the direct opposite of von Hayek's predictions. Within the US itself, we discover that higher union density is associated with fewer workers

earning around the minimum wage -- *"the percentage of those earning around the minimum wage are both substantially higher in right-to-work states [i.e. those that pass anti-union laws] than overall and lower in high union density states than overall"* and *"in right-to-work states . . . wages have traditionally been lower."* [Oren M. Levin-Waldman, **The Minimum Wage and Regional Wage Structure**] If unions **did** harm non-union workers, we would expect the opposite to occur. It does not. Of course, being utterly wrong has not dented his reputation with the right nor stopped him being quoted in arguments in favour of flexibility and free market reforms.

Moreover, the growth of the US economy has also slowed down as wage flexibility and market reform has increased (it was 4.4% in the 1960s, 3.2% in the 1970s, 2.8% in the 1980s and 1.9% in the first half of the 1990s [Larry Elliot and Dan Atkinson, **The Age of Insecurity**, p. 236]). In addition, inequality in the US has dramatically increased since the 1970s, with income and wealth growth in the 1980s going predominately to the top 20% (and, in fact, mostly to the top 1% of the population). The bottom 80% of the population saw their wealth grow by 1.2% and their income by 23.7% in the 1980s, while for the top 20% the respective figures were 98.2% and 66.3% (the figures for the top 1% were 61.6% and 38.9%, respectively). [Edward N. Wolff, *"How the Pie is Sliced"*, **The American Prospect**, no. 22, Summer 1995]

Comparing the claims of von Hayek to what actually happened after trade union reform and the reduction of class struggle helps to suggest that the claims that social struggle is self-defeating are false (and probably self-serving, considering it is usually bosses and employer supported parties and economists who make these claims). A **lack** of social struggle has been correlated with low economic growth, stagnant (even declining) wages and the creation of purely paid service jobs to replace highly paid manufacturing ones. So while social struggle **may** make capital flee and other problems, lack of it is no guarantee of prosperity (quite the reverse, if the last quarter of the 20th century is anything to go by!). Indeed, a lack of social struggle will make bosses be more likely to cut wages, worsen working conditions and so on -- after all, they feel they can get away with it! Which brings home the fact that *"to make their [the working class'] victory secure and definitive, it is necessary to destroy capitalism."* [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 191]

Of course, no one can **know** that struggle will make things better. It is a guess; no one can predict the future. Not all struggles are successful and many can be very difficult. If the *"military is a role model for the business world"* (in the words of an ex-CEO of Hill & Knowlton Public Relations [quoted by John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton in **Toxic Sludge Is Good For You!**, p. 47]), and it is, then **any** struggle against it and other concentrations of power may, and often is, difficult and dangerous at times. But, as Zapata once said, *"better to die on your feet than live on your knees!"* All we can say is that social struggle can and does improve things and, in terms of its successes and transforming effect on those involved, well worth the potential difficulties it can create. Moreover, without struggle there is little chance of creating a free society, dependent as it is on individuals who refuse to bow to authority and have the ability and desire to govern themselves. In addition, social struggle is always essential, not only to **win** improvements, but to **keep** them as well. In order to fully secure improvements you have to abolish capitalism and the state. Not to do so means that any reforms can and will be taken away (and if social struggle does not exist, they will be taken away sooner rather than later). Ultimately, most

anarchists would argue that social struggle is not an option -- we either do it or we put up with the all the petty (and not so petty) impositions of authority. If we do not say "no" then the powers that be will walk all over us.

As the history of the last 20 years shows, a lack of social struggle is fully compatible with worsening conditions. Ultimately, if you want to be treated as a human being you have to stand up for your dignity -- and that means thinking and rebelling. As Bakunin often argued, human development is based on thought and rebellion (see **God and the State**). Without rebellion, without social struggle, humanity would stagnate beneath authority forever and never be in a position to be free. We would agree wholeheartedly with the Abolitionist Frederick Douglass:

*"If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favour freedom and yet deprecate agitation are people who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. That struggle might be a moral one; it might be a physical one; it might be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and never will. People might not get all that they work for in this world, but they must certainly work for all they get."*

### **J.4.3 Are the new social movements a positive development for anarchists?**

When assessing the revolutionary potential of our own era, we must note again that modern civilisation is under constant pressure from the potential catastrophes of social breakdown, ecological destruction, and proliferating weapons of mass destruction. These crises have drawn attention as never before to the inherently counter-evolutionary nature of the authoritarian paradigm, making more and more people aware that the human race is headed for extinction if it persists in outmoded forms of thought and behaviour. This awareness produces a favourable climate for the reception of new ideas, and thus an opening for radical educational efforts aimed at creating the mass transformation of consciousness which must take place alongside the creation of new liberatory institutions.

This receptiveness to new ideas has led to a number of new social movements in recent years. From the point of view of anarchism, the four most important of these are perhaps the feminist, ecology, peace, and social justice movements. Each of these movements contain a great deal of anarchist content, particularly insofar as they imply the need for decentralisation and direct democracy. Since we have already commented on the anarchist aspects of the ecology and feminist movements, here we will limit our remarks to the peace and social justice movements.

It is clear to many members of the peace movement that international disarmament, like the liberation of women, saving the planet's ecosystem, and preventing social breakdown, can never be attained without a shift of mass consciousness involving widespread rejection of hierarchy, which is based on the authoritarian principles of domination and exploitation. As C. George Bennello argued, *"[s]ince peace involves the positive process of replacing violence by other means of settling conflict. . . it can be argued*

*that some sort of institutional change is necessary. For if insurgency is satisfied with specific reform goals, and does not seek to transform the institutional structure of society by getting at its centralised make-up, the war system will probably not go away. This is really what we should mean by decentralising: making institutions serve human ends again by getting humans to be responsible at every level within them.*" [From the Ground Up, p. 31]

When pursued along gender, class, racial, ethnic, or national lines, these two principles are the primary causes of resentment, hatred, anger, and hostility, which often explode into individual or organised violence. Therefore, both domestic and international peace depend on decentralisation, i.e. dismantling hierarchies, thus replacing domination and exploitation by the anarchist principles of co-operation, sharing, and mutual aid.

But direct democracy is the other side of decentralisation. In order for an organisation to spread power horizontally rather than concentrating it at the apex of hierarchy, all of its members have to have an equal voice in making the decisions that affect them. Hence decentralisation implies direct democracy. So the peace movement implies anarchism, because world peace is impossible without both decentralisation and direct democracy. Moreover, "*[s]o long as profits are tied to defence production, speaking truth to the elites involved is not likely to get very far*" as "*it is only within the boundaries of the profit system that the corporate elites would have any space to move.*" [Op. Cit., p. 34] Thus the peace movement implicitly contains a libertarian critique of both forms of the power system -- the political and economical.

In addition, certain of the practical aspects of the peace movement also suggest anarchistic elements. The use of non-violent direct action to protest against the war machine can only be viewed as a positive development by anarchists. Not only does it use effective, anarchistic methods of struggle it also radicalises those involved, making them more receptive to anarchist ideas and analysis (after all, as Benello correctly argues, the "*anarchist perspective has an unparalleled relevance today because prevailing nuclear policies can be considered as an ultimate stage in the divergence between the interests of governments and their peoples . . . the implications when revealed serve to raise fundamental questions regarding the advisability of entrusting governments with questions of life and death. . . There is thus a pressing impetus to re-think the role, scale, and structure of national governments.*" [Op. Cit., p. 138]).

If we look at the implications of "*nuclear free zones*" we can detect anarchistic tendencies within them. A nuclear free zone involves a town or region declaring an end of its association with the nuclear military industrial complex. They prohibit the research, production, transportation and deployment of nuclear weapons as well as renouncing the right to be defended by nuclear power. This movement was popular in the 1980s, with many areas in Europe and the Pacific Basin declaring that they were nuclear free zones. As Benello points out, "*[t]he development of campaigns for nuclear free zones suggests a strategy which can educate and radicalise local communities. Indeed, by extending the logic of the nuclear free zone idea, we can begin to flesh out a libertarian municipalist perspective which can help move our communities several steps towards autonomy from both the central government and the*

*existing corporate system." While the later development of these initiatives did not have the radicalising effects that Benello hoped for, they did "represent a local initiative that does not depend on the federal government for action. Thus it is a step toward local empowerment. . . Steps that increase local autonomy change the power relations between the centre and its colonies. . . The nuclear free zone movement has a thrust which is clearly congruent with anarchist ideas. . . The same motives which go into the declaration of a nuclear free zone would dictate that in other areas where the state and the corporate systems services are dysfunctional and involve excessive costs, they should be dispensed with." [Op. Cit., p. 137, pp. 140-1]*

The social justice movement is composed of people seeking fair and compassionate solutions to problems such as poverty, unemployment, economic exploitation, discrimination, poor housing, lack of health insurance, wealth and income inequalities, and the like. Such concerns have traditionally been associated with the left, especially with socialism and trade-unionism. Recently, however, many radicals have begun to perceive the limitations of both Marxist-Leninist and traditional trade-unionist solutions to social justice problems, particularly insofar as these solutions involve hierarchical organisations and authoritarian values.

Following the widespread disillusionment with statism and centrally planned economies generated by the failure of "Communism" in the ex-Soviet Union and Eastern European nations, many radicals, while retaining their commitment to social justice issues, have been searching for new approaches. And in doing so they've been drawn into alliances with ecologists, feminists, and members of the peace movement. (This has occurred particularly among the German Greens, many of whom are former Marxists. So far, however, few of the latter have declared themselves to be anarchists, as the logic of the ecology movement requires.)

It is not difficult to show that the major problems concerning the social justice movement can all be traced back to the hierarchy and domination. For, given the purpose of hierarchy, the highest priority of the elites who control the state is necessarily to maintain their own power and privileges, regardless of the suffering involved for subordinate classes.

Today, in the aftermath of 12 years of especially single-minded pursuit of this priority by two Republican administrations, the United States, for example, is reaping the grim harvest: armies of the homeless wandering the streets; social welfare budgets slashed to the bone as poverty, unemployment, and underemployment grow; sweatshops mushrooming in the large cities; over 43 million Americans without any health insurance; obscene wealth inequalities; and so on. This decay promises to accelerate in the US during the coming years, now that Republicans control both houses of Congress. Britain under the neo-liberal policies of Thatcher and Major has experienced a social deterioration similar to that in the US.

In short, social injustice is inherent in the exploitative functions of the state, which are made possible by the authoritarian form of state institutions and of the state-complex as a whole. Similarly, the authoritarian form of the corporation (and capitalist companies in general) gives rise to social injustice

as unfair income differentials and wealth disparity between owners/management and labour.

Hence the success of the social justice movement, like that of the feminist, ecology, and peace movements, depends on dismantling hierarchies. This means not only that these movement all imply anarchism but that they are related in such a way that it's impossible to conceive one of them achieving its goals in isolation from any of the others.

To take just one example, let's consider the relationship between social justice and peace, which can be seen by examining a specific social justice issue: labour rights.

As Dimitrios Roussopoulos points out, the production of advanced weapons systems is highly profitable for capitalists, which is why more technologically complex and precise weapons keep getting built with government help (with the public paying the tab by way of rising taxes).

Now, we may reasonably argue that it's a fundamental human right to be able to choose freely whether or not one will personally contribute to the production of technologies that could lead to the extinction of the human race. Yet because of the authoritarian form of the capitalist corporation, rank-and-file workers have virtually no say in whether the companies for which they work will produce such technologies. (To the objection that workers can always quit if they don't like company policy, the reply is that they may not be able to find other work and therefore that the choice is not free but coerced.) Hence the only way that ordinary workers can obtain the right to be consulted on life-or-death company policies is to control the production process themselves, through self-management.

But we can't expect real self-management to emerge from the present labour relations system in which centralised unions bargain with employers for "concessions" but never for a dissolution of the authoritarian structure of the corporation. As Roussopoulos puts it, self-management, by definition, must be struggled for locally by workers themselves at the grassroots level:

*"Production for need and use will not come from the employer. The owners of production in a capitalist society will never begin to take social priorities into account in the production process. The pursuit of ever greater profits is not compatible with social justice and responsibility." [Dissidence]*

For these reasons, the peace and social justice movements are fundamentally linked through their shared need for a worker-controlled economy.

We should also note in this context that the impoverished ghetto environments in which the worst victims of social injustice are forced to live tends to desensitise them to human pain and suffering -- a situation that is advantageous for military recruiters, who are thereby able to increase the ranks of the armed forces with angry, brutalised, violence-prone individuals who need little or no extra conditioning to become the remorseless killers prized by the military command. Moreover, extreme poverty makes military service one of the few legal economic options open to such individuals. These considerations

illustrate further links between the peace and social justice movements -- and between those movements and anarchism, which is the conceptual "glue" that can potentially unite all the new social movement in a single anti-authoritarian coalition.

## J.4.4 What is the "economic structural crisis"?

There is an ongoing structural crisis in the global capitalist economy. Compared to the post-war "Golden Age" of 1950 to 1973, the period from 1974 has seen a continual worsening in economic performance in the West and for Japan. For example, growth is lower, unemployment is far higher, labour productivity lower as is investment. Average rates of unemployment in the major industrialised countries have risen sharply since 1973, especially after 1979. Unemployment *"in the advanced capitalist countries (the 'Group of 7'. . .) increased by 56 per cent between 1973 and 1980 (from an average 3.4 per cent to 5.3 per cent of the labour force) and by another 50 per cent since then (from 5.3 per cent of the labour force in 1980 to 8.0 per cent in 19994)." [Takis Fotopoulos, **Towards and Inclusive Democracy**, p. 35]* Job insecurity has increased (in the USA, for example, there is the most job insecurity since the depression of the 1930s [**Op. Cit.**, p. 141]). In addition, both national economies and the international economy have become far less stable.

This crisis is not confined to the economy. It extends into the ecological and the social. *"In recent years,"* point out Larry Elliot and Dan Atkinson, *"some radical economics have tried to [create] . . . an all-embracing measure of well-being called the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare [ISEW] . . . In the 1950s and 1960s the ISEW rose in tandem with per capita GDP. It was a time not just of rising incomes, but of greater social equity, low crime, full employment and expanding welfare states. But from the mid-1970s onwards the two measures started to move apart. GDP per head continued its inexorable rise, but the ISEW start to decline as a result of lengthening dole queues, social exclusion, the explosion in crime, habitat loss, environmental degradation and the growth of environment- and stress-related illness. By the start of the 1990s, the ISEW was almost back to the levels at which it started in the early 1990s."* [**The Age of Insecurity**, p. 248] Which indicates well our comments in [section C.10](#), namely that economic factors cannot, and do not, indicate human happiness. However, here we discuss economic factors. This does not imply that the social and ecological crises are unimportant or are reducible to the economy. Far from it. We concentrate on the economic factor simply because this is the factor usually stressed by the establishment and it is useful to indicate the divergence of reality and hype we are currently being subjected to.

Ironically enough, as Robert Brenner points out, *"as the neo-classical medicine has been administered in even stronger doses [since the 1960s], the economy has performed steadily less well. The 1970s were worse than the 1960s, the 1980s worse than the 1970s, and the 1990s have been worse than the 1980s."* [*"The Economics of Global Turbulence"*, **New Left Review**, no. 229, p. 236] This is ironic because during the crisis of Keynesianism in the 1970s the right argued that too much equality and democracy harmed the economy, and so us all in the long run (due to lower growth, sluggish investment and so on). However, after over a decade of pro-capitalist governments, rising inequality, increased freedom for capital and its owners and managers, the weakening of trade unions and so on, economic

performance has become worse!

If we look at the USA in the 1990s (usually presented as an economy that "got it right") we find that the *"cyclical upturn of the 1990s has, in terms of the main macro-economic indicators of growth -- output, investment, productivity, and real compensation -- has been even less dynamic than its relatively weak predecessors of the 1980s and the 1970s (not to mention those of the 1950s and 1960s)." [Op. Cit., p. 5]* Of course, the economy is presented as a success because inequality is growing, the rich are getting richer and wealth is concentrating into fewer and fewer hands. For the rich and finance capital, it can be considered a "Golden Age" and so is presented as such by the media. Indeed, it is for this reason that it may be wrong to term this slow rot a "crisis" as it is hardly one for the ruling elite. Their share in social wealth, power and income has steadily increased over this period. For the majority it is undoubtedly a crisis (the term *"silent depression"* has been accurately used to describe this) but for those who run the system it has by no means been a crisis.

Indeed, the only countries which saw substantial and dynamic growth after 1973 where those which used state intervention to violate the eternal "laws" of neo-classical economics, namely the South East Asian countries (in this they followed the example of Japan which had used state intervention to grow at massive rates after the war). Of course, before the economic crisis of 1997, "free market" capitalists argued that these countries were classic examples of "free market" economies. For example, right-wing icon F.A von Hayek asserted that *"South Korea and other newcomers" had "discovered the benefits of free markets"* when, in fact, they had done nothing of the kind [*"1980s Unemployment and the Unions"* reproduced in **The Economic Decline of Modern Britain**, p. 113]. More recently, in 1995, the **Heritage Foundation** released its index of economic freedom. Four of the top seven countries were Asian, including Japan and Taiwan. All the Asian countries struggling just four years latter were qualified as "free." However, as Takis Fotopoulos argues, *"it was not laissez-faire policies that induced their spectacular growth. As a number of studies have shown, the expansion of the Asian Tigers was based on massive state intervention that boosted their export sectors, by public policies involving not only heavy protectionism but even deliberate distortion of market prices to stimulate investment and trade."* [Op. Cit., p. 115] After the crisis, the free-marketeers discovered the statism that had always been there and danced happily on the grave of what used to be called *"the Asian miracle."*

Such hypocrisy is truly sickening and smacks of a Stalinist/Orwellian desire to re-write history so as to appear always right. Moreover, such a cynical analysis actually undermines their own case for the wonders of the "free market." After all, until the crisis appeared, the world's investors -- which is to say "the market" -- saw nothing but blue skies ahead for these economies. They showed their faith by shoving billions into Asian equity markets, while foreign banks contentedly handed out billions in loans. If Asia's problems are systemic and the result of these countries' statist policies, then investors' failure to recognise this earlier is a blow against the market, not for it.

Still more perverse is that, even as the supporters of "free-market" capitalism conclude that history is rendering its verdict on the Asian model of capitalism, they seem to forget that until the recent crisis they themselves took great pains to deny that such a model existed. Until Asia fell apart, supporters of "free-market" capitalism happily held it up as proof that the only recipe for economic growth was open



markets and non-intervention on the part of the state. Needless to say, this re-writing of history will be placed down the memory-hole, along with any other claims which have subsequently been proved utter nonsense.

So, as can be seen, the global economy has been marked by an increasing stagnation, the slowing down of growth, in the western economies (for example, the 1990s business upswing has been the weakest since the end of the Second World War). This is despite (or, more likely, **because of**) the free market reforms imposed and the deregulation of finance capital (we say "because of" simply because neo-classical economics argue that pro-market reforms would increase growth and improve the economy, but as we argued in [section C](#) such economics have little basis in reality and so their recommendations are hardly going to produce positive results). Of course as the ruling class have been doing well in this New World Order this underlying slowdown has been ignored and obviously

In recent years crisis (particularly financial crisis) has become increasingly visible, reflecting (finally) the underlying weakness of the global economy. This underlying weakness has been hidden by the speculator performance of the world's stock markets, whose performance, ironically enough, have helped create that weakness to begin with! As one expert on Wall Street argues, "*Bond markets . . . hate economic strength . . . Stocks generally behave badly just as the real economy is at its strongest. . . Stocks thrive on a cool economy, and wither in a hot one.*" [**Wall Street**, p. 124] In other words, real economic weakness is reflected in financial strength.

Henwood also notes that "[w]hat might be called the rentier share of the corporate surplus -- dividends plus interest as a percentage of pre-tax profits and interest -- has risen sharply, from 20-30% in the 1950s to 60% in the 1990s." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 73] This helps explain the stagnation which has afflicted the economies of the west. The rich have been placing more of their ever-expanding wealth in stocks, allowing this market to rise in the face of general economic torpor. Rather than being used for investment, surplus is being funnelled into the finance markets, markets which do concentrate wealth very successfully (retained earnings in the US have decreased as interest and dividend payments have increased [Brenner, **Op. Cit.**, p. 210]). Given that "*the US financial system performs dismally at its advertised task, that of efficiently directing society's savings towards their optimal investment pursuits. The system is stupefyingly expensive, gives terrible signals for the allocation of capital, and has surprisingly little to do with real investment.*" [Henwood, **Op. Cit.**, p. 3] As most investment comes from internal funds, the rise in the rentiers (those who derive their incomes from returns on capital) share of the surplus has meant less investment and so the stagnation of the economy. And the weakening economy has increased financial strength, which in turn leads to a weakening in the real economy. A viscous circle, and one reflected in the slowing of economic growth over the last 30 years.

In effect, especially since the end of the 1970s, has seen the increasing dominance of finance capital. This dominance has, in effect, created a market for government policies as finance capital has become increasingly global in nature. Governments must secure, protect and expand the field of profit-making for financial capital and transnational corporations, otherwise they will be punished by the global markets (i.e. finance capital). These policies have been at the expense of the underlying economy in

general, and of the working class in particular:

*"Rentier power was directed at labour, both organised and unorganised ranks of wage earners, because it regarded rising wages as a principal threat to the stable order. For obvious reasons, this goal was never stated very clearly, but financial markets understood the centrality of the struggle: protecting the value of their capital required the suppression of labour incomes."* [William Greider, **One World, Ready or Not**, p. 302]

Of course, industrial capital **also** hates labour, so there is a basis of an alliance between the two sides of capital, even if they do disagree over the specifics of the economic policies implemented. Given that a key aspect of the neo-liberal reforms was the transformation of the labour market from a post-war sellers' market to a nineteenth century buyers' market, with its effects on factory discipline, wage claims and proneness to strike, industrial capital could not but be happy with its effects. Doug Henwood correctly argues that *"Liberals and populists often search for potential allies among industrialists, reasoning that even if financial interests suffer in a boom, firms that trade in real, rather than fictitious, products would thrive when growth is strong. In general, industrialists are less sympathetic to these arguments. Employers in any industry like slack in the labour market; it makes for a pliant workforce, one unlikely to make demands or resist speedups."* In addition, *"many non-financial corporations have heavy financial interests."* [Op. Cit., p. 123, p. 135]

Thus the general stagnation afflicting much of the world, a stagnation which has developed into crisis as the needs of finance have undermined the real economy which, ultimately, it is dependent upon. The contradiction between short term profits and long term survival inherent in capitalism strikes again.

Crisis, as we have noted above, has appeared in areas previously considered as strong economies and it has been spreading. An important aspect of this crisis is the tendency for productive capacity to outstrip effective demand (i.e. the tendency to over-invest relative to the available demand), which arises in large part from the imbalance between capitalists' need for a high rate of profit and their simultaneous need to ensure that workers have enough wealth and income so that they can keep buying the products on which those profits depend (see [section C](#)). Inequality has been increasing in the USA, which means that the economy faces a realisation crisis (see [section C.7](#)), a crisis which has so far been avoided by deepening debt for working people (debt levels more than doubled between the 1950s to the 1990s, from 25% to over 60%).

Over-investment has been magnified in the East-Asian Tigers as they were forced to open their economies to global finance. These economies, due to their intervention in the market (and repressive regimes against labour) ensured they were a more profitable place to invest than elsewhere. Capital flooded into the area, ensuring a relative over-investment was inevitable. As we argued in [section C.7.2](#), crisis is possible simply due to the lack of information provided by the price mechanism -- economic agents can react in such a way that the collective result of individually rational decisions is irrational. Thus the desire to reap profits in the Tiger economies resulted in a squeeze in profits as the aggregate investment decisions resulted in over-investment, and so over-production and falling profits.

In effect, the South East Asian economies suffered from a problem termed the "fallacy of composition." When you are the first Asian export-driven economy, you are competing with high-cost Western producers and so your cheap workers, low taxes and lax environmental laws allow you to under-cut your competitors and make profits. However, as more tigers joined into the market, they end up competing against **each other** and so their profit margins would decrease towards their actual cost price rather than that of Western firms. With the decrease in profits, the capital that flowed into the region flowed back out, thus creating a crisis (and proving, incidentally, that free markets are destabilising and do not secure the best of all possible outcomes). Thus, the rentier regime, after weakening the Western economies, helped destabilise the Eastern ones too.

So, in the short-run, many large corporations and financial companies solved their profit problems by expanding production into "underdeveloped" countries so as to take advantage of the cheap labour there (and the state repression which ensured that cheapness) along with weaker environmental laws and lower taxes. Yet gradually they are running out of third-world populations to exploit. For the very process of "development" stimulated by the presence of Transnational Corporations in third-world nations increases competition and so, potentially, over-investment and, even more importantly, produces resistance in the form of unions, rebellions and so on, which tend to exert a downward pressure on the level of exploitation and profits (for example, in South Korea, labour' share in value-added increased from 23 to 30 per cent, in stark contrast to the USA, Germany and Japan, simply because Korean workers had rebelled and won new political freedoms).

This process reflects, in many ways, the rise of finance capital in the 1970s. In the 1950s and 1960s, existing industrialised nations experienced increased competition from the ex-Axis powers (namely Japan and Germany). As these nations re-industrialised, they placed increased pressure on the USA and other nations, reducing the global "degree of monopoly" and forcing them to compete with lower cost producers (which, needless to say, reduced the existing companies profits). In addition, full employment produced increasing resistance on the shop floor and in society as a whole (see [section C.7.1](#)), squeezing profits even more. Thus a combination of class struggle and global over-capacity resulted in the 1970s crisis. With the inability of the real economy, especially the manufacturing sector, to provide an adequate return, capital shifted into finance. In effect, it ran away from the success of working people asserting their rights at the point of production and elsewhere. This, combined with increased international competition from Japan and Germany, ensured the rise of finance capital, which in return ensured the current stagnationist tendencies in the economy (tendencies made worse by the rise of the Asian Tiger economies in the 1980s).

From the contradictions between finance capital and the real economy, between capitalists' need for profit and human needs, between over-capacity and demand, and others, there has emerged what appears to be a long-term trend toward **permanent** stagnation of the capitalist economy. This trend has been apparent for several decades, as evidenced by the continuous upward adjustment of the rate of unemployment officially considered to be "normal" or "acceptable" during those decades, and by other symptoms as well such as falling growth, lower rates of profit and so on.

This stagnation has recently become even more obvious by the development of crisis in many countries and the reactions of central banks trying to revive the real economies that have suffered under their rentier inspired policies. Whether this crisis will become worse is hard to say. The Western powers may act to protect the real economy by adopting the Keynesian policies they have tried to discredit over the last thirty years. However, whether such a bailout will succeed is difficult to tell and may just ensure continued stagnation rather than a real up-turn, if it has any effect at all.

Of course, a deep depression may solve the problem of over-capacity and over-investment in the world and lay the foundations of an up-turn. Such a strategy is, however, very dangerous due to working class resistance it could provoke, the deepness of the slump and the length it could last for. However, this, perhaps, has been the case in the USA in 1997-9 where over 20 years of one-sided class war may have paid off in terms of higher profits and profit rate. However, this may have more to do with the problems elsewhere in the world than a real economic change, in addition to rising consumer debt (there is now negative personal savings rate in the US), a worsening trade deficit and a stock market bubble. In addition, rising productivity has combined with stagnant wages to increase the return to capital and the profit rate (wages fell over much of the 1990s recovery and finally regained their pre-recession 1989 peak in 1999! Despite 8 years of economic growth, the typical worker is back only where they started at the peak of the last business cycle). This drop and slow growth of wages essentially accounts for the rising US profit rate, with the recent growth in real wages being hardly enough to make much of an impact (although it has made the US Federal Reserve increase interest rates to slow down even this increase, which re-enforces our argument that capitalist profits require unemployment and insecurity to maintain capitalist power at the point of production).

Such a situation reflects 1920s America (see [section C.7.3](#) for details) which was also marked by rising inequality, a labour surplus and rising profits and suggests that the new US economy faces the same potential for a slump. This means that the US economy must face the danger of over-investment (relative to demand, of course) sooner or later, perhaps sooner due to the problems elsewhere in the world as a profits-lead growth economy is fragile as it is dependent on investment, luxury spending and working class debt to survive -- all of which are more unstable and vulnerable to shocks than workers' consumption.

Given the difficulties in predicting the future (and the fact that those who try are usually proven totally wrong!), we will not pretend to know it and leave our discussion at highlighting a few possibilities. One thing is true, however, and that is the working class will pay the price of any "solution" -- unless they organise and get rid of capitalism and the state. Ultimately, capitalism need profits to survive and such profits came from the fact that workers do not have economic liberty. Thus any "solution" within a capitalist framework means the increased oppression and exploitation of working people.

Faced with negative balance sheets during recessions, the upper strata occasionally panic and agree to some reforms, some distribution of wealth, which temporarily solves the short-run problem of stagnation by increasing demand and thus permits renewed expansion. However, this short-run solution means that the working class gradually makes economic and political gains, so that exploitation and oppression, and

hence the rate of profit, tends to fall (as happened during the post-war Keynesian "Golden Age"). Faced with the dangers of, on the one hand, economic collapse and, on the other, increased working class power, the ruling class may not act until it is too late. So, on the basis that the current crisis may get worse and stagnation turn into depression, we will discuss why the "*economic structural crisis*" we have lived through for the later quarter of the 20th century (and its potential crisis) is important to social struggle in the [next section](#).

## J.4.5 Why is this "*economic structural crisis*" important to social struggle?

The "*economic structural crisis*" we out-lined in the [last section](#) has certain implications for anarchists and social struggle. Essentially, as C. George Benello argues, "*[i]f economic conditions worsen. . . then we are likely to find an openness to alternatives which have not been thought of since the depression of the 1930s. . . It is important to plan for a possible economic crisis, since it is not only practical, but also can serve as a method of mobilising a community in creative ways.*" [From the **Ground Up**, p. 149]

In the face of economic stagnation and depression, attempts to improve the rate of exploitation (i.e. increase profits) by increasing the authority of the boss grow. In addition, more people find it harder to make ends meet, running up debts to survive, face homelessness if they are made unemployed, and so on. Such effects make exploitation ever more visible and tend to push oppressed strata together in movements that seek to mitigate, and even remove, their oppression. As the capitalist era has worn on, these strata have become increasingly able to rebel and gain substantial political and economic improvements, which have, in addition, lead to an increasingly willing to do so because of rising expectations (about what is possible) and frustration (about what actually is). This is why, since 1945, the world-wide "*family*" of progressive movements has grown "*ever stronger, ever bolder, ever more diverse, ever more difficult to contain.*" [Immanuel Wallerstein, **Geopolitics and Geoculture**, p. 110] It is true that libertarians, the left and labour have suffered a temporary setback during the past few decades, but with increasing misery of the working class due to neo-liberal policies (and the "*economic structural crisis*" they create), it is only a matter of time before there is a resurgence of radicalism.

Anarchists will be in the forefront of this resurgence. For, with the discrediting of authoritarian state capitalism ("Communism") in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the anti-authoritarian faction of the left will increasingly be seen as its only credible one. Thus the ongoing structural crisis of the global capitalist economy, combined with the other developments springing from what Takis Fotopoulos calls (in his book **Towards and Inclusive Democracy**) a "*multidimensional crisis*" (which included economic, political, social, ecological and ideological aspects), could (potentially) lead over the next decade or two to a new **international** anti-authoritarian alliance linking together the new (and not so new) social movements in the West (feminism, the Green movement, rank-and-file labour militancy, etc.) with non-authoritarian liberation movements in the Third World and new anti-bureaucracy movements in formerly "communist" countries. However, this is only likely to happen if anarchists take the lead in promoting alternatives and working with the mass of the population. Ways in which anarchist

can do this are discussed in some detail in [section J.5](#).

Thus the "economic structural crisis" can aid social struggle by placing the contrast of "*what is*" with what "*could be*" in a clear light. Any crisis brings forth the contradictions in capitalism, between the production of use values (things people need) and of exchange value (capitalist profits), between capitalism's claims of being based on liberty and the authoritarianism associated with wage labour ("*[t]he general evidence of repression poses an ancient contradiction for capitalism: while it claims to promote human freedom, it profits concretely from the denial of freedom, most especially freedom for the workers employed by capitalist enterprise*" [William Greider, **One World, Ready or Not**, p. 388]) and so on. It shakes to the bone popular faith in capitalism's ability to "deliver the goods" and gets more and more people thinking about alternatives to a system that places profit above and before people and planet. The crisis also, by its very nature, encourages workers and other oppressed sections of the population to resist and fight back, which in turn generates collective organisation (such as unions or workplace-based assemblies and councils), solidarity and direct action -- in other words, collective self-help and the awareness that the problems of working class people can only be solved by themselves, by their own actions and organisations. The 1930s in the USA is a classic example of this process, with very militant struggles taking place in very difficult situations (see Howard Zinn's **A People's History of the United States** or Jeremy Brecher's **Strike!** for details).

In other words, the "economic structural crisis" gives radicals a lot potential to get their message across, even if the overall environment may make success seem difficult in the extreme at times!

As well as encouraging workplace organisation due to the intensification of exploitation and authority provoked by the economic stagnant/depression, the "economic structural crisis" can encourage other forms of libertarian alternatives. For example, "*the practical effect of finance capital's hegemony was to lock the advanced economies and their governments in a malignant spiral, restricting them to bad choices. Like bondholders in general, the new governing consensus explicitly assumed that faster economic growth was dangerous -- threatening to the stable financial order -- so nations were effectively blocked from measures that might reduce permanent unemployment or ameliorate the decline in wages. . . The reality of slow growth, in turn, drove the governments into their deepening indebtedness, since the disappointing growth inevitably undermined tax revenues while it expanded the public welfare costs. The rentier regime repeatedly instructed governments to reform their spending priorities -- that is, withdraw benefits from dependent citizens. . .*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 297-8]

Thus the "economic structural crisis" has resulted in the erosion of the welfare state (at least for the working class, for the elite, state aid is never far away). This development as potential libertarian possibilities. "*The decline of the state,*" argues L. Gambone, "*makes necessary a revitalisation of the notions of direct action and mutual aid. Without Mama State to do it for us, we must create our own social services through mutual aid societies.*" [**Syndicalism in Myth and Reality**, p. 12] As we argue in more depth in [section J.5.16](#), such a movement of mutual aid has a long history in the working class and, as it is under our control, it cannot be withdrawn from us to enrich and empower the ruling class as state run systems have been. Thus the decline of state run social services could, potentially, see the rise of a

network of self-managed, working class alternatives (equally, of course, it could see the end of all services to the most weak sections of our society -- which possibility comes about depends on what we do in the here and now. see [section J.5.15](#) for an anarchist analysis of the welfare state).

**Food Not Bombs!** is an excellent example of practical libertarian alternatives being generated by the economic crisis we are facing. Food Not Bombs helps the homeless through the direct action of its members. It also involves the homeless in helping themselves. It is a community-based group which helps other people in the community who are needy by providing free food to those in need. FNB! also helps other Anarchist political projects and activities.

Food Not Bombs! serves free food in public places to dramatise the plight of the homeless, the callousness of the system and our capacity to solve social problems through our own actions without government or capitalism. The constant harassment of FNB! by the cops, middle classes and the government illustrates their callousness to the plight of the poor and the failure of their institutions to build a society which cares for people more than money and property (and arms, cops and prisons to protect them). The fact is that in the US many working and unemployed people have no **feeling** that they are entitled to basic human needs such as medicine, clothes, shelter, and food. Food Not Bombs! does encourage poor people to make these demands, does provide a space in which these demands can be voiced, and does help to breakdown the wall between hungry and not-hungry. The repression directed towards FNB! by local police forces and governments also demonstrates the effectiveness of their activity and the possibility that it may radicalise those who get involved with the organisation. Charity is obviously one thing, mutual aid is something else. FNB! as it is a politicised movement from below, based on solidarity, is **not** charity, because, in Kropotkin's words, charity "*bears a character of inspiration from above, and, accordingly, implies a certain superiority of the giver upon the receiver*" and hardly libertarian [**Mutual Aid**, p. 222].

The last example of how economic stagnation can generate libertarian tendencies can be seen from the fact that, "*[h]istorically, at times of severe inflation or capital shortages, communities have been forced to rely on their own resources. During the Great Depression, many cities printed their own currency; this works to the extent that a community is able to maintain a viable internal economy which provides the necessities of life, independent of transactions with the outside.*" [C. George Benello, **Op. Cit.**, p. 150]

These local currencies and economies can be used as the basis of a libertarian socialist economy. The currencies would be the basis of a mutual bank (see sections [J.5.5](#) and [J.5.6](#)), providing interest-free loans to workers to form co-operatives and so build libertarian alternatives to capitalist firms. In addition, these local currencies could be labour-time based, eliminating the profits of capitalists by allowing workers to exchange the product of their labour with other workers. Moreover, "*local exchange systems strength local communities by increasing their self-reliance, empowering community members, and helping to protect them from the excesses of the global market.*" [Frank Lindenfield, "*Economics for Anarchists*," **Social Anarchism**, no. 23, p. 24] In this way local self-managing communes could be created, communes that replace hierarchical, top-down, government with collective decision making of

community affairs based on directly democratic community assemblies (see [section J.5.1](#)). These self-governing communities and economies could federate together to co-operate on a wider scale and so create a counter-power to that of state and capitalism.

This confederal system of self-managing communities could also protect jobs as the *"globalisation of capital threatens local industries. A way has to be found to keep capital at home and so preserve the jobs and the communities that depend upon them. Protectionism is both undesirable and unworkable. But worker-ownership or workers' co-operatives are alternatives."* [L. Gambone, **Syndicalism in Myth and Reality**, pp.12-13] Local communities could provide the necessary support structures which could protect co-operatives from the corrupting effects of working in the capitalist market (see [section J.5.11](#)). In this way, economic liberty (self-management) could replace capitalism (wage slavery) and show that anarchism is a practical alternative to the chaos and authoritarianism of capitalism, even if these examples are fragmentally and limited in nature.

However, these developments should **not** be taken in isolation of collective struggle in the workplace or community. It is in the class struggle that the real potential for anarchy is created. The work of such organisations as Food Not Bombs! and the creation of local currencies and co-operatives are supplementary to the important task of creating workplace and community organisations that can create effective resistance to both state and capitalists, resistance that can overthrow both (see sections [J.5.2](#) and [J.5.1](#) respectively). *"Volunteer and service credit systems and alternative currencies by themselves may not be enough to replace the corporate capitalist system. Nevertheless, they can help build the economic strength of local currencies, empower local residents, and mitigate some of the consequences of poverty and unemployment. . . . By the time a majority [of a community are involved it] will be well on its way to becoming a living embodiment of many anarchist ideals."* [Frank Lindenfield, **Op. Cit.**, p. 28] And such a community would be a great aid in any strike or other social struggle which is going on!

Therefore, the general economic crisis which we are facing has implications for social struggle and anarchist activism. It could be the basic of libertarian alternatives in our workplaces and communities, alternatives based on direct action, solidarity and self-management. These alternatives could include workplace and community unionism, co-operatives, mutual banks and other forms of anarchistic resistance to capitalism and the state. We discuss such alternatives in more detail in [section J.5](#), and so do not do so here.

Before moving on to the [next section](#), we must stress that we are **not** arguing that working class people need an economic crisis to force them into struggle. Such "objectivism" (i.e. the placing of tendencies towards socialism in the development of capitalism, of objective factors, rather than in the class struggle, i.e. subjective factors) is best left to orthodox Marxists and Leninists as it has authoritarian underpinnings (see [section H](#)). Rather we are aware that the class struggle, the subjective pressure on capitalism, is not independent of the conditions within which it takes place (and helped to create, we must add). Subjective revolt is always present under capitalism and, in the case of the 1970s crisis, played a role in creating it. Faced with an economic crisis we are indicating what we can do in response to it and how it could, potentially, generate libertarian tendencies within society. Economic crisis could,



in other words, provoke social struggle, collective action and generate anarchic tendencies in society. Equally, it could cause apathy, rejection of collective struggle and, perhaps, the embracing of **false** "solutions" such as right-wing populism, Leninism, Fascism or right-wing "libertarianism." We cannot predict how the future will develop, but it is true that if we do nothing then, obviously, libertarian tendencies will not grow and develop.

## J.4.6 What are implications of anti-government and anti-big business feelings?

According to a report in **Newsweek** ("*The Good Life and its Discontents*" Jan. 8, 1996), feelings of disappointment have devastated faith in government and big business. Here are the results of a survey in which which people were asked whether they had a "*great deal of confidence*" in various institutions:

	1966	1975	1985	1994
Congress	42%	13%	16%	8%
Executive Branch	41%	13%	15%	12%
The press	29%	26%	16%	13%
Major Companies	55%	19%	17%	19%

As can be seen, the public's faith in major companies plunged 36% over a 28-year period in the survey, an even worse vote of "*no confidence*" than that given to Congress (34%).

Some of the feelings of disappointment with government can be blamed on the anti-big-government rhetoric of conservatives and right-wing populists. But such rhetoric is of potential benefit to anarchists as well. Of course the Right would never dream of **really** dismantling the state, as is evident from the fact that government grew more bureaucratic and expensive under "conservative" administrations than ever before.

Needless to say, this "decentralist" element of right-wing rhetoric is a con. When a politician, economist or business "leader" argues that the government is too big, he is rarely thinking of the same government functions you are. You may be thinking of subsidies for tobacco farmers or defence firms and they are thinking about pollution controls. You may be thinking of reforming welfare for the better, while their idea is to dismantle the welfare state totally. Moreover, with their support for "family values", "wholesome" television, bans on abortion, and so on their victory would see an increased level of government intrusion in many personal spheres (as well as increased state support for the power of the boss over the worker, the landlord over the tenant and so on).

If you look at what the Right has done and is doing, rather than what it is saying, you quickly see the

ridiculous of claims of right-wing "libertarianism" (as well as who is really in charge). Obstructing pollution and health regulations; defunding product safety laws; opening national parks to logging and mining, or closing them entirely; reducing taxes for the rich; eliminating the capital gains tax; allowing companies to fire striking workers; making it easier for big telecommunications companies to make money; limiting companies' liability for unsafe products-- the program here is obviously to help big business do what it wants without government interference, and to help the rich get richer. In other words, increased "freedom" for private power combined with a state whose role is to protect that "liberty."

Yet along with the pro-business, pro-private tyranny, racist, anti-feminist, and homophobic hogwash disseminated by right-wing radio propagandists and the business-backed media, important decentralist and anti-statist ideas are also being implanted in mass consciousness. These ideas, if consistently pursued and applied in all areas of life (the home, the community, the workplace), could lead to a revival of anarchism in the US -- but only if radicals take advantage of this opportunity to spread the message that capitalism is not **genuinely** anti-authoritarian (nor could it ever be), as a social system based on liberty must entail.

This does not mean that right-wing tendencies have anarchistic elements. Of course not. Nor does it mean that anarchist fortunes are somehow linked to the success of the right. Far from it (the reverse is actually the case). Similarly, the anti-big government propaganda of big business is hardly anarchistic. But it does have the advantage of placing certain ideas on the agenda, such as decentralisation. What anarchists try to do is point out the totally contradictory nature of such right-wing rhetoric. After all, the arguments against big government are equally applicable to big business and wage slavery. **If** people are capable of making their own decisions, then why should this capability be denied in the workplace? As Noam Chomsky points out, while there is a "*leave it alone*" and "*do your own thing*" current within society, it in fact *tells you that the propaganda system is working full-time, because there is no such ideology in the U.S. Business, for example, doesn't believe it. It has always insisted upon a powerful interventionist state to support its interests -- still does and always has -- back to the origins of American society. There's nothing individualistic about corporations. Those are big conglomerate institutions, essentially totalitarian in character, but hardly individualistic. Within them you're a cog in a big machine. There are few institutions in human society that have such strict hierarchy and top-down control as a business organisation. Nothing there about 'Don't tread on me.' You're being tread on all the time. The point of the ideology is to try to get other people, outside of the sectors of co-ordinated power, to fail to associate and enter into decision-making in the political arena themselves. The point is to atomise everyone else while leaving powerful sectors integrated and highly organised and of course dominating resources.*" He goes on to note that:

*"There is a streak of independence and individuality in American culture which I think is a very good thing. This 'Don't tread on me' feeling is in many respects a healthy one. It's healthy up to the point where it atomises and keeps you from working together with other people. So it's got its healthy side and its negative side. It's the negative side that's emphasised naturally in the propaganda and indoctrination."* [**Keeping the Rabble in Line**, pp. 279-80]

As the opinion polls above show, most people direct their dislike and distrust of institutions equally to Big Business, which shows that people are not stupid. However, the slight decrease in distrust for big business even after a period of massive business-lead class war, down-sizing and so on, is somewhat worrying. Unfortunately, as Gobbels was well aware, tell a lie often enough and people start to believe it. And given the funds available to big business, its influence in the media, its backing of "think-tanks," the use of Public Relations companies, the support of economic "science," its extensive advertising and so on, it says a lot for the common sense of people that so many people see big business for what it is. You simply cannot fool all the people all of the time!

However, these feelings can easily be turned into cynicism and a hopelessness that things can change for the better and than the individual can help change society. Or, even worse, they can be twisted into support for the right, authoritarian, populist or (so-called) "Libertarian"-Right. The job for anarchists is to combat this and help point the healthy distrust people have for government and business towards a real solution to societies problems, namely a decentralised, self-managed anarchist society.

## **J.4.7 What about the communications revolution?**

Another important factor working in favour of anarchists is the existence of a sophisticated global communications network and a high degree of education and literacy among the populations of the core industrialised nations. Together these two developments make possible nearly instantaneous sharing and public dissemination of information by members of various progressive and radical movements all over the globe -- a phenomenon that tends to reduce the effectiveness of repression by central authorities. The electronic-media and personal-computer revolutions also make it more difficult for elitist groups to maintain their previous monopolies of knowledge. In short, the advent of the Information Age is potentially one of the most subversive variables in the modern equation.

Indeed the very existence of the Internet provides anarchists with a powerful argument that decentralised structures can function effectively in today's highly complex world. For the net has no centralised headquarters and is not subject to regulation by any centralised regulatory agency, yet it still manages to function quite effectively. Moreover, the net is also an effective way of anarchists and other radicals to communicate their ideas to others, share knowledge and work on common projects (such as this FAQ, for example) and co-ordinate activities and social struggle. By using the Internet, radicals can make their ideas accessible to people who otherwise would not come across anarchist ideas (obviously we are aware that the vast majority of people in the world do not have access to telephones, never mind computers, but computer access is increasing in many countries, making it available, via work, libraries, schools, universities, and so on to more and more working people). In addition, and far more important than anarchists putting their ideas across, the fact is that the net allows everyone with access to express themselves freely, to communicate with others and get access (by visiting webpages and joining mailing lists and newsgroups) and give access (by creating webpages and joining in with on-line arguments) to new ideas and viewpoints. This is very anarchistic as it allows people to express themselves and start to consider new ideas, ideas which may change how they think and act. Of course most people on the

planet do not have a telephone, let alone a computer, but that does not undermine the fact that the internet is a medium in which people can communicate freely (at least until it is totally privatised, then it may prove to be more difficult as the net could become a giant shopping centre).

Of course there is no denying that the implications of improved communications and information technology are ambiguous, implying Big Brother as well the ability of progressive and radical movements to organise. However, the point is only that the information revolution in combination with the other new social developments we are considering **could** (but will not **necessarily**) contribute to a social paradigm shift. Obviously such a shift will not happen automatically. Indeed, it will not happen at all unless there is strong resistance to governmental attempts to limit public access to information technology (e.g. encryption programs) and censor citizens' communications.

How anarchists are very effectively using the Internet to co-ordinate struggles and spread information is discussed in [section J.4.9](#).

This use of the Internet and computers to spread the anarchist message is ironic. The rapid improvement in price-performance ratios of computers, software, and other technology today seems to validate the faith in free markets. But to say that the information revolution proves the inevitable superiority of markets requires a monumental failure of short-term historical memory. After all, not just the Internet, but the computer sciences and computer industry represent a spectacular success of public investment. As late as the 1970s and early 1980s, according to Kenneth Flamm's 1988 book **Creating the Computer**, the federal government was paying for 40 percent of all computer-related research and probably 60 to 75 percent of basic research. Even such modern-seeming gadgets as video terminals, the light pen, the drawing tablet, and the mouse evolved from Pentagon-sponsored research in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Even software was not without state influence, with database software having its roots in US Air Force and Atomic Energy Commission projects, artificial intelligence in military contracts back in the 1950s and airline reservation systems in 1950s air-defence systems. More than half of IBM's Research and Development budget came from government contracts in the 1950s and 1960s.

The motivation was national security, but the result has been the creation of comparative advantage in information technology for the United States that private firms have happily exploited and extended. When the returns were uncertain and difficult to capture, private firms were unwilling to invest, and government played the decisive role. And not for want of trying, for key players in the military first tried to convince businesses and investment bankers that a new and potentially profitable business opportunity was presenting itself, but they did not succeed and it was only when the market expanded and the returns were more definite that the government receded. While the risks and development costs were socialised, the gains were privatised. All of which make claims that the market would have done it anyway highly unlikely.

Looking beyond state aid to the computer industry we discover a "*do-it-yourself*" (and so self-managed) culture which was essential to its development. The first personal computer, for example, was invented by amateurs who wanted to build their own cheap machines. The existence of a "gift" economy among

these amateurs and hobbyists was a necessary precondition for the development of PCs. Without this free sharing of information and knowledge, the development of computers would have been hindered. In other words, socialistic relations between developers and within the working environment created the necessary conditions for the computer revolution. If this community had been marked by commercial relations, the chances are the necessary breakthroughs and knowledge would have remained monopolised by a few companies or individuals, so hindering the industry as a whole.

The first 20 years of the Internet's development was almost completely dependent on state aid -- such as the US military or the universities -- plus an anti-capitalist "gift economy" between hobbyists. Thus a combination of public funding and community based sharing helped create the framework of the Internet, a framework which is now being claimed as one of capitalism's greatest successes!

Encouragingly, this socialistic "gift economy" is still at the heart of computer/software development and the Internet. For example, the **Free Software Foundation** has developed the **General Public Licence** (GPL). GPL, also known as "*copyleft*", uses copyright to ensure that software remains free. Copyleft ensures that a piece of software is made available to everyone to use and modify as they desire. The only restriction is that any used or modified copyleft material must remain under copyleft, ensuring that others have the same rights as you did when you used the original code. It creates a commons which anyone may add to, but no one may subtract from. Placing software under GPL means that every contributor is assured that she, and all other users, will be able to run, modify and redistribute the code indefinitely. Unlike commercial software, copyleft code ensures an increasing knowledge base from which individuals can draw from and, equally as important, contribute to. In this way everyone benefits as code can be improved by everyone, unlike commercial code.

Many will think that this essentially anarchistic system would be a failure. In fact, code developed in this way is far more reliable and sturdy than commercial software. Linux, for example, is a far superior operating system than DOS, for example, precisely **because** it draws on the collective experience, skill and knowledge of thousands of developers. Apache, the most popular web-server, is another freeware product and is acknowledged as the best available. While non-anarchists may be surprised, anarchists are not. Mutual aid and co-operation are beneficial in evolution of life, why not in the evolution of software?

For anarchists, this "gift economy" at the heart of the communications revolution is an important development. It shows the superiority of common development and the walls to innovation and decent products generated by property systems. We hope that such an economy will spread increasingly into the "real" world.

## **J.4.8 What is the significance of the accelerating rate of change and the information explosion?**

As Philip Slater points out in **A Dream Deferred**, the cumbersomeness of authoritarian structures becomes more and more glaring as the rate of change speeds up. This is because all relevant information

in authoritarian systems must be relayed to a central command before any decisions can be made, in contrast to decentralised systems where important decisions can be made by individuals and small autonomous groups responding immediately to new information. This means that decision making is slower in authoritarian structures, putting them at a disadvantage relative to more decentralised and democratic structures.

The failure of centrally planned state-capitalist ("Communist") economies due to overwhelming bureaucratic inertia provides an excellent illustration of the problem in question. Similarly, under private-property capitalism, small and relatively decentralised companies are generally more innovative and productive than large corporations with massive bureaucracies, which tend to be nearly as inflexible and inefficient as their "Communist" counterparts. In a world where the proliferation of information is accelerating at the same time that crucial economic and political decisions must be made ever more quickly, authoritarian structures are becoming increasingly maladaptive. As Slater notes, authoritarian systems simply cannot cope effectively with the information explosion, and for this reason more and more nations are realising they must either "democratise" or fall behind. He cites the epidemic of "democratisation" in Eastern Europe as well as popular pressure for democracy in Communist China as symptomatic of this phenomenon.

Unfortunately, Slater fails to note that the type of "democracy" to which he refers is ultimately a fraud (though better than state-capitalist totalitarianism), since the representative type of government at which it aims is a disguised form of political domination by the corporate rich. Nevertheless, the cumbersomeness of authoritarian structures on which he bases his argument is real enough, and it will continue to lend credibility to the anarchist argument that "representative" political structures embedded in a corporate-state complex of authoritarian institutions is very far from being either true democracy or an efficient way of organising society. Moreover, the critique of authoritarian structures is equally applicable to the workplace as capitalist companies are organised as mini-centrally planned states, with (official) power concentrated in the hands of bosses and managers. Any struggle for increased participation will inevitably take place in the workplace as well (as it has continually done so as long as wage slavery has existed).

## **J.4.9 What are Netwars?**

Netwars refers to the use of the Internet by autonomous groups and social movements to co-ordinate action to influence and change society and fight government or business policy. This use of the Internet has steadily grown over the years, with a Rand corporation researcher, David Ronfeldt, arguing that this has become an important and powerful force (Rand is, and has been since it's creation in 1948, a private appendage of the military industrial complex). In other words, activism and activists power and influence has been fuelled by the advent of the information revolution. Through computer and communication networks, especially via the world-wide Internet, grassroots campaigns have flourished, and the most importantly, government elites have taken notice.

Ronfeldt specialises in issues of national security, especially in the areas of Latin American and the

impact of new informational technologies. Ronfeldt and another colleague coined the term "*netwar*" a couple years ago in a Rand document entitled "*Cyberwar is Coming!*". "Netwars" are actions by autonomous groups -- especially advocacy groups and social movements -- that use informational networks to co-ordinate action to influence, change or fight government policy.

Ronfeldt's work became a flurry of discussion on the Internet in mid-March 1995 when Pacific News Service correspondent Joel Simon wrote an article about Ronfeldt's opinions on the influence of netwars on the political situation in Mexico after the Zapatista uprising. According to Simon, Ronfeldt holds that the work of social activists on the Internet has had a large influence -- helping to co-ordinate the large demonstrations in Mexico City in support of the Zapatistas and the proliferation of EZLN communiques across the world via computer networks. These actions, Ronfeldt argues, have allowed a network of groups that oppose the Mexican Government to muster an international response, often within hours of actions by it. In effect, this has forced the Mexican government to maintain the facade of negotiations with the EZLN and has on many occasions, actually stopped the army from just going in to Chiapas and brutally massacring the Zapatistas.

Given that Ronfeldt is an employee of the Rand Corporation (described by Paul Dickson, author of the book "*Think Tanks*", as the "*first military think tank. . . undoubtedly the most powerful research organisation associated with the American military*") his comments indicate that the U.S. government and it's military and intelligence wings are very interested in what the Left and anarchists are doing on the Internet. Given that they would not be interested in this if it was not effective, we can say that this use of the "Information Super-Highway" is a positive example of the use of technology in ways unplanned of by those who initially developed it (let us not forget that the Internet was originally funded by the U.S. government and military). While the internet is being hyped as the next big marketplace, it is being subverted by activists -- an example of anarchistic trends within society worrying the powers that be.

Ronfeldt argues that "*the information revolution. . . disrupts and erodes the hierarchies around which institutions are normally designed. It diffuses and redistributes power, often to the benefit of what may be considered weaker, smaller actors.*" He continues, "*multi-organisational networks consist of (often small) organisations or parts of institutions that have linked together to act jointly... making it possible for diverse, dispersed actors to communicate, consult, co-ordinate, and operate together across greater distances, and on the basis of more and better information than ever.*" He emphasises that "*some of the heaviest users of the new communications networks and technologies are progressive, centre-left, and social activists... [who work on] human rights, peace, environmental, consumer, labour, immigration, racial and gender-based issues.*" In other words, social activists are on the cutting edge of the new and powerful "network" system of organising.

All governments, especially the U.S. government, have been extremely antagonistic to this idea of effective use of information, especially by the political Left and anarchists. The use of the Internet may facilitate another "crisis in democracy" (i.e. the development of **real** democracy rather than the phoney elite kind favoured by capitalism). To fight this possible use of the internet to combat the elite, Ronfeldt maintains that the lesson is clear: "*institutions can be defeated by networks, and it may take networks to*

*counter networks.*" He argues that if the U.S. government and/or military is to fight this ideological war properly with the intend of winning -- and he does specifically mention ideology -- it must completely reorganise itself, scrapping hierarchical organisation for a more autonomous and decentralised system: a network. In this way, he states, "*we expect that. . . netwar may be uniquely suited to fighting non-state actors*".

Ronfeldt's research and opinion should be flattering for the political Left. He is basically arguing that the efforts of activists on computers not only has been very effective or at least has the potential, but more importantly, argues that the only way to counter this work is to follow the lead of social activists. Ronfeldt emphasised in a personal correspondence that the "*information revolution is also strengthening civil-society actors in many positive ways, and moreover that netwar is not necessarily a 'bad' thing that necessarily is a 'threat' to U.S. or other interests. It depends.*" At the same time, anarchists and other activists should understand the important implications of Ronfeldt's work: government elites are not only watching these actions (big surprise), but are also attempting to work against them.

This can be seen in many countries. For example, in 1995 a number of computer networks, so far confined to Europe, have been attacked or completely shut down. In Italy, members of the Carabinieri Anti-Crime Special Operations Group raided the homes of a number of activists -- many active in the anarchist movement. They confiscated journals, magazines, pamphlets, diaries, and video tapes. They also took their personal computers, one of which hosted "*BITS Against the Empire*", a node of Cybernet and Fidonet networks. The warrant ridiculously charged them for "*association with intent to subvert the democratic order*", carrying a penalty of 7 to 15 years imprisonment for a conviction.

In Britain, Terminal Boredom bulletin board system (BBS) in Scotland was shutdown by police in 1995 after the arrest of a hacker who was affiliated with the BBS. In the same year Spunk Press, the largest anarchist archive of published material catalogued on computer networks faced a media barrage in the UK press which has falsely accused them of working with known terrorists like the Red Army Faction of Germany, of providing recipes for making bombs and of co-ordinating the "*disruption of schools, looting of shops and attacks on multinational firms.*" Articles by the computer trade magazine, **Computing**, and the **Sunday Times**, entitled "*Anarchism Runs Riot on the Superhighway*" and "*Anarchists Use Computer Highway For Subversion*" respectively, nearly lead one of the organisers of Spunk Press loosing his job after the firm he works for received bad publicity. According to the book **Turning up the Heat: MI5 after that cold war** by Lara O'Hara, one of the journalists who wrote the Sunday Times article has contacts with MI5 (the British equivalent of the FBI).

It is not coincidence that this attack has started first against anarchists and libertarian-socialists. They are currently one of the most organised political grouping on the Internet. Even Simon Hill, editor of **Computing** magazine, admits that "*we have been amazed at the level of organisation of these... groups who have appeared on the Internet in a short amount of time*". According to Ronfeldt's thesis, this makes perfect sense. Who best can exploit a system that "*erodes hierarchy*" and requires the co-ordination of decentralised, autonomous groups in co-operative actions than anarchists and libertarian-socialists?



These attacks may not be confined to anarchists for long. Indeed, many countries have attempted to control the internet, using a number of issues as a means to do so (such as "terrorism", pornography and so on). Government is not the only institution to notice the power of the Internet in the hands of activists. In America, the Washington Post ("*Mexican Rebels Using a High-Tech Weapon; Internet Helps Rally Support*", by Tod Robberson), Newsweek ("*When Words are the Best Weapon: How the Rebels Use the Internet and Satellite TV*", by Russell Watson) and even CNN have done stories about the importance of the Internet and network communication organisation with respect to the Zapatistas.

It is important to point out that the mainstream media is not interested in the information that circulates across the Internet. No, they are interested in sensationalising the activity, even demonising it. They correctly see that the "rebels" possess an incredibly powerful tool, but the media does not report on what they either are missing or omitting.

A good example of this powerful tool is the incredible speed and range at which information travels the Internet about events concerning Mexico and the Zapatistas. When Alexander Cockburn wrote an article exposing a Chase Manhattan Bank memo about Chiapas and the Zapatistas in Counterpunch, only a small number of people read it because it is only a newsletter with a limited readership. The memo, written by Riordan Roett, was very important because it argued that "*the [Mexican] government will need to eliminate the Zapatistas to demonstrate their effective control of the national territory and of security policy*". In other words, if the Mexican government wants investment from Chase, it will have to crush the Zapatistas. This information was relatively ineffective when just confined to print. But when it was uploaded to the Internet (via a large number of List-servers and the USENET), it suddenly reached a very large number of people. These people in turn co-ordinated protests against the U.S and Mexican governments and especially Chase Manhattan. Chase was eventually forced to attempt to distance itself from the Roett memo that it commissioned.

Anarchists and the Zapatistas is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Currently there are a myriad of social activist campaigns on the Internet. From local issues like the anti-Proposition 187 movement in California to a progressive college network campaign against the Republican "*Contract [on] America*," the network system of activism is not only working -- and working well as Ronfeldt admits -- but is growing. It is growing rapidly in numbers of people involved and growing in political and social effectiveness. There are many parallels between the current situation in Chiapas and the drawn out civil war in Guatemala, yet the Guatemalan military has been able to nearly kill without impunity while the Mexican military received a co-ordinated, international attack literally hours after they mobilise their troops. The reason is netwars are effective as Ronfeldt concedes, and when they are used they have been very influential.

It is clear than Rand, and possibly other wings of the establishment, are not only interested in what activists are doing on the Internet, but they think it is working. It is also clear that they are studying our activities and analysing our potential power. We should do the same, but obviously not from the perspective of inhibiting our work, but the opposite: how to further facilitate it. Also, we should turn the tables as it were. They are studying our behaviour and actions -- we should study theirs. As was outlined

above, we should analyse their movements and attempt to anticipate attacks as much as possible.

As Ronfeldt argues repeatedly, the potential is there for us to be more effective. Information is getting out as is abundantly clear. But we can do better than just a co-ordination of raw information, which has been the majority of the "networking" so far on the Internet. To improve on the work that is being done, we should attempt to provide more -- especially in the area of in-depth analysis. Not just what we are doing and what the establishment is doing, but more to the point, we should attempt to co-ordinate the dissemination of solid analysis of important events. In this way members of the activist network will not only have the advantage of up-to-date information of events, but also a good background analysis of what each event means, politically, socially and/or economically as the case may be.

Thus Netwars are a good example of anarchistic trends within society, the use of communications technology (developed for the state and used by capitalism as a means to aid the selling process) has become a means of co-ordinating activity across the world in a libertarian fashion.

(This section of the FAQ is based on an article by Jason Wehling called *"NetWars' and Activists' Power on the Internet"* which has appeared in issue 2 of **Scottish Anarchist** magazine as well as **Z Magazine**)

## C.10 Will "free market" capitalism benefit everyone, especially the poor?

Murray Rothbard and a host of other supporters of "free-market" capitalism make this claim. Again, it does contain an element of truth. As capitalism is a "grow or die" economy (see section [D.4.1](#)), obviously the amount of wealth available to society increases for **all** as the economy expands. So the poor will be better off **absolutely** in any growing economy (at least in economic terms). This was the case under Soviet state capitalism as well: the poorest worker in the 1980's was obviously far better off economically than one in the 1920's.

However, what counts is **relative** differences between classes and periods within a growth economy. Given the thesis that free-market capitalism will benefit the poor **especially**, we have to ask: can the other classes benefit equally well?

As noted above, wages are dependent on productivity, with increases in the wages lagging behind increases in productivity. If, in a free market, the poor "especially" benefited, wages would need to increase **faster** than productivity in order for the worker to obtain an increased share of social wealth. However, if this were the case, the amount of profit going to the upper classes would be proportionally smaller. Hence if capitalism "especially" benefited the poor, it could not do the same for those who live off the profit generated by workers.

For the reasons indicated above, productivity **must** rise faster than wages or companies will fail and recession could result. This is why wages (usually) lag behind productivity gains. In other words, workers produce more but do not receive a corresponding increase in wages. This is graphically illustrated by Taylor's first experiment in his "*scientific management*" techniques.

Taylor's theory was that when workers controlled their own work, they did not produce to the degree wanted by management. His solution was simple. The job of management was to discover the "one best way" of doing a specific work task and then ensure that workers followed these (management defined) working practices. The results of his experiment was a 360% increase in productivity for a 60% increase in wages. Very efficient. However, from looking at the figures, we see that the immediate result of Taylor's experiment is lost. The worker is turned into a robot and effectively deskilled (see section [D.10](#)). While this is good for profits and the economy, it has the effect of dehumanising and alienating the workers involved as well as increasing the power of capital in the labour market. But only those ignorant of economic science or infected with anarchism would make the obvious point that what is good for the economy may not be good for people.

This brings up another important point related to the question of whether "free market" capitalism will result in everyone being "better off." The typical capitalist tendency is to consider quantitative values as

being the most important consideration. Hence the concern over economic growth, profit levels, and so on, which dominate discussions on modern life. However, as E.P. Thompson makes clear, this ignores an important aspect of human life:

*"simple points must be made. It is quite possible for statistical averages and human experiences to run in opposite directions. A per capita increase in quantitative factors may take place at the same time as a great qualitative disturbance in people's way of life, traditional relationships, and sanctions. People may consume more goods and become less happy or less free at the same time"* [**The Making of the English Working Class**, p. 231]

For example, real wages may increase but at the cost of longer hours and greater intensity of labour. Thus, *"[i]n statistical terms, this reveals an upward curve. To the families concerned it might feel like immiseration."* [Thompson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 231] In addition, consumerism may not lead to the happiness or the "better society" which many economists imply to be its results. If consumerism is an attempt to fill an empty life, it is clearly doomed to failure. If capitalism results in an alienated, isolated existence, consuming more will hardly change that. The problem lies within the individual and the society within which they live. Hence, quantitative increases in goods and services may not lead to anyone "benefiting" in any meaningful way.

This is important to remember when listening to "free market" gurus discussing economic growth from their "gated communities," insulated from the surrounding deterioration of society and nature caused by the workings of capitalism (see sections [D.1](#) and [D.4](#) for more on this). In other words, quality is often more important than quantity. This leads to the important idea that some (even many) of the requirements for a truly human life cannot be found on any market, no matter how "free."

However, to go back to the "number crunching" that capitalism so loves, we see that the system is based on workers producing more profits for "their" company by creating more commodities than they would be able to buy back with their wages. If this does not happen, profits fall and capital dis-invests. As can be seen from the example of Chile (see section [C.11](#)) under Pinochet, "free market" capitalism can and does make the rich richer and the poor poorer while economic growth was going on. Indeed, the benefits of economic growth accumulated into the hands of the few.

To put it simply, economic growth in laissez-faire capitalism depends upon increasing exploitation and inequality. As wealth floods upwards into the hands of the ruling class, the size of the crumbs falling downwards will increase (after the economy is getting bigger). This is the real meaning of "trickle down" economics. Like religion, laissez faire capitalism promises pie at some future date. Until then we (at least the working class) must sacrifice, tighten our belts and trust in the economic powers that be to invest wisely for society. Of course, as the recent history of the USA or Chile shows, the economy can be made freer and grow while real wages stagnant (or fall) and inequality increase.

This can also be seen from the results of the activities of the pro-"free market" government in the UK,

where the number of people with less than half the average income rose from 9% of the population in 1979 to 25% in 1993 and the share of national wealth held by the poorer half of the population has fallen from one third to one quarter. In addition, between 1979 and 1992-3, the poorest tenth of the UK population experienced a fall in their real income of 18% after housing costs, compared to an unprecedented rise of 61% for the top tenth. Of course, the UK is not a "pure" capitalist system and so the defenders of the faith can argue that their "pure" system will spread the wealth. However, it seems strange that movements towards the "free market" always seem to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. In other words, the evidence from "actually existing" capitalism supports anarchist arguments that when ones bargaining power is weak (which is typically the case in the labour market) "free" exchanges tend to magnify inequalities of wealth and power over time rather than working towards an equalisation (see section [F.3.1](#), for example). Similarly, it can hardly be claimed that these movements towards "purer" capitalism have "especially" benefited the poor, quite the reverse.

This is unsurprising as "free market" capitalism cannot benefit **all** equally, for if the share of social wealth falling to the working class increased (i.e. it "especially" benefited them), it would mean that the ruling class would be **worse off** (and vice versa). Hence the claim that all would benefit is obviously false if we recognise and reject the sleight-of-hand of looking at the absolute figures so loved by the apologists of capitalism. And as the evidence indicates, movements towards a purer capitalism have resulted in "free" exchanges benefiting those with (economic) power more than those without, rather than benefiting all equally. This result is surprising, of course, only to those who prefer to look at the image of "free exchange" within capitalism rather than at its content.

In short, to claim that all would benefit from a free market ignores the fact that capitalism is a profit-driven system and that for profits to exist, workers **cannot** receive the full fruits of their labour. As the individualist anarchist Lysander Spooner noted over 100 years ago, *"almost all fortunes are made out of the capital and labour of other men than those who realise them. Indeed, large fortunes could rarely be made at all by one individual, except by his sponging capital and labour from others."* [quoted by Martin J. James, **Men Against the State**, p. 173f]

So it can be said that laissez-faire capitalism will benefit all, **especially** the poor, only in the sense that all can potentially benefit as an economy increases in size. If we look at actually existing capitalism, we can start to draw some conclusions about whether laissez-faire capitalism will actually benefit working people. The United States has a small public sector by international standards and in many ways it is the closest large industrial nation to laissez-faire capitalism. It is also interesting to note that it is also number one, or close to it, in the following areas [Richard Du Boff, **Accumulation and Power**, pp. 183-4]:

- lowest level of job security for workers, with greatest chance of being dismissed without notice or reason.
- greatest chance for a worker to become unemployed without adequate unemployment and medical insurance.
- less leisure time for workers, such as holiday time.

- one of the most lopsided income distribution profiles.
- lowest ratio of female to male earnings, in 1987 64% of the male wage.
- highest incidence of poverty in the industrial world.
- among the worse rankings of all advanced industrial nations for pollutant emissions into the air.
- highest murder rates.
- worse ranking for life expectancy and infant mortality.

It seems strange that the more laissez-faire system has the worse job security, least leisure time, highest poverty and inequality if laissez-faire will **especially** benefit the poor. Of course, defenders of laissez-faire capitalism will point out that the United States is far from being laissez-faire, but it seems strange that the further an economy moves from that condition the better conditions get for those who, it is claimed, will **especially** benefit from it.

Even if we look at economic growth (the rationale for claims that laissez faire will benefit the poor), we find that by the 1960s the rate of growth of per capita product since the 19th century was not significantly higher than in France and Germany, only slightly higher than in Britain and significantly lower than in Sweden and Japan (and do not forget that France, Germany, Japan and Britain suffered serve damage in two world wars, unlike America). So the *"superior productivity and income levels in the United States have been accompanied by a mediocre performance in the rise of those levels over time. The implication is no longer puzzling: if US per capita incomes did not grow particularly fast but Americans on average enjoy living standards equal to or above those of citizens of other developed nations, then the American starting point must have been higher 100 to 150 years ago. We now know that before the Civil War per capita incomes in the United States were high by contemporary standards, surpassed through the 1870s only by the British. . . To a great extent this initial advantage was a gift of nature."* [Op. Cit., p. 176]

Looking beyond the empirical investigation, we should point out the slave mentality behind these arguments. Afterall, what does this argument actually imply? Simply that economic growth is the only way for working people to get ahead. If working people put up with exploitative working environments, in the long run capitalists will invest some of their profits and so increase the economic cake for all. So, like religion, "free market" economics argue that we must sacrifice in the short term so that (perhaps) in the future our living standards will increase (*"you'll get pie in the sky when you die"* as Joe Hill said about religion). Moreover, any attempt to change the "laws of the market" (i.e. the decisions of the rich) by collective action will only harm the working class. Capital will be frightened away to countries with a more "realistic" and "flexible" workforce (usually made so by state repression).

In other words, capitalist economics praises servitude over independence, kow-towing over defiance and altruism over egoism. The "rational" person of neo-classical economics does not confront authority, rather he accommodates himself to it. For, in the long run, such self-negation will pay off with a bigger cake with (it is claimed) correspondingly bigger crumbs "trickling" downwards. In other words, in the short-term, the gains may flow to the elite but in the future we will all gain as some of it will trickle (back) down to the working people who created them in the first place. But, unfortunately, in the real

world uncertainty is the rule and the future is unknown. The history of capitalism shows that economic growth is quite compatible with stagnating wages, increasing poverty and insecurity for workers and their families, rising inequality and wealth accumulating in fewer and fewer hands (the example of the USA and Chile from the 1970s to 1990s and Chile spring to mind). And, of course, even **if** workers know how to bosses, the bosses may just move production elsewhere anyway (as tens of thousands of "down-sized" workers across the West can testify). For more details of this process in the USA see Edward S. Herman's article *"Immiserating Growth: The First World"* in **Z Magazine**, July 1994.

For anarchists it seems strange to wait for a bigger cake when we can have the whole bakery. If control of investment was in the hands of those it directly effects (working people) then it could be directed into socially and ecologically constructive projects rather than being used as a tool in the class war and to make the rich richer. The arguments against "rocking the boat" are self-serving (it is obviously in the interests the rich and powerful to defend a given income and property distribution) and, ultimately, self-defeating for those working people who accept them. In the end, even the most self-negating working class will suffer from the negative effects of treating society as a resource for the economy, the higher mobility of capital that accompanies growth and effects of periodic economic and long term ecological crisis. When it boils down to it, we all have two options -- you can do what is right or you can do what you are told. "Free market" capitalist economics opts for the latter.

Finally, the average annual growth rate per capita was 1.4% between 1820 and 1950. This is in sharp contrast to the 3.4% rate between 1950 and 1970. If laissez-faire capitalism would benefit "everyone" more than "really existing capitalism," the growth rate would be **higher** during the earlier period, which more closely approximated laissez faire. It is not.

## D.4 What is the relationship between capitalism and the ecological crisis?

Environmental damage has reached alarming proportions. Almost daily there are new upwardly revised estimates of the severity of global warming, ozone destruction, topsoil loss, oxygen depletion from the clearing of rain forests, acid rain, toxic wastes and pesticide residues in food and water, the accelerating extinction rate of natural species, etc., etc. Some scientists now believe that there may be as little as 35 years to act before vital ecosystems are irreparably damaged and massive human die-offs begin [Donella M. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, and Jorgen Randers, **Beyond the Limits: Confronting Global Collapse, Envisioning a Sustainable Future**, Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 1992]. Or, as Kirkpatrick Sale puts it, "*the planet is on the road to, perhaps on the verge of, global ecocide*" ["Bioregionalism -- A Sense of Place," **The Nation** 12: 336-339].

Many anarchists see the ecological crisis as rooted in the psychology of domination, which emerged with the rise of patriarchy, slavery, and the first primitive states during the Late Neolithic. Murray Bookchin, one of the pioneers of eco-anarchism (see [section E](#)), points out that "*[t]he hierarchies, classes, propertied forms, and statist institutions that emerged with social domination were carried over conceptually into humanity's relationship with nature. Nature too became increasingly regarded as a mere resource, an object, a raw material to be exploited as ruthlessly as slaves on a latifundium.*" [**Toward an Ecological Society** p. 41]. In his view, without uprooting the psychology of domination, all attempts to stave off ecological catastrophe are likely to be mere palliatives and so doomed to failure.

Bookchin argues that "*the conflict between humanity and nature is an extension of the conflict between human and human. Unless the ecology movement encompasses the problem of domination in all its aspects, it will contribute **nothing** toward eliminating the root causes of the ecological crisis of our time. If the ecology movement stops at mere reformism in pollution and conservation control - at mere 'environmentalism' - without dealing radically with the need for an expanded concept of revolution, it will merely serve as a safety valve for the existing system of natural and human exploitation.*" [**Ibid.**, p. 43]

Since capitalism is the vehicle through which the psychology of domination finds its most ecologically destructive outlet, most eco-anarchists give the highest priority to dismantling capitalism. "*Literally, the system in its endless devouring of nature will reduce the entire biosphere to the fragile simplicity of our desert and arctic biomes. We will be reversing the process of organic evolution which has differentiated flora and fauna into increasingly complex forms and relationships, thereby creating a simpler and less stable world of life. The consequences of this appalling regression are predictable enough in the long run -- the biosphere will become so fragile that it will eventually collapse from the standpoint human survival needs and remove the organic preconditions for human life. That this will eventuate from a society based on production for the sake of production is . . . merely a matter of time, although when it*



*will occur is impossible to predict.*" [**Ibid.**, p. 68]

It's important to stress that capitalism must be **eliminated** because it **cannot** reform itself so as to become "environment friendly," contrary to the claims of so-called "green" capitalists. This is because *"[c]apitalism not only validates precapitalist notions of the domination of nature, . . . it turns the plunder of nature into society's law of life. To quibble with this kind of system about its values, to try to frighten it with visions about the consequences of growth is to quarrel with its very metabolism. One might more easily persuade a green plant to desist from photosynthesis than to ask the bourgeois economy to desist from capital accumulation."* [**Ibid.**, p. 66]

Thus capitalism causes ecological destruction because it is based upon domination (of human over human and so humanity over nature) and continual, endless growth (for without growth, capitalism would die).

## D.4.1 Why must capitalist firms "grow or die?"

Industrial production has increased fifty fold since 1950. Obviously such expansion in a finite environment cannot go on indefinitely without disastrous consequences. Yet, as the quotation above suggests, it is impossible **in principle** for capitalism to kick its addiction to growth. It is important to understand why.

Capitalism is based on production for profit. In order to stay profitable, a firm must be able to produce goods and services cheaply enough to compete with other firms in the same industry. If one firm increases its productivity (as all firms must try to do), it will be able to produce more cheaply, thus undercutting its competition and capturing more market share, until eventually it forces less profitable firms into bankruptcy. Moreover, as companies with higher productivity/profitability expand, they often realise economies of scale (e.g. getting bulk rates on larger quantities of raw materials), thus giving them even more of a competitive advantage over less productive/profitable enterprises. Hence, constantly increasing productivity is essential for survival.

There are two ways to increase productivity, either by increasing the exploitation of workers (e.g. longer hours and/or more intense work for the same amount of pay) or by introducing new technologies that reduce the amount of labour necessary to produce the same product or service. Due to the struggle of workers to prevent increases in the level of their exploitation, new technologies are the main way that productivity is increased under capitalism (though of course capitalists are always looking for ways to increase the exploitation of workers on a given technology by other means as well).

But new technologies are expensive, which means that in order to pay for continuous upgrades, a firm must continually sell **more** of what it produces, and so must keep expanding its capital (machinery, floor space, workers, etc.). Indeed, to stay in the same place under capitalism is to tempt crisis - thus a firm must always strive for more profits and thus must always expand and invest. In other words, in order to survive, a firm must constantly expand and upgrade its capital and production levels so it can sell

enough to **keep** expanding and upgrading its capital -- i.e. "grow or die," or "production for the sake of production."

Thus it is impossible in principle for capitalism to solve the ecological crisis, because "grow or die" is inherent in its nature:

*"To speak of 'limits to growth' under a capitalistic market economy is as meaningless as to speak of limits of warfare under a warrior society. The moral pieties, that are voiced today by many well-meaning environmentalists, are as naive as the moral pieties of multinationals are manipulative. Capitalism can no more be 'persuaded' to limit growth than a human being can be 'persuaded' to stop breathing. Attempts to 'green' capitalism, to make it 'ecological', are doomed by the very nature of the system as a system of endless growth."* [Murray Bookchin, **Remaking Society**, pp. 93-94]

As long as capitalism exists, it will **necessarily** continue its "endless devouring of nature," until it removes the "organic preconditions for human life." For this reason there can be no compromise with capitalism: We must destroy it before it destroys us. And time is running out.

Capitalists, of course, do not accept this conclusion. Most simply ignore the evidence or view the situation through rose-coloured spectacles, maintaining that ecological problems are not as serious as they seem or that science will find a way to solve them before it's too late. Right libertarians tend to take this approach, but they also argue that a genuinely free market capitalism would provide solutions to the ecological crisis. In [section E](#) we will show why these arguments are unsound and why libertarian socialism is our best hope for preventing ecological catastrophe.

# **Section E - What do anarchists think causes ecological problems?**

## **Introduction**

### **E.1 What do eco-anarchists propose instead of capitalism?**

**E.1.1 Why do eco-anarchists advocate workers' control?**

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# Section E - What do anarchists think causes ecological problems?

Anarchists have been at the forefront of ecological thinking and the green movement for decades. Murray Bookchin in particular has placed anarchist ideas at the centre of green debate, emphasising the **social** nature of the ecological problems we face and arguing that humanity's domination of nature is the result of domination **within** humanity itself. (See, for example **Toward an Ecological Society**). The ecological implications of many anarchist ideas (such as decentralisation, integration of industry and agriculture, and so forth) has meant that anarchists have quickly recognised the importance of ecological movements and ideas.

Precursors of eco-anarchism can be found in Peter Kropotkin's writings. For example, in his classic work **Fields, Factories and Workshops**, Kropotkin argued the case for "small is beautiful" 70 years before E. F. Schumacher coined the phrase. Through his investigations in geography and biology, Kropotkin discovered species to be interconnected with each other and with their environment. **Mutual Aid** is the classic source book on the survival value of co-operation within species, which Kropotkin regarded as the chief factor of evolution, arguing that those who claim competition is the chief factor have distorted Darwin's work. So, while a specifically "eco" anarchism did not develop until the revolutionary work done by Murray Bookchin from the 1950's onwards, anarchist theory has had a significant "proto-green" content since at least Kropotkin's time.

This section of the FAQ expands upon section D.4 (["What is the relationship between capitalism and the ecological crisis?"](#)) in which we indicated that since capitalism is based upon the principle of "growth or death," a "green" capitalism is impossible. By its very nature capitalism must expand, creating new markets, increasing production and consumption, and so invading more ecosystems, using more resources, and upsetting the interrelations and delicate balances that exist with ecosystems.

Takis Fotopoulous has argued that the main reason why the project of "greening" capitalism is just a utopian dream *"lies in a fundamental contradiction that exists between the logic and dynamic of the growth economy, on the one hand, and the attempt to condition this dynamic with qualitative interests"* on the other [*"Development or Democracy?"*, p. 82, **Society and Nature** No. 7, pp. 57-92]. Under capitalism, ethics, nature and humanity all have a price tag. And that price tag is god. This is understandable as every hierarchical social system requires a belief-system. Under feudalism, the belief-system came from the Church, whereas under capitalism, it pretends to come from science, whose biased practitioners (usually funded by the state and capital) are the new priesthood. Like the old priesthods, only those members who produce "objective research" become famous and influential -- "objective research" being that which accepts the status quo as "natural" and produces what the elite want to hear (i.e. apologetics for capitalism and elite rule will always be praised as "objective" and "scientific" regardless of its actual scientific and factual content, the infamous "bell curve" and Malthus's "Law of Population" being classic examples). More importantly, capitalism needs science to be able to

measure and quantify everything in order to sell it. This mathematical faith is reflected in its politics and economics, where quantity is more important than quality, where 5 votes are better than 2 votes, where \$5 is better than \$2. And like all religions, capitalism needs sacrifice. In the name of "free enterprise," "economic efficiency," "stability" and "growth" it sacrifices individuality, freedom, humanity, and nature for the power and profits of the few.

Besides its alliance with the ecology movement, eco-anarchism also finds allies in the feminist and peace movements, which it regards, like the ecology movement, as implying the need for anarchist principles. Thus eco-anarchists think that global competition between nation-states is responsible not only for the devouring of nature but is also the primary cause of international military tensions, as nations seek to dominate each other by military force or the threat thereof. As international competition becomes more intense and weapons of mass destruction spread, the seeds are being sown for catastrophic global warfare involving nuclear, chemical, and/or biological weapons. Because such warfare would be the ultimate ecological disaster, eco-anarchism and the peace movement are but two aspects of the same basic project. Similarly, eco-anarchists recognise that domination of nature and male domination of women have historically gone hand in hand, so that eco-feminism is yet another aspect of eco-anarchism. Since feminism, ecology, and peace are key issues of the Green movement, anarchists believe that Greens are implicitly committed to anarchism, whether they realise it or not, and hence that they should adopt anarchist principles of direct political action rather than getting bogged down in trying to elect people to state offices.

Here we discuss some of the main themes of eco-anarchism and consider a few suggestions by non-anarchists about how to protect the environment, including the false free market capitalist claim that the answer to the ecological crisis is to privatise everything, the myth that population growth is a **cause** of ecological problems rather than the **effect** of deeper root-causes, and why green consumerism is doomed to failure. The issue of electing Green Parties to power will be addressed in section J.2.4 (["Surely voting for radical parties will be effective?"](#)) and so will be ignored here, as will the question of "single-issue" campaigns (like C.N.D. and Friends of the Earth), which will be discussed in section J.1.4 (["What attitude do anarchists take to 'single-issue' campaigns?"](#)).

For anarchists, unless we resolve the underlying contradictions within society, which stem from domination, hierarchy and a capitalist economy, ecological disruption will continue and grow, putting our Earth in increasing danger. We need to resist the system and create new values based on quality, not quantity. We must return the human factor to our alienated society before we alienate ourselves completely off the planet.

Many greens attack what they consider the "wrong ideas" of modern society, its "materialistic values" and counter-pose **new** ideas, more in tune with a green society. This approach, however, misses the point. Ideas and values do not "just happen", but are the **product** of a given set of social relationships. This means that it is not just a matter of changing our values in a way that places humanity in harmony with nature, but also of understanding the **social** and **structural** origins of the ecological crisis. Ideas and values **do** need to be challenged, but unless the authoritarian social relationships, hierarchy

and inequalities in power, i.e. the material base that produces these values and ideas, is also challenged and, more importantly, **changed** an ecological society is impossible. So unless ecologists recognise that this crisis did not develop in a social vacuum and is not the "fault" of people as **people** (as opposed to people in a hierarchical society), little can be done root out the systemic causes of the problems that we and the planet face.

# E.1 What do eco-anarchists propose instead of capitalism?

In place of capitalism, eco-anarchists favour ecologically responsible forms of libertarian socialism (see [section I](#)), with an economy based on the principles of complementarity with nature; decentralisation of large-scale industries, reskilling of workers, and a return to more artisan-like modes of production; the use of environment-friendly technologies, energy sources, and products; the use of recycled raw materials and renewable resources; and worker-controlled enterprises responsive to the wishes of local community assemblies and labour councils in which decisions are made by direct democracy. (See, e.g. Murray Bookchin, **Toward and Ecological Society** and **Remaking Society**). Such an economy would be "steady-state," meaning that the rate of resource depletion would equal the rate of renewal and that it would not be subject to disastrous collapses in the absence of quantitative growth or stimulation by military spending.

As Bookchin emphasises, however, the ecological crisis stems not only from capitalism but from the principle of domination itself (see [D.4](#)) -- a principle embodied in institutional hierarchies and relations of command and obedience which pervade society at many different levels. Thus, *"[w]ithout changing the most molecular relationships in society -- notably, those between men and women, adults and children, whites and other ethnic groups, heterosexuals and gays (the list, in fact, is considerable) -- society will be riddled by domination even in a socialistic 'classless' and 'non-exploitative' form. It would be infused by hierarchy even as it celebrated the dubious virtues of 'people's democracies,' 'socialism' and the 'public ownership' of 'natural resources,' And as long as hierarchy persists, as long as domination organises humanity around a system of elites, the project of dominating nature will continue to exist and inevitably lead our planet to ecological extinction"* [**Toward an Ecological Society**, p. 76].

So, although we focus our attention below on the economic aspects of the ecological crisis and its solution, it should be kept in mind that a complete solution must be multi-dimensional, addressing all aspects of the total system of hierarchy and domination. This means that only anarchism, with its emphasis on the elimination of coercive authority in **all** areas of life, goes to the real root of the ecological crisis.

## E.1.1 Why do eco-anarchists favour workers' control?

Eco-anarchists advocate workers' control of the economy as a necessary component of a steady-state economy. This means society-wide ownership of the means of production and all productive enterprises self-managed by their workers, as described further in [section I](#).

Most ecologists, even if they are not anarchists, recognise the pernicious ecological effects of the

capitalist "grow or die" principle; but unless they are also anarchists, they usually fail to make the connection between that principle and the **hierarchical form** of the typical capitalist corporation. In contrast, eco-anarchists emphasise that socially owned and worker self-managed firms, especially the type in which surpluses are shared equally among all full-time members, would be under far less pressure toward rapid expansion than the traditional capitalist firm.

The slower growth rate of co-operatives has been documented in a number of studies, which show that in the traditional capitalist firm, owners' and executives' percentage share of profits greatly increases as more employees are added to the payroll. This is because the corporate hierarchy is designed to facilitate exploitation by funnelling a disproportionate share of the surplus value produced by workers to those at the top of the pyramid (see [C.2, "Where do profits come from?"](#)) Such a design gives ownership and management a very strong incentive to expand, since, other things being equal (e.g. no recession), their income rises with every new employee hired. Hence the hierarchical form of the capitalist corporation is one of the main causes of runaway growth. [See e.g. Henry Levin "*Employment and Productivity of Producer Co-operatives*," in Robert Jackall and Henry Levin (eds.), **Worker Co-operatives in America**, UC Press, 1984; cf. David Schweickart, **Against Capitalism**].

By contrast, in an equal-share worker co-operative, the addition of more members simply means more people with whom the available pie will have to be equally divided -- a situation that immensely reduces the incentive to expand. Thus a libertarian-socialist economy will be able to function in a stationary state, requiring neither an expanding population nor technological innovation at a pace sufficient to guarantee increased production. Moreover, it will be able to switch from a growth state to a stationary state without excessive disruption. For if consumers start buying less, this will increase leisure time among producers, which will be shared by those firms affected first and then gradually spreading to other sectors. For these reasons, libertarian socialism based on producer co-operatives is essential for the type of steady-state economy necessary to solve the ecological crisis.

## E.1.2 Why do eco-anarchists emphasise direct democracy?

The eco-anarchist argument for direct (participatory) democracy is that effective protection of the planet's ecosystems requires that ordinary citizens be able to take part at the grassroots level in decision-making that affects their environment, since they are more likely to favour stringent environmental safeguards than the large, polluting special interests that now dominate the "representative" system of government. Thus a solution to the ecological crisis presupposes participatory democracy in the political sphere -- a transformation that would amount to a political revolution.

However, as Bakunin emphasised, a political revolution of this nature must be preceded by a **socioeconomic** revolution based on workers' self-management. This is because the daily experience of participatory decision-making, non-authoritarian modes of organisation, and personalistic human relationships in small work groups would foster creativity, spontaneity, responsibility, independence, and respect for individuality -- the qualities needed for a directly democratic political system to function effectively.



Given the amount of time that most people spend at the workplace, the political importance of turning it into a training ground for the development of libertarian and democratic values can scarcely be overstated. As history has demonstrated, political revolutions that are not preceded by mass psychological transformation -- that is, by a deconditioning from the master/slave attitudes absorbed from the current system -- result only in the substitution of new ruling elites for the old ones (e.g. Lenin becoming the new "Tsar" and Communist Party apparatchiks becoming the new "aristocracy"). Therefore, besides having a slower growth rate, worker co-operatives with democratic self-management would lay the psychological foundations for the kind of directly democratic political system necessary to protect the biosphere. Thus "green" libertarian socialism is the only proposal radical enough to solve the ecological crisis.

In contrast, free market capitalism (an extreme example of this viewpoint being right-wing "libertarianism") not only cannot solve the ecological crisis but would in fact exacerbate it. Besides the fact that right libertarians do not propose to dismantle capitalism, which is necessarily based on "grow or die," they also do not wish to dismantle the hierarchical structure of the capitalist firm, which contributes its own greed-driven pressure for expansion, as discussed above. (Indeed, right-libertarian literature is full of arguments showing that hierarchical firms are necessary for reasons of "efficiency.") But since there would be no state regulatory apparatus to mitigate any of the negative ecological effects of capitalist expansion, "free market" capitalism would be even more environmentally malignant than the present system.

In sections E.2, to E.5 we discuss and refute some spurious free market capitalist "solutions" to the ecological crisis. Section E.7 discusses why "*green consumerism*," another basic capitalist assumption, is also doomed to failure.

## F.10 Would laissez-faire capitalism be stable?

Unsurprisingly, right-libertarians combine their support for "absolute property rights" with a whole-hearted support for laissez-faire capitalism. In such a system (which they maintain, to quote Ayn Rand, is an "*unknown ideal*") everything would be private property and there would be few (if any) restrictions on "voluntary exchanges." "Anarcho"-capitalists are the most extreme of defenders of pure capitalism, urging that the state itself be privatised and no voluntary exchange made illegal (for example, children would be considered the property of their parents and it would be morally right to turn them into child prostitutes -- the child has the option of leaving home if they object).

As there have been no example of "pure" capitalism it is difficult to say whether their claims about are true (for a discussion of a close approximation see the section [F.10.3](#)). This section of the FAQ is an attempt to discover whether such a system would be stable or whether it would be subject to the usual booms and slumps. Before starting we should note that there is some disagreement within the right-libertarian camp itself on this subject (although instead of stability they usually refer to "equilibrium" -- which is an economics term meaning that all of a societies resources are fully utilised).

In general terms, most right-Libertarians' reject the concept of equilibrium as such and instead stress that the economy is inherently a dynamic (this is a key aspect of the Austrian school of economics). Such a position is correct, of course, as such noted socialists as Karl Marx and Michal Kalecki and capitalist economists as Keynes recognised long ago. There seems to be two main schools of thought on the nature of disequilibrium. One, inspired by von Mises, maintains that the actions of the entrepreneur/capitalist results in the market co-ordinating supply and demand and another, inspired by Joseph Schumpeter, who question whether markets co-ordinate because entrepreneurs are constantly innovating and creating new markets, products and techniques.

Of course both actions happen and we suspect that the differences in the two approaches are not important. The important thing to remember is that "anarcho"-capitalists and right-libertarians in general reject the notion of equilibrium -- but when discussing their utopia they do not actually indicate this! For example, most "anarcho"-capitalists will maintain that the existence of government (and/or unions) causes unemployment by either stopping capitalists investing in new lines of industry or forcing up the price of labour above its market clearing level (by, perhaps, restricting immigration, minimum wages, taxing profits). Thus, we are assured, the worker will be better off in "pure" capitalism because of the unprecedented demand for labour it will create. However, full employment of labour is an equilibrium in economic terms and that, remember, is impossible due to the dynamic nature of the system. When pressed, they will usually admit there will be periods of unemployment as the market adjusts or that full unemployment actually means under a certain percentage of unemployment. Thus, if you (rightly) reject the notion of equilibrium you also reject the idea of full employment and so the labour market becomes a buyers market and labour is at a massive disadvantage.

The right-libertarian case is based upon logical deduction, and the premises required to show that laissez-faire will be stable are somewhat incredible. If banks do not set the wrong interest rate, if companies do not extend too much trade credit, if workers are willing to accept (real wage related) pay cuts, if workers altruistically do not abuse their market power in a fully employed society, if interest rates provide the correct information, if capitalists predict the future relatively well, if banks and companies do not suffer from isolation paradoxes, then, perhaps, laissez-faire will be stable.

So, will laissez-faire capitalism be stable? Let us see by analysing the assumptions of right-libertarianism -- namely that there will be full employment and that a system of private banks will stop the business cycle. We will start on the banking system first (in section [F.10.1](#)) followed by the effects of the labour market on economic stability (in section [F.10.2](#)). Then we will indicate, using the example of 19th century America, that actually existing ("impure") laissez-faire was very unstable.

Explaining booms and busts by state action plays an ideological convenience as it exonerates market processes as the source of instability within capitalism. We hope to indicate in the next two sections why the business cycle is inherent in the system (see also sections [C.7](#), [C.8](#) and [C.9](#)).

## F.10.1 Would privatising banking make capitalism stable?

It is claimed that the existence of the state (or, for minimal statist, government policy) is the cause of the business cycle (recurring economic booms and slumps). This is because the government either sets interest rates too low or expands the money supply (usually by easing credit restrictions and lending rates, sometimes by just printing fiat money). This artificially increases investment as capitalists take advantage of the artificially low interest rates. The real balance between savings and investment is broken, leading to over-investment, a drop in the rate of profit and so a slump (which is quite socialist in a way, as many socialists also see over-investment as the key to understanding the business cycle, although they obviously attribute the slump to different causes -- namely the nature of capitalist production, not that the credit system does not play its part -- see section [C.7](#)).

In the words of Austrian Economist W. Duncan Reekie, "*[t]he business cycle is generated by monetary expansion and contraction . . . When new money is printed it appears as if the supply of savings has increased. Interest rates fall and businessmen are misled into borrowing additional funds to finance extra investment activity . . . This would be of no consequence if it had been the outcome of [genuine saving] . . . -but the change was government induced. The new money reaches factor owners in the form of wages, rent and interest . . . the factor owners will then spend the higher money incomes in their existing consumption:investment proportions . . . Capital goods industries will find their expansion has been in error and malinvestments have been incoordinated.*" [**Markets, Entrepreneurs and Liberty**, pp. 68-9]

In other words, there has been "*wasteful mis-investment due to government interference with the market.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 69] In response to this (negative) influence in the workings of the market, it is

suggested by right-libertarians that a system of private banks should be used and that interest rates are set by them, via market forces. In this way an interest rate that matches the demand and supply for savings will be reached and the business cycle will be no more. By truly privatising the credit market, it is hoped by the business cycle will finally stop.

Unsurprisingly, this particular argument has its weak points and in this section of the FAQ we will try to show exactly why this theory is wrong.

Let us start with Reekie's starting point. He states that the "*main problem*" of the slump is "*why is there suddenly a 'cluster' of business errors? Businessmen and entrepreneurs are market experts (otherwise they would not survive) and why should they all make mistakes simultaneously?*" [Op. Cit., p. 68] It is this "*cluster*" of mistakes that the Austrians' take as evidence that the business cycle comes from outside the workings of the market (i.e. is exogenous in nature). Reekie argues that an "*error cluster only occurs when all entrepreneurs have received the wrong signals on potential profitability, and all have received the signals simultaneously through government interference with the money supply.*" [Op. Cit., p. 74] But is this **really** the case?

The simple fact is that groups of (rational) individuals can act in the same way based on the same information and this can lead to a collective problem. For example, we do not consider it irrational that everyone in a building leaves it when the fire alarm goes off and that the flow of people can cause hold-ups at exits. Neither do we think that it is unusual that traffic jams occur, after all those involved are all trying to get to work (i.e. they are reacting to the same desire). Now, is it so strange to think that capitalists who all see the same opportunity for profit in a specific market decide to invest in it? Or that the aggregate outcome of these individually rational decisions may be irrational (i.e. cause a glut in the market)?

In other words, a "cluster" of business failures may come about because a group of capitalists, acting in isolation, over-invest in a given market. They react to the same information (namely super profits in market X), arrange loans, invest and produce commodities to meet demand in that market. However, the aggregate result of these individually rational actions is that the aggregate supply far exceeds demand, causing a slump in that market and, perhaps, business failures. The slump in this market (and the potential failure of some firms) has an impact on the companies that supplied them, the companies that are dependent on their employees wages/demand, the banks that supplied the credit and so forth. The accumulative impact of this slump (or failures) on the chain of financial commitments of which they are but one link can be large and, perhaps, push an economy into general depression. Thus the claim that it is something external to the system that causes depression is flawed.

It could be claimed the interest rate is the problem, that it does not accurately reflect the demand for investment or relate it to the supply of savings. But, as we argued in section [C.8](#), it is not at all clear that the interest rate provides the necessary information to capitalists. They need investment information for their specific industry, but the interest rate is cross-industry. Thus capitalists in market X do not know if the investment in market X is increasing and so this lack of information can easily cause "mal-

investment" as over-investment (and so over-production) occurs. As they have no way of knowing what the investment decisions of their competitors are or how these decisions will affect an already unknown future, capitalists may over-invest in certain markets and the net effects of this aggregate mistake can expand throughout the whole economy and cause a general slump. In other words, a cluster of business failures can be accounted for by the workings of the market itself and **not** the (existence of) government.

This is **one** possible reason for an internally generated business cycle but that is not the only one. Another is the role of class struggle which we discuss in the [next section](#) and yet another is the endogenous nature of the money supply itself. This account of money (proposed strongly by, among others, the post-Keynesian school) argues that the money supply is a function of the demand for credit, which itself is a function of the level of economic activity. In other words, the banking system creates as much money as people need and any attempt to control that creation will cause economic problems and, perhaps, crisis (interestingly, this analysis has strong parallels with mutualist and individualist anarchist theories on the causes of capitalist exploitation and the business cycle). Money, in other words, emerges from **within** the system and so the right-libertarian attempt to "blame the state" is simply wrong.

Thus what is termed "credit money" (created by banks) is an essential part of capitalism and would exist without a system of central banks. This is because money is created from within the system, in response to the needs of capitalists. In a word, money is endogenous and credit money an essential part of capitalism.

Right-libertarians do not agree. Reekie argues that *"[o]nce fractional reserve banking is introduced, however, the supply of money substitutes will include fiduciary media. The ingenuity of bankers, other financial intermediaries and the endorsement and **guaranteeing of their activities by governments and central banks** has ensured that the quantity of fiat money is immense."* [Op. Cit., p. 73]

Therefore, what "anarcho"-capitalists and other right-libertarians seem to be actually complaining about when they argue that "state action" creates the business cycle by creating excess money is that the state **allows** bankers to meet the demand for credit by creating it. This makes sense, for the first fallacy of this sort of claim is how could the state **force** bankers to expand credit by loaning more money than they have savings. And this seems to be the normal case within capitalism -- the central banks accommodate bankers activity, they do not force them to do it. Alan Holmes, a senior vice president at the New York Federal Reserve, stated that:

*"In the real world, banks extend credit, creating deposits in the process, and look for the reserves later. The question then becomes one of whether and how the Federal Reserve will accommodate the demand for reserves. In the very short run, the Federal Reserve has little or no choice about accommodating that demand, over time, its influence can obviously be felt."* [quoted by Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 220]

(Although we must stress that central banks are **not** passive and do have many tools for affecting the supply of money. For example, central banks can operate "tight" money policies which can have

significant impact on an economy and, via creating high enough interest rates, the demand for money.)

It could be argued that because central banks exist, the state creates an "environment" which bankers take advantage off. By not being subject to "free market" pressures, bankers could be tempted to make more loans than they would otherwise in a "pure" capitalist system (i.e. create credit money). The question arises, would "pure" capitalism generate sufficient market controls to stop banks loaning in excess of available savings (i.e. eliminate the creation of credit money/fiduciary media).

It is to this question we now turn.

As noted above, the demand for credit is generated from **within** the system and the comments by Holmes reinforce this. Capitalists seek credit in order to make money and banks create it precisely because they are also seeking profit. What right-libertarians actually object to is the government (via the central bank) **accommodating** this creation of credit. If only the banks could be forced to maintain a savings to loans ration of one, then the business cycle would stop. But is this likely? Could market forces ensure that bankers pursue such a policy? We think not -- simply because the banks are profit making institutions. As post-Keynesianist Hyman Minsky argues, "*[b]ecause bankers live in the same expectational climate as businessmen, profit-seeking bankers will find ways of accommodating their customers. . . . Banks and bankers are not passive managers of money to lend or to invest; they are in business to maximise profits. . . .*" [quoted by L. Randall Wray, **Money and Credit in Capitalist Economies**, p. 85]

This is recognised by Reekie, in passing at least (he notes that "*fiduciary media could still exist if bankers offered them and clients accepted them*" [Op. Cit., p. 73]). Bankers will tend to try and accommodate their customers and earn as much money as possible. Thus Charles P. Kindleberger comments that monetary expansion "*is systematic and endogenous rather than random and exogenous*" seem to fit far better the reality of capitalism than the Austrian and right-libertarian viewpoint [**Manias, Panics, and Crashes**, p. 59] and post-Keynesian L. Randall Wray argues that "*the money supply . . . is more obviously endogenous in the monetary systems which predate the development of a central bank.*" [Op. Cit., p. 150]

In other words, the money supply cannot be directly controlled by the central bank since it is determined by private decisions to enter into debt commitments to finance spending. Given that money is generated from **within** the system, can market forces ensure the non-expansion of credit (i.e. that the demand for loans equals the supply of savings)? To begin to answer this question we must note that investment is "*essentially determined by expected profitability.*" [Philip Arestis, **The Post-Keynesian Approach to Economics**, p. 103] This means that the actions of the banks cannot be taken in isolation from the rest of the economy. Money, credit and banks are an essential part of the capitalist system and they cannot be artificially isolated from the expectations, pressures and influences of that system.

Let us assume that the banks desire to maintain a loans to savings ratio of one and try to adjust their interest rates accordingly. Firstly, changes in the rate of interest "*produce only a very small, if any,*

*movement in business investment*" according to empirical evidence [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 82-83] and that *"the demand for credit is extremely inelastic with respect to interest rates."* [L. Randall Wray, **Op. Cit.**, p. 245] Thus, to keep the supply of savings in line with the demand for loans, interest rates would have to increase greatly (indeed, trying to control the money supply by controlling the monetary bases in this way will only lead to very big fluctuations in interest rates). And increasing interest rates has a couple of paradoxical effects.

According to economists Joseph Stiglitz and Andrew Weiss (in *"Credit Rationing in Markets with Imperfect Knowledge"*, **American Economic Review**, no. 71, pp. 393-410) interest rates are subject to what is called the *"lemons problem"* (asymmetrical information between buyer and seller). Stiglitz and Weiss applied the *"lemons problem"* to the credit market and argued (and unknowingly repeated Adam Smith) that at a given interest rate, lenders will earn lower return by lending to bad borrowers (because of defaults) than to good ones. If lenders try to increase interest rates to compensate for this risk, they may chase away good borrowers, who are unwilling to pay a higher rate, while perversely not chasing away incompetent, criminal, or malignantly optimistic borrowers. This means that an increase in interest rates may actually increase the possibilities of crisis, as more loans may end up in the hands of defaulters.

This gives banks a strong incentive to keep interest rates lower than they otherwise could be. Moreover, *"increases in interest rates make it more difficult for economic agents to meet their debt repayments"* [Philip Arestis, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 237-8] which means when interest rates **are** raised, defaults will increase and place pressures on the banking system. At high enough short-term interest rates, firms find it hard to pay their interest bills, which cause/increase cash flow problems and so *"[s]harp increases in short term interest rates . . . leads to a fall in the present value of gross profits after taxes (quasi-rents) that capital assets are expected to earn."* [Hyman Minsky, **Post-Keynesian Economic Theory**, p. 45]

In addition, *"production of most investment goods is undertaken on order and requires time for completion. A rise in interest rates is not likely to cause firms to abandon projects in the process of production . . . This does not mean . . . that investment is completely unresponsive to interest rates. A large increase in interest rates causes a 'present value reversal', forcing the marginal efficiency of capital to fall below the interest rate. If the long term interest rate is also pushed above the marginal efficiency of capital, the project may be abandoned."* [Wray, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 172-3] In other words, investment takes **time** and there is a lag between investment decisions and actual fixed capital investment. So if interest rates vary during this lag period, initially profitable investments may become white elephants.

As Michal Kalecki argued, the rate of interest must be lower than the rate of profit otherwise investment becomes pointless. The incentive for a firm to own and operate capital is dependent on the prospective rate of profit on that capital relative to the rate of interest at which the firm can borrow at. The higher the interest rate, the less promising investment becomes.

If investment is unresponsive to all but very high interest rates (as we indicated above), then a privatised banking system will be under intense pressure to keep rates low enough to maintain a boom (by, perhaps, creating credit above the amount available as savings). And if it does this, over-investment and crisis is the eventual outcome. If it does not do this and increases interest rates then consumption and investment will dry up as interest rates rise and the defaulters (honest and dishonest) increase and a crisis will eventually occur.

This is because increasing interest rates may increase savings **but** it also reduce consumption (*"high interest rates also deter both consumers and companies from spending, so that the domestic economy is weakened and unemployment rises"* [Paul Ormerod, **The Death of Economics**, p. 70]). This means that firms can face a drop off in demand, causing them problems and (perhaps) leading to a lack of profits, debt repayment problems and failure. An increase in interest rates also reduces demand for investment goods, which also can cause firms problems, increase unemployment and so on. So an increase in interest rates (particularly a sharp rise) could reduce consumption and investment (i.e. reduce aggregate demand) and have a ripple effect throughout the economy which could cause a slump to occur.

In other words, interest rates and the supply and demand of savings/loans they are meant to reflect may not necessarily move an economy towards equilibrium (if such a concept is useful). Indeed, the workings of a "pure" banking system without credit money may increase unemployment as demand falls in both investment and consumption in response to high interest rates and a general shortage of money due to lack of (credit) money resulting from the "tight" money regime implied by such a regime (i.e. the business cycle would still exist). This was the case of the failed Monetarist experiments on the early 1980s when central banks in America and Britain tried to pursue a "tight" money policy. The "tight" money policy did not, in fact, control the money supply. All it did do was increase interest rates and lead to a serious financial crisis and a deep recession (as Wray notes, *"the central bank uses tight money policies to raise interest rates"* [Op. Cit., p. 262]). This recession, we must note, also broke the backbone of working class resistance and the unions in both countries due to the high levels of unemployment it generated. As intended, we are sure.

Such an outcome would not surprise anarchists, as this was a key feature of the Individualist and Mutualist Anarchists' arguments against the "money monopoly" associated with specie money. They argued that the "money monopoly" created a "tight" money regime which reduced the demand for labour by restricting money and credit and so allowed the exploitation of labour (i.e. encouraged wage labour) and stopped the development of non-capitalist forms of production. Thus Lysander Spooner's comments that workers need *"money capital to enable them to buy the raw materials upon which to bestow their labour, the implements and machinery with which to labour . . . Unless they get this capital, they must all either work at a disadvantage, or not work at all. A very large portion of them, to save themselves from starvation, have no alternative but to sell their labour to others . . ."* [A Letter to Grover Cleveland, p. 39] It is interesting to note that workers **did** do well during the 1950s and 1960s under a "liberal" money regime than they did under the "tighter" regimes of the 1980s and 1990s.

We should also note that an extended period of boom will encourage banks to make loans more freely. According to Minsky's *"financial instability model"* crisis (see *"The Financial Instability Hypothesis"* in



**Post-Keynesian Economic Theory** for example) is essentially caused by risky financial practices during periods of financial tranquillity. In other words, *"stability is destabilising."* In a period of boom, banks are happy and the increased profits from companies are flowing into their vaults. Over time, bankers note that they can use a reserve system to increase their income and, due to the general upward swing of the economy, consider it safe to do so (and given that they are in competition with other banks, they may provide loans simply because they are afraid of losing customers to more flexible competitors). This increases the instability within the system (as firms increase their debts due to the flexibility of the banks) and produces the possibility of crisis if interest rates are increased (because the ability of business to fulfil their financial commitments embedded in debts deteriorates).

Even if we assume that interest rates **do** work as predicted in theory, it is false to maintain that there is one interest rate. This is not the case. *"Concentration of capital leads to unequal access to investment funds, which obstructs further the possibility of smooth transitions in industrial activity. Because of their past record of profitability, large enterprises have higher credit ratings and easier access to credit facilities, and they are able to put up larger collateral for a loan."* [Michael A. Bernstein, **The Great Depression**, p. 106] As we noted in section [C.5.1](#), the larger the firm, the lower the interest rate they have to pay. Thus banks routinely lower their interest rates to their best clients even though the future is uncertain and past performance cannot and does not indicate future returns. Therefore it seems a bit strange to maintain that the interest rate will bring savings and loans into line if there are different rates being offered.

And, of course, private banks cannot affect the underlying fundamentals that drive the economy -- like productivity, working class power and political stability -- any more than central banks (although central banks can influence the speed and gentleness of adjustment to a crisis).

Indeed, given a period of full employment a system of private banks may actually speed up the coming of a slump. As we argue in the [next section](#), full employment results in a profits squeeze as firms face a tight labour market (which drives up costs) and, therefore, increased workers' power at the point of production and in their power of exit. In a central bank system, capitalists can pass on these increasing costs to consumers and so maintain their profit margins for longer. This option is restricted in a private banking system as banks would be less inclined to devalue their money. This means that firms will face a profits squeeze sooner rather than later, which will cause a slump as firms cannot make ends meet. As Reekie notes, inflation *"can temporarily reduce employment by postponing the time when misdirected labour will be laid off"* but as Austrians (like Monetarists) think *"inflation is a monetary phenomenon"* he does not understand the real causes of inflation and what they imply for a "pure" capitalist system [Op. Cit., p. 67, p. 74]. As Paul Ormerod points out *"the claim that inflation is always and everywhere purely caused by increases in the money supply, and that there the rate of inflation bears a stable, predictable relationship to increases in the money supply is ridiculous."* And he notes that *"[i]ncreases in the rate of inflation tend to be linked to falls in unemployment, and vice versa"* which indicates its **real** causes -- namely in the balance of class power and in the class struggle. [**The Death of Economics**, p. 96, p. 131]

Moreover, if we do take the Austrian theory of the business cycle at face value we are drawn to conclusion that in order to finance investment savings must be increased. But to maintain or increase the stock of loanable savings, inequality must be increased. This is because, unsurprisingly, rich people save a larger proportion of their income than poor people and the proportion of profits saved are higher than the proportion of wages. But increasing inequality (as we argued in section [F.3.1](#)) makes a mockery of right-libertarian claims that their system is based on freedom or justice.

This means that the preferred banking system of "anarcho"-capitalism implies increasing, not decreasing, inequality within society. Moreover, most firms (as we indicated in section [C.5.1](#)) fund their investments with their own savings which would make it hard for banks to loan these savings out as they could be withdrawn at any time. This could have serious implications for the economy, as banks refuse to fund new investment simply because of the uncertainty they face when accessing if their available savings can be loaned to others (after all, they can hardly loan out the savings of a customer who is likely to demand them at any time). And by refusing to fund new investment, a boom could falter and turn to slump as firms do not find the necessary orders to keep going.

So, would market forces create "sound banking"? The answer is probably not. The pressures on banks to make profits come into conflict with the need to maintain their savings to loans ration (and so the confidence of their customers). As Wray argues, *"as banks are profit seeking firms, they find ways to increase their liabilities which don't entail increases in reserve requirements"* and *"[i]f banks share the profit expectations of prospective borrowers, they can create credit to allow [projects/investments] to proceed."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 295, p. 283] This can be seen from the historical record. As Kindleberger notes, *"the market will create new forms of money in periods of boom to get around the limit"* imposed on the money supply [**Op. Cit.**, p. 63]. Trade credit is one way, for example. Under the Monetarist experiments of 1980s, there was *"deregulation and central bank constraints raised interest rates and created a moral hazard -- banks made increasingly risky loans to cover rising costs of issuing liabilities. Rising competition from nonbanks and tight money policy forced banks to lower standards and increase rates of growth in an attempt to 'grow their way to profitability'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 293]

Thus credit money ("fiduciary media") is an attempt to overcome the scarcity of money within capitalism, particularly the scarcity of specie money. The pressures that banks face within "actually existing" capitalism would still be faced under "pure" capitalism. It is likely (as Reekie acknowledges) that credit money would still be created in response to the demands of business people (although not at the same level as is currently the case, we imagine). The banks, seeking profits themselves and in competition for customers, would be caught between maintaining the value of their business (i.e. their money) and the needs to maximise profits. As a boom develops, banks would be tempted to introduce credit money to maintain it as increasing the interest rate would be difficult and potentially dangerous (for reasons we noted above). Thus, if credit money is not forthcoming (i.e. the banks stick to the Austrian claims that loans must equal savings) then the rise in interest rates required will generate a slump. If it is forthcoming, then the danger of over-investment becomes increasingly likely. All in all, the business cycle is part of capitalism and **not** caused by "external" factors like the existence of government.

As Reekie notes, to Austrians *"ignorance of the future is endemic"* [Op. Cit., p. 117] but you would be forgiven for thinking that this is not the case when it comes to investment. An individual firm cannot know whether its investment project will generate the stream of returns necessary to meet the stream of payment commitments undertaken to finance the project. And neither can the banks who fund those projects. Even **if** a bank does not get tempted into providing credit money in excess of savings, it cannot predict whether other banks will do the same or whether the projects it funds will be successful. Firms, looking for credit, may turn to more flexible competitors (who practice reserve banking to some degree) and the inflexible bank may see its market share and profits decrease. After all, commercial banks *"typically establish relations with customers to reduce the uncertainty involved in making loans. Once a bank has entered into a relationship with a customer, it has strong incentives to meet the demands of that customer."* [Wray, Op. Cit., p. 85]

There are example of fully privatised banks. For example, in the United States *"which was without a central bank after 1837"* "the major banks in New York were in a bind between their roles as profit seekers, which made them contributors to the instability of credit, and as possessors of country deposits against whose instability they had to guard." [Kindleberger, Op. Cit., p. 85]

In Scotland, the banks were unregulated between 1772 and 1845 but *"the leading commercial banks accumulated the notes of lesser ones, as the Second Bank of the United States did contemporaneously in [the USA], ready to convert them to specie if they thought they were getting out of line. They served, that is, as an informal controller of the money supply. For the rest, as so often, historical evidence runs against strong theory, as demonstrated by the country banks in England from 1745 to 1835, wildcat banking in Michigan in the 1830s, and the latest experience with bank deregulation in Latin America."* [Op. Cit., p. 82] And we should note there were a few banking "wars" during the period of deregulation in Scotland which forced a few of the smaller banks to fail as the bigger ones refused their money and that there was a major bank failure in the Ayr Bank.

Kindleberger argues that central banking *"arose to impose control on the instability of credit"* and did not cause the instability which right-libertarians maintain it does. And as we note in section [F.10.3](#), the USA suffered massive economic instability during its period without central banking. Thus, **if** credit money **is** the cause of the business cycle, it is likely that a "pure" capitalism will still suffer from it just as much as "actually existing" capitalism (either due to high interest rates or over-investment).

In general, as the failed Monetarist experiments of the 1980s prove, trying to control the money supply is impossible. The demand for money is dependent on the needs of the economy and any attempt to control it will fail (and cause a deep depression, usually via high interest rates). The business cycle, therefore, is an endogenous phenomenon caused by the normal functioning of the capitalist economic system. Austrian and right-libertarian claims that *"slump flows boom, but for a totally unnecessary reason: government inspired mal-investment"* [Reekie, Op. Cit., p. 74] are simply wrong. Over-investment **does** occur, but it is **not** "inspired" by the government. It is "inspired" by the banks need to make profits from loans and from businesses need for investment funds which the banks accommodate. In other words, by the nature of the capitalist system.

## F.10.2 How does the labour market effect capitalism?

In many ways, the labour market is the one that affects capitalism the most. The right-libertarian assumption (like that of mainstream economics) is that markets clear and, therefore, the labour market will also clear. As this assumption has rarely been proven to be true in actuality (i.e. periods of full employment within capitalism are few and far between), this leaves its supporters with a problem -- reality contradicts the theory.

The theory predicts full employment but reality shows that this is not the case. Since we are dealing with logical deductions from assumptions, obviously the theory cannot be wrong and so we must identify external factors which cause the business cycle (and so unemployment). In this way attention is diverted away from the market and its workings -- after all, it is assumed that the capitalist market works -- and onto something else. This "something else" has been quite a few different things (most ridiculously, sun spots in the case of one of the founders of marginalist economics, William Stanley Jevons). However, these days most pro-free market capitalist economists and right-libertarians have now decided it is the state.

In this section of the FAQ we will present a case that maintains that the assumption that markets clear is false at least for one, unique, market -- namely, the market for labour. As the fundamental assumption underlying "free market" capitalism is false, the logically consistent superstructure built upon comes crashing down. Part of the reason why capitalism is unstable is due to the commodification of labour (i. e. people) and the problems this creates. The state itself can have positive and negative impacts on the economy, but removing it or its influence will not solve the business cycle.

Why is this? Simply due to the nature of the labour market.

Anarchists have long realised that the capitalist market is based upon inequalities and changes in power. Proudhon argued that "*[t]he manufacturer says to the labourer, 'You are as free to go elsewhere with your services as I am to receive them. I offer you so much.'* The merchant says to the customer, '*Take it or leave it; you are master of your money, as I am of my goods. I want so much.'* Who will yield? The weaker." He, like all anarchists, saw that domination, oppression and exploitation flow from inequalities of market/economic power and that the "*power of invasion lies in superior strength.*" [**What is Property?**, p. 216, p. 215]

This applies with greatest force to the labour market. While mainstream economics and right-libertarian variations of it refuse to acknowledge that the capitalist market is based upon hierarchy and power, anarchists (and other socialists) do not share this opinion. And because they do not share this understanding with anarchists, right-libertarians will never be able to understand capitalism or its dynamics and development. Thus, when it comes to the labour market, it is essential to remember that the balance of power within it is the key to understanding the business cycle. Thus the economy must be understood as a system of power.

So how does the labour market effect capitalism? Let us consider a growing economy, on that is coming out of a recession. Such a growing economy stimulates demand for employment and as unemployment falls, the costs of finding workers increase and wage and condition demands of existing workers intensify. As the economy is growing and labour is scare, the threat associated with the hardship of unemployment is weakened. The share of profits is squeezed and in reaction to this companies begin to cut costs (by reducing inventories, postponing investment plans and laying off workers). As a result, the economy moves into a downturn. Unemployment rises and wage demands are moderated. Eventually, this enables the share of profits first of all to stabilise, and then rise. Such an *"interplay between profits and unemployment as the key determinant of business cycles"* is *"observed in the empirical data."* [Paul Ormerod, **The Death of Economics**, p. 188]

Thus, as an economy approaches full employment the balance of power on the labour market changes. The sack is no longer that great a threat as people see that they can get a job elsewhere easily. Thus wages and working conditions increase as companies try to get new (and keep) existing employees and output is harder to maintain. In the words of economist William Lazonick, labour *"that is able to command a higher price than previously because of the appearance of tighter labour markets is, by definition, labour that is highly mobile via the market. And labour that is highly mobile via the market is labour whose supply of effort is difficult for managers to control in the production process. Hence, the advent of tight labour markets generally results in more rapidly rising average costs . . . as well as upward shifts in the average cost curve. . ."* [**Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, p. 106]

In other words, under conditions of full-employment *"employers are in danger of losing the upper hand."* [Juliet B. Schor, **The Overworked American**, p. 75] Schor argues that *"employers have a structural advantage in the labour market, because there are typically more candidates ready and willing to endure this work marathon [of long hours] than jobs for them to fill."* [p. 71] Thus the labour market is usually a buyers market, and so the sellers have to compromise. In the end, workers adapt to this inequality of power and instead of getting what they want, they want what they get.

But under full employment this changes. As we argued in section [B.4.4](#) and section [C.7](#), in such a situation it is the bosses who have to start compromising. And they do not like it. As Schor notes, America *"has never experienced a sustained period of full employment. The closest we have gotten is the late 1960s, when the overall unemployment rate was under 4 percent for four years. But that experience does more to prove the point than any other example. The trauma caused to business by those years of a tight labour market was considerable. Since then, there has been a powerful consensus that the nation cannot withstand such a low rate of unemployment."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 75-76]

So, in other words, full employment is not good for the capitalist system due to the power full employment provides workers. Thus unemployment is a necessary requirement for a successful capitalist economy and not some kind of aberration in an otherwise healthy system. Thus "anarcho"-capitalist claims that "pure" capitalism will soon result in permanent full employment are false. Any moves towards full employment will result in a slump as capitalists see their profits squeezed from

below by either collective class struggle or by individual mobility in the labour market.

This was recognised by Individualist Anarchists like Benjamin Tucker, who argued that mutual banking would *"give an unheard of impetus to business, and consequently create an unprecedented demand for labour, -- a demand which would always be in excess of the supply, directly contrary of the present condition of the labour market."* [**The Anarchist Reader**, pp. 149-150] In other words, full employment would end capitalist exploitation, drive non-labour income to zero and ensure the worker the full value of her labour -- in other words, end capitalism. Thus, for most (if not all) anarchists the exploitation of labour is only possible when unemployment exists and the supply of labour exceeds the demand for it. Any move towards unemployment will result in a profits squeeze and either the end of capitalism or an economic slump.

Indeed, as we argued in the [last section](#), the extended periods of (approximately) full employment until the 1960s had the advantage that any profit squeeze could (in the short run anyway) be passed onto working class people in the shape of inflation. As prices rise, labour is made cheaper and profits margins supported. This option is restricted under a "pure" capitalism (for reasons we discussed in the [last section](#)) and so "pure" capitalism will be affected by full employment faster than "impure" capitalism.

As an economy approaches full employment, *"hiring new workers suddenly becomes much more difficult. They are harder to find, cost more, and are less experienced. Such shortages are extremely costly for a firm."* [Schor, **Op. Cit.**, p. 75] This encourages a firm to pass on these rises to society in the form of price rises, so creating inflation. Workers, in turn, try to maintain their standard of living. *"Every general increase in labour costs in recent years,"* note J. Brecher and J. Costello in the late 1970s, *"has followed, rather than preceded, an increase in consumer prices. Wage increases have been the result of workers' efforts to catch up after their incomes have already been eroded by inflation. Nor could it easily be otherwise. All a businessman has to do to raise a price . . . [is to] make an announcement. . . . Wage rates . . . are primarily determined by contracts"* and so cannot be easily adjusted in the short term. [**Common Sense for Bad Times**, p, 120]

These full employment pressures will still exist with "pure" capitalism (and due to the nature of the banking system will not have the safety value of inflation). This means that periodic profit squeezes will occur, due to the nature of a tight labour market and the increased power of workers this generates. This in turn means that a "pure" capitalism will be subject to periods of unemployment (as we argued in section [C.9](#)) and so still have a business cycle. This is usually acknowledged by right-libertarians in passing, although they seem to think that this is purely a "short-term" problem (it seems a strange "short-term" problem that continually occurs).

But such an analysis is denied by right-libertarians. For them government action, combined with the habit of many labour unions to obtain higher than market wage rates for their members, creates and exacerbates mass unemployment. This flows from the deductive logic of much capitalist economics. The basic assumption of capitalism is that markets clear. So if unemployment exists then it can only be because the price of labour (wages) is too high (Austrian Economist W. Duncan Reekie argues that

unemployment will "*disappear provided real wages are not artificially high*" [**Markets, Entrepreneurs and Liberty**, p. 72]).

Thus the assumption provokes the conclusion -- unemployment is caused by an unclearing market as markets always clear. And the cause for this is either the state or unions. But what if the labour market **cannot** clear without seriously damaging the power and profits of capitalists? What if unemployment is required to maximise profits by weakening labours' bargaining position on the market and so maximising the capitalists power? In that case unemployment is caused by capitalism, not by forces external to it.

However, let us assume that the right-libertarian theory is correct. Let us assume that unemployment is all the fault of the selfish unions and that a job-seeker "*who does not want to wait will always get a job in the unhampered market economy.*" [von Mises, **Human Action**, p. 595]

Would crushing the unions reduce unemployment? Let us assume that the unions have been crushed and government has been abolished (or, at the very least, become a minimum state). The aim of the capitalist class is to maximise their profits and to do this they invest in labour saving machinery and otherwise attempt to increase productivity. But increasing productivity means that the prices of goods fall and falling prices mean increasing real wages. It is high real wages that, according to right-libertarians, that cause unemployment. So as a reward for increasing productivity, workers will have to have their money wages cut in order to stop unemployment occurring! For this reason some employers might refrain from cutting wages in order to avoid damage to morale - potentially an important concern.

Moreover, wage contracts involve **time** -- a contract will usually agree a certain wage for a certain period. This builds in rigidity into the market, wages cannot be adjusted as quickly as other commodity prices. Of course, it could be argued that reducing the period of the contract and/or allowing the wage to be adjusted could overcome this problem. However, if we reduce the period of the contract then workers are at a suffer disadvantage as they will not know if they have a job tomorrow and so they will not be able to easily plan their future (an evil situation for anyone to be in). Moreover, even without formal contracts, wage renegotiation can be expensive. After all, it takes time to bargain (and time is money under capitalism) and wage cutting can involve the risk of the loss of mutual good will between employer and employee. And would **you** give your boss the power to "adjust" your wages as he/she thought was necessary? To do so would imply an altruistic trust in others not to abuse their power.

Thus a "pure" capitalism would be constantly seeing employment increase and decrease as productivity levels change. There exist important reasons why the labour market need not clear which revolve around the avoidance/delaying of wage cuts by the actions of capitalists themselves. Thus, given a choice between cutting wages for all workers and laying off some workers without cutting the wages of the remaining employees, it is unsurprising that capitalists usually go for the later. After all, the sack is an important disciplining device and firing workers can make the remaining employees more inclined to work harder and be more obedient.

And, of course, many employers are not inclined to hire over-qualified workers. This is because, once the economy picks up again, their worker has a tendency to move elsewhere and so it can cost them time and money finding a replacement and training them. This means that involuntary unemployment can easily occur, so reducing tendencies towards full employment even more. In addition, one of the assumptions of the standard marginalist economic model is one of decreasing returns to scale. This means that as employment increases, costs rise and so prices also rise (and so real wages fall). But in reality many industries have **increasing** returns to scale, which means that as production increases unit costs fall, prices fall and so real wages rise. Thus in such an economy unemployment would increase simply because of the nature of the production process!

Moreover, as we argued in-depth in section [C.9](#), a cut in money wages is not a neutral act. A cut in money wages means a reduction in demand for certain industries, which may have to reduce the wages of its employees (or fire them) to make ends meet. This could produce an accumulative effect and actually **increase** unemployment rather than reduce it.

In addition, there are no "self-correcting" forces at work in the labour market which will quickly bring employment back to full levels. This is for a few reasons. Firstly, the supply of labour cannot be reduced by cutting back production as in other markets. All we can do is move to other areas and hope to find work there. Secondly, the supply of labour can sometimes adjust to wage decreases in the wrong direction. Low wages might drive workers to offer a greater amount of labour (i.e. longer hours) to make up for any short fall (or to keep their job). This is usually termed the "*efficiency wage*" effect. Similarly, another family member may seek employment in order to maintain a given standard of living. Falling wages may cause the number of workers seeking employment to **increase**, causing a full further fall in wages and so on (and this is ignoring the effects of lowering wages on demand discussed in section [C.9](#)).

The paradox of piece work is an important example of this effect. As Schor argues, "*piece-rate workers were caught in a viscous downward spiral of poverty and overwork. . . . When rates were low, they found themselves compelled to make up in extra output what they were losing on each piece. But the extra output produced glutted the market and drove rates down further.*" [Juliet C. Schor, **The Overworked American**, p, 58]

Thus, in the face of reducing wages, the labour market may see an accumulative move away from (rather than towards) full employment. The right-libertarian argument is that unemployment is caused by real wages being too high which in turn flows from the assumption that markets clear. If there is unemployment, then the price of the commodity labour is too high -- otherwise supply and demand would meet and the market clear. But if, as we argued above, unemployment is essential to discipline workers then the labour market **cannot** clear except for short periods. If the labour market clears, profits are squeezed. Thus the claim that unemployment is caused by "too high" real wages is false (and as we argue in section [C.9](#), cutting these wages will result in deepening any slump and making recovery longer to come about).

In other words, the assumption that the labour market must clear is false, as is any assumption that



reducing wages will tend to push the economy quickly back to full employment. The nature of wage labour and the "commodity" being sold (i.e. human labour/time/liberty) ensure that it can never be the same as others. This has important implications for economic theory and the claims of right-libertarians, implications that they fail to see due to their vision of labour as a commodity like any other.

The question arises, of course, of whether, during periods of full employment, workers could not take advantage of their market power and gain increased workers' control, create co-operatives and so reform away capitalism. This was the argument of the Mutualist and Individualist anarchists and it does have its merits. However, it is clear (see section [J.5.12](#)) that bosses hate to have their authority reduced and so combat workers' control whenever they can. The logic is simple, if workers increase their control within the workplace the manager and bosses may soon be out of a job and (more importantly) they may start to control the allocation of profits. Any increase in working class militancy may provoke capitalists to stop/reduce investment and credit and so create the economic environment (i.e. increasing unemployment) necessary to undercut working class power.

In other words, a period of full unemployment is not sufficient to reform capitalism away. Full employment (nevermind any struggle over workers' control) will reduce profits and if profits are reduced then firms find it hard to repay debts, fund investment and provide profits for shareholders. This profits squeeze would be enough to force capitalism into a slump and any attempts at gaining workers' self-management in periods of high employment will help push it over the edge (after all, workers' control without control over the allocation of any surplus is distinctly phoney). Moreover, even if we ignore the effects of full employment may not last due to problems associated with over-investment (see section [C.7.2](#)), credit and interest rate problems (see section [F.10.1](#)) and realisation/aggregate demand disjoints. Full employment adds to the problems associated with the capitalist business cycle and so, if class struggle and workers power did not exist or cost problem, capitalism would still not be stable.

If equilibrium is a myth, then so is full employment. It seems somewhat ironic that "anarcho"-capitalists and other right-libertarians maintain that there will be equilibrium (full employment) in the one market within capitalism it can never actually exist in! This is usually quietly acknowledged by most right-libertarians, who mention in passing that some "temporary" unemployment **will** exist in their system -- but "temporary" unemployment is not full employment. Of course, you could maintain that all unemployment is "voluntary" and get round the problem by denying it, but that will not get us very far.

So it is all fine and well saying that "libertarian" capitalism would be based upon the maxim "*From each as they choose, to each as they are chosen.*" [Robert Nozick, **Anarchy, State, and Utopia**, p. 160] But if the labour market is such that workers have little option about what they "choose" to give and fear that they will **not** be chosen, then they are at a disadvantage when compared to their bosses and so "consent" to being treated as a resource from the capitalist can make a profit from. And so this will result in any "free" contract on the labour market favouring one party at the expense of the other -- as can be seen from "actually existing capitalism".

Thus any "free exchange" on the labour market will usually **not** reflect the true desires of working

people (and who will make all the "adjusting" and end up wanting what they get). Only when the economy is approaching full employment will the labour market start to reflect the true desires of working people and their wage start to approach its full product. And when this happens, profits are squeezed and capitalism goes into slump and the resulting unemployment disciplines the working class and restores profit margins. Thus full employment will be the exception rather than the rule within capitalism (and that is a conclusion which the historical record indicates).

In other words, in a normally working capitalist economy any labour contracts will not create relationships based upon freedom due to the inequalities in power between workers and capitalists. Instead, any contracts will be based upon domination, **not** freedom. Which prompts the question, how is libertarian capitalism **libertarian** if it erodes the liberty of a large class of people?

### F.10.3 Was laissez-faire capitalism stable?

Firstly, we must state that a pure laissez-faire capitalist system has not existed. This means that any evidence we present in this section can be dismissed by right-libertarians for precisely this fact -- it was not "pure" enough. Of course, if they were consistent, you would expect them to shun all historical and current examples of capitalism or activity within capitalism, but this they do not. The logic is simple -- if X is good, then it is permissible to use it. If X is bad, the system is not pure enough.

However, as right-libertarians **do** use historical examples so shall we. According to Murray Rothbard, there was "*quasi-laissez-faire industrialisation [in] the nineteenth century*" [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 264] and so we will use the example of nineteenth century America -- as this is usually taken as being the closest to pure laissez-faire -- in order to see if laissez-faire is stable or not.

Yes, we are well aware that 19th century USA was far from laissez-faire -- there was a state, protectionism, government economic activity and so on -- but as this example has been often used by right-Libertarians' themselves (for example, Ayn Rand) we think that we can gain a lot from looking at this imperfect approximation of "pure" capitalism (and as we argued in section [F.8](#), it is the "quasi" aspects of the system that counted in industrialisation, **not** the laissez-faire ones).

So, was 19th century America stable? No, it most definitely was not.

Firstly, throughout that century there were a continual economic booms and slumps. The last third of the 19th century (often considered as a heyday of private enterprise) was a period of profound instability and anxiety. Between 1867 and 1900 there were 8 complete business cycles. Over these 396 months, the economy expanded during 199 months and contracted during 197. Hardly a sign of great stability (since the end of world war II, only about a fifth of the time has spent in periods of recession or depression, by way of comparison). Overall, the economy went into a slump, panic or crisis in 1807, 1817, 1828, 1834, 1837, 1854, 1857, 1873, 1882, and 1893 (in addition, 1903 and 1907 were also crisis years).

Part of this instability came from the eras banking system. "*Lack of a central banking system,*" writes

Richard Du Boff, *"until the Federal Reserve act of 1913 made financial panics worse and business cycle swings more severe"* [**Accumulation and Power**, p. 177] It was in response to this instability that the Federal Reserve system was created; and as Doug Henwood notes *"the campaign for a more rational system of money and credit was not a movement of Wall Street vs. industry or regional finance, but a broad movement of elite bankers and the managers of the new corporations as well as academics and business journalists. The emergence of the Fed was the culmination of attempts to define a standard of value that began in the 1890s with the emergence of the modern professionally managed corporation owned not by its managers but dispersed public shareholders."* [**Wall Street**, p. 93] Indeed, the Bank of England was often forced to act as lender of last resort to the US, which had no central bank.

In the decentralised banking system of the 19th century, during panics thousands of banks would hoard resources, so starving the system for liquidity precisely at the moment it was most badly needed. The creation of trusts was one way in which capitalists tried to manage the system's instabilities (at the expense of consumers) and the corporation was a response to the outlawing of trusts. *"By internalising lots of the competitive system's gaps -- by bring more transactions within the same institutional walls -- corporations greatly stabilised the economy."* [Henwood, **Op. Cit.**, p. 94]

All during the hey-day of laissez faire we also find popular protests against the money system used, namely specie (in particular gold), which was considered as a hindrance to economic activity and expansion (as well as being a tool for the rich). The Individualist Anarchists, for example, considered the money monopoly (which included the use of specie as money) as the means by which capitalists ensured that *"the labourers . . . [are] kept in the condition of wage labourers,"* and reduced *"to the conditions of servants; and subject to all such extortions as their employers . . . may choose to practice upon them"*, indeed they became the *"mere tools and machines in the hands of their employers"*. With the end of this monopoly, *"[t]he amount of money, capable of being furnished . . . [would assure that all would] be under no necessity to act as a servant, or sell his or her labour to others."* [Lysander Spooner, **A Letter to Grover Cleveland**, p. 47, p. 39, p. 50, p. 41] In other words, a specie based system (as desired by many "anarcho"-capitalists) was considered a key way of maintaining wage labour and exploitation.

Interestingly, since the end of the era of the Gold Standard (and so commodity money) popular debate, protest and concern about money has disappeared. The debate and protest was in response to the **effects** of commodity money on the economy -- with many people correctly viewing the seriously restrictive monetary regime of the time responsible for economic problems and crisis as well as increasing inequalities. Instead radicals across the political spectrum urged a more flexible regime, one that did not cause wage slavery and crisis by reducing the amount of money in circulation when it could be used to expand production and reduce the impact of slumps. Needless to say, the Federal Reserve system in the USA was far from the institution these populists wanted (after all, it is run by and for the elite interests who desired its creation).

That the laissez-faire system was so volatile and panic-ridden suggests that "anarcho"-capitalist dreams of privatising everything, including banking, and everything will be fine are very optimistic at best (and, ironically, it was members of the capitalist class who lead the movement towards state-managed

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capitalism in the name of "sound money").

## C.9 Would laissez-faire capitalism reduce unemployment, as supporters of "free market" capitalism claim?

Firstly, we have to state that "actually existing capitalism" in the West actually manages unemployment to ensure high profit rates for the capitalist class (see [section C.8.3](#)) - market discipline for the working class, state protection for the ruling class, in other words. As Edward Herman points out:

*"Conservative economists have even developed a concept of a 'natural rate of unemployment' [which Herman defines as "the rate of unemployment preferred by the propertied classes"] . . . [which] is defined as the minimum level consistent with price level stability, but, as it is based on a highly abstract model that is not directly testable, the natural rate can only be inferred from the price level itself. That is, if prices are going up, unemployment is below the 'natural rate' and too low. . . Apart from the grossness of this kind of metaphysical legerdemain, the very concept of a natural rate of unemployment has a huge built-in bias. It takes as granted all the other institutional factors that influence the price level-unemployment trade-off (market structures and independent pricing power, business investment policies at home and abroad, the distribution of income, the fiscal and monetary mix, etc.) and focuses solely on the tightness of the labour market as the controllable variable. Inflation is the main threat, the labour market (i.e. wage rates and unemployment levels) is the locus of the solution to the problem." [Beyond Hypocrisy, p. 94]*

In a sense, it is understandable that the ruling class within capitalism desires to manipulate unemployment in this way and deflect questions about their profit, property and power onto the labour market. Managing depression (as indicated by high unemployment levels) allows greater profits to be extracted from workers as management hierarchy is more secure. When times are hard, workers with jobs think twice before standing up to their bosses and so work harder, for longer and in worse conditions. This ensures that surplus value is increased relative to real wages (indeed, in the USA, real wages have stagnated since 1973 while profits have grown massively). In addition, such a policy ensures that political discussion about investment, profits, power and so on ("*the other institutional factors*") are reduced and diverted because working class people are too busy trying to make ends meet.

Of course, it can be argued that as this "natural" rate is both invisible and can move, historical evidence is meaningless -- you can prove anything with an invisible, mobile value. But if this is the case then any attempts to maintain a "natural" rate is also meaningless as the only way to discover it is to watch inflation levels (and with an invisible, mobile value, the theory is always true after the fact -- if inflation rises as unemployment rises, then the natural rate has increased; if inflation falls as unemployment rises, it has fallen!). Which means that people are being made unemployed on the off-chance that the

unemployment level will drop below the (invisible and mobile) "natural" rate and harm the interests of the ruling class (high inflation rates harms interest incomes and full employment squeezes profits by increasing workers' power). Given that most mainstream economists subscribe to this fallacy, it just shows how the "science" accommodates itself to the needs of the powerful.

So, supporters of "free market" capitalism do have a point, "actually existing capitalism" has created high levels of unemployment. The question now arises, will a "purer" capitalism create full employment?

First, we should point out that some supporters of "free market" capitalism claim that the market has no tendency to equilibrium at all, which means full employment is impossible, but few explicitly state this obvious conclusion of their own theories. However, most claim that full employment can occur. Anarchists agree, full employment can occur in "free market" capitalism, but not for ever (nor for long periods). As the Polish economist Michal Kalecki pointed out in regards to pre-Keynesian capitalism, the *"reserve of capital equipment and the reserve army of unemployed are typical features of capitalist economy at least throughout a considerable part of the [business] cycle."* [quoted by George R. Feiwel, **The Intellectual Capital of Michal Kalecki**, p. 130]

Cycles of short periods of full employment and longer periods of rising and falling unemployment are actually a more likely outcome of "free market" capitalism than continued full employment. As we argued in sections [B.4.4](#) and [C.7.1](#) capitalism needs unemployment to function successfully and so "free market" capitalism will experience periods of boom and slump, with unemployment increasing and decreasing over time (as can be seen from 19th century capitalism). So, full employment under capitalism is unlikely to last long (nor would full employment booms fill a major part of the full business cycle). Moreover, the notion that capitalism naturally stays at equilibrium or that unemployment is temporary adjustments is false, even given the logic of neo-classical economics. As Proudhon argued:

*"The economists admit it [that machinery causes unemployment]: but here they repeat their eternal refrain that, after a lapse of time, the demand for the product having increased in proportion to the reduction in price [caused by the investment], labour in turn will come finally to be in greater demand than ever. Undoubtedly, **with time**, the equilibrium will be restored; but I must add again, the equilibrium will be no sooner restored at this point than it will be disturbed at another, because the spirit of invention never stops. . ."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, pp. 200-1]

That capitalism creates permanent unemployment and, indeed, needs it to function is a conclusion that few, if any, pro-"free market" capitalists subscribe to. Faced with the empirical evidence that full employment is rare in capitalism, they argue that reality is not close enough to their theories and must be changed (usually by weakening the power of labour by welfare "reform" and reducing "union power"). Thus reality is at fault, not the theory (to re-quote Proudhon, *"Political economy -- that is, proprietary despotism -- can never be in the wrong: it must be the proletariat."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 187]) So if

unemployment exists, then its because real wages are too high, not because capitalists need unemployment to discipline labour (see [section C.9.2](#) for evidence that the neo-classical theory is false). Or if real wages are falling as unemployment is rising, it can only mean that the real wage is not falling fast enough -- empirical evidence is never enough to falsify logical deductions from assumptions!

(As an aside, it is one of amazing aspects of the "science" of economics that empirical evidence is never enough to refute its claims. As the left-wing economist Nicholas Kaldor once pointed out, "[b]ut unlike any scientific theory, where the basic assumptions are chosen on the basis of direct observation of the phenomena the behaviour of which forms the subject-matter of the theory, the basic assumptions of economic theory are either of a kind that are unverifiable. . . or of a kind which are directly contradicted by observation." [Further Essays on Applied Economics, pp. 177-8] Or, if we take the standard economics expression "in the long run," we may point out that unless a time is actually given it will always remain unclear as to how much evidence must be gathered before one can accept or reject the theory.)

Of course, reality often has the last laugh on any ideology. For example, since the late 1970s and early 1980s right-wing capitalist parties have taken power in many countries across the world. These regimes made many pro-free market reforms, arguing that a dose of market forces would lower unemployment, increase growth and so on. The reality proved somewhat different. For example, in the UK, by the time the Labour Party under Tony Blair come back to office in 1997, unemployment (while falling) was still higher than it had been when the last Labour government left office in May, 1979. 18 years of labour market reform had not reduced unemployment. It is no understatement to argue, in the words of two critics of neo-liberalism, that the *"performance of the world economy since capital was liberalised has been worse than when it was tightly controlled"* and that *"[t]hus far, [the] actual performance [of liberalised capitalism] has not lived up to the propaganda."* [Larry Elliot and Dan Atkinson, **The Age of Insecurity**, p. 274, p. 223]

Lastly, it is apparent merely from a glance at the history of capitalism during its laissez-faire heyday in the 19th century that "free" competition among workers for jobs does not lead to full employment. Between 1870 and 1913, unemployment was at an average of 5.7% in the 16 more advanced capitalist countries. This compares to an average of 7.3% in 1913-50 and 3.1% in 1950-70. If laissez-faire did lead to full employment, these figures would be reversed. As discussed above (in [section C.7.1](#)), ] full employment **cannot** be a fixed feature of capitalism due to its authoritarian nature and the requirements of production for profit. To summarise, unemployment has more to do with private property than the wages of our fellow workers.

However, it is worthwhile to discuss why the "free market" capitalist is wrong to claim that unemployment within their system will not exist for long periods of time. In addition, to do so will also indicate the poverty of their theory of, and "solution" to, unemployment and the human misery they would cause. We do this in the [next section](#).

## C.9.1 Would cutting wages reduce unemployment?

The "free market" capitalist (or neo-classical or neo-liberal or "Austrian") argument is that unemployment is caused by workers real wage being higher than the market clearing level. Workers, it is claimed, are more interested in money wages than real wages (which is the amount of goods they can buy with their money wages). This leads them to resist wage cuts even when prices are falling, leading to a rise in their real wages. In other words, they are pricing themselves out of work without realising it (the validity of the claim that unemployment is caused by high wages is discussed in the [next section](#)).

From this analysis comes the argument that if workers were allowed to compete 'freely' among themselves for jobs, real wages would decrease. This would reduce production costs and this drop would produce an expansion in production which provides jobs for the unemployed. Hence unemployment would fall. State intervention (e.g. unemployment benefit, social welfare programmes, legal rights to organise, minimum wage laws, etc.) and labour union activity according to this theory is the cause of unemployment, as such intervention and activity forces wages above their market level, thus increasing production costs and "forcing" employers to "let people go."

Therefore, according to neo-classical economic theory, firms adjust production to bring the marginal cost of their products (the cost of producing one more item) into equality with the product's market-determined price. So a drop in costs theoretically leads to an expansion in production, producing jobs for the "temporarily" unemployed and moving the economy toward a full-employment equilibrium.

So, in neo-classical theory, unemployment can be reduced by reducing the real wages of workers currently employed. However, this argument is flawed. While cutting wages may make sense for one firm, it would not have this effect throughout the economy as a whole (as is required to reduce unemployment in a country as a whole). This is because, in all versions of neo-classical theory, it is assumed that prices depend (at least in part) on wages. If all workers accepted a cut in wages, all prices would fall and there would be little reduction in the buying power of wages. In other words, the fall in money wages would reduce prices and leave real wages nearly unchanged and unemployment would continue.

Moreover, if prices remained unchanged or only fell by a small amount (i.e. if wealth was redistributed from workers to their employers), then the effect of this cut in real wages would not increase employment, it would reduce it. For people's consumption depends on their income, and if their incomes have fallen, in real terms, so will their consumption. As Proudhon pointed out in 1846, *"if the producer earns less, he will buy less. . . [which will] engender. . . over-production and destitution"* because *"though the workmen cost you [the capitalist] something, they are your customers: what will you do with your products, when driven away by you, they shall consume no longer? Thus, machinery, after crushing, is not show in dealing employers a counter-blow; for if production excludes consumption, it is soon obliged to stop itself."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 204, p. 190]

However, it can be argued, not everyone's real income would fall: incomes from profits would increase. But redistributing income from workers to capitalists, a group who tend to spend a smaller portion of



their income on consumption than do workers, could reduce effective demand and increase unemployment. As David Schweickart points out, when wages decline, so does workers' purchasing power; and if this is not offset by an increase in spending elsewhere, total demand will decline [**Against Capitalism**, pp. 106-107]. In other words, contrary to neo-classical economics, market equilibrium might be established at any level of unemployment.

But in "free market" capitalist theory, such a possibility of market equilibrium with unemployment is impossible. Neo-liberals reject the claim that cutting real wages would merely decrease the demand for consumer goods without automatically increasing investment sufficiently to compensate for this. Neo-classicists argue that investment will increase to make up for the decline in working class consumption.

However, in order to make this claim, the theory depends on three critical assumptions, namely that firms can expand production, that they will expand production, and that, if they do, they can sell their expanded production. However, this theory and its assumptions can be questioned.

The first assumption states that it is always possible for a company to take on new workers. But increasing production requires more than just labour. If production goods and facilities are not available, employment will not be increased. Therefore the assumption that labour can always be added to the existing stock to increase output is plainly unrealistic.

Next, will firms expand production when labour costs decline? Hardly. Increasing production will increase supply and eat into the excess profits resulting from the fall in wages. If unemployment did result in a lowering of the general market wage, companies might use the opportunity to replace their current workers or force them to take a pay cut. If this happened, neither production nor employment would increase. However, it could be argued that the excess profits would increase capital investment in the economy (a key assumption of neo-liberalism). The reply is obvious: perhaps, perhaps not. A slumping economy might well induce financial caution and so capitalists could stall investment until they are convinced of the sustained higher profitability while last.

This feeds directly into the last assumption, namely that the produced goods will be sold. But when wages decline, so does worker purchasing power, and if this is not offset by an increase in spending elsewhere, then total demand will decline. Hence the fall in wages may result in the same or even more unemployment as aggregate demand drops and companies cannot find a market for their goods. However, business does not (cannot) instantaneously make use of the enlarged funds resulting from the shift of wages to profit for investment (either because of financial caution or lack of existing facilities). This will lead to a reduction in aggregate demand as profits are accumulated but unused, so leading to stocks of unsold goods and renewed price reductions. This means that the cut in real wages will be cancelled out by price cuts to sell unsold stock and unemployment remains.

So, the traditional neo-classical reply that investment spending will increase because lower costs will mean greater profits, leading to greater savings, and ultimately, to greater investment is weak. Lower costs will mean greater profits only if the products are sold, which they might not be if demand is

adversely affected. In other words, a higher profit margins do not result in higher profits due to fall in consumption caused by the reduction of workers purchasing power. And, as Michal Kalecki argued, wage cuts in combating a slump may be ineffective because gains in profits are not applied immediately to increase investment and the reduced purchasing power caused by the wage cuts causes a fall in sales, meaning that higher profit margins do not result in higher profits. Moreover, as Keynes pointed out long ago, the forces and motivations governing saving are quite distinct from those governing investment. Hence there is no necessity for the two quantities always to coincide. So firms that have reduced wages may not be able to sell as much as before, let alone more. In that case they will cut production, adding to unemployment and further lowering demand. This can set off a vicious downward spiral of falling demand and plummeting production leading to depression (the political results of such a process would be dangerous to the continued survival of capitalism). This downward spiral is described by Kropotkin (nearly 40 years before Keynes made the same point in his **General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money**):

*"Profits being the basis of capitalist industry, low profits explain all ulterior consequences.*

*"Low profits induce the employers to reduce the wages, or the number of workers, or the number of days of employment during the week. . . [L]ow profits ultimately mean a reduction of wages, and low wages mean a reduced consumption by the worker. Low profits mean also a somewhat reduced consumption by the employer; and both together mean lower profits and reduced consumption with that immense class of middlemen which has grown up in manufacturing countries, and that, again, means a further reduction of profits for the employers."* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 33]

Thus, a cut in wages will deepen any slump, making it deeper and longer than it otherwise would be. Rather than being the solution to unemployment, cutting wages will make it worse (we will address the question of whether wages being too high actually causes unemployment in the first place, as maintained by neo-classical economics, below). Given that, as we argued in [section C.7.1](#), inflation is caused by insufficient profits for capitalists (they try to maintain their profit margins by price increases) this spiralling effect of cutting wages helps to explain what economists term "stagflation" -- rising unemployment combined with rising inflation (as seen in the 1970s). As workers are made unemployed, aggregate demand falls, cutting profit margins even more and in response capitalists raise prices in an attempt to recoup their losses. Only a very deep recession can break this cycle (along with labour militancy and more than a few workers and their families). Working people paying for capitalism's contradictions, in other words.

All this means that working class people have two options in a slump -- accept a deeper depression in order to start the boom-bust cycle again or get rid of capitalism and with it the contradictory nature of capitalist production which produces the business cycle in the first place (not to mention other blights such as hierarchy and inequality).

The "Pigou" (or "real balance") effect is another neo-classical argument that aims to prove that (in the end) capitalism will pass from slump to boom. This theory argues that when unemployment is sufficiently high, it will lead to the price level falling which would lead to a rise in the real value of the money supply and so increase the real value of savings. People with such assets will have become richer and this increase in wealth will enable people to buy more goods and so investment will begin again. In this way, slump passes to boom naturally.

However, this argument is flawed in many ways. In reply, Michal Kalecki argued that, firstly, Pigou had *"assumed that the banking system would maintain the stock of money constant in the face of declining incomes, although there was no particular reason why they should."* If the money stock changes, the value of money will also change. Secondly, that *"the gain in money holders when prices fall is exactly offset by the loss to money providers. Thus, whilst the real value of a deposit in bank account rises for the depositor when prices fell, the liability represented by that deposit for the bank also rises in size."* And, thirdly, *"that falling prices and wages would mean that the real value of outstanding debts would be increased, which borrowers would find it increasingly difficult to repay as their real income fails to keep pace with the rising real value of debt. Indeed, when the falling prices and wages are generated by low levels of demand, the aggregate real income will be low. Bankruptcies follow, debts cannot be repaid, and a confidence crisis was likely to follow."* In other words, debtors may cut back on spending more than creditors would increase it and so the depression would continue as demand did not rise. [Malcolm C. Sawyer, **The Economics of Michal Kalecki**, p. 90]

So, as Schweickart, Kalecki and others correctly observe, such considerations undercut the neo-classical contention that labour unions and state intervention are responsible for unemployment (or that depressions will easily or naturally end by the workings of the market). To the contrary, insofar as labour unions and various welfare provisions prevent demand from falling as low as it might otherwise go during a slump, they apply a brake to the downward spiral. Far from being responsible for unemployment, they actually mitigate it. This should be obvious, as wages (and benefits) may be costs for some firms but they are revenue for even more.

## C.9.2 Is unemployment caused by wages being too high?

As we noted in the [last section](#), most capitalist economic theories argue that unemployment is caused by wages being too high. Any economics student will tell you that high wages will reduce the quantity of labour demanded, in other words unemployment is caused by wages being too high -- a simple case of "supply and demand." From this theory we would expect that areas with high wages will also be areas with high levels of unemployment. Unfortunately for the theory, this does not seem to be the case.

Empirical evidence does not support the argument the neo-classical argument that unemployment is caused by real wages being too high. The phenomenon that real wages increase during the upward swing of the business cycle (as unemployment falls) and fall during recessions (when unemployment increases) renders the neo-classical interpretation that real wages govern employment difficult to maintain (real wages are *"pro-cyclical,"* to use economic terminology). But this is not the only evidence against the

neo-classical theory of unemployment. Will Hutton, the UK based neo-Keynesian economist, summaries research that suggests high wages do not cause unemployment (as claimed by neo-classical economists):

*"the British economists David Blanchflower and Andrew Oswald [examined] . . . the data in twelve countries about the actual relation between wages and unemployment - and what they have discovered is another major challenge to the free market account of the labour market. . . [They found] precisely the opposite relationship [than that predicted in neo-classical theory]. The higher the wages, the lower the local unemployment - and the lower the wages, the higher the local unemployment. As they say, this is not a conclusion that can be squared with free market text-book theories of how a competitive labour market should work." [The State We're In, p. 102]*

Blanchflower and Oswald state their conclusions from their research that employees *"who work in areas of high unemployment earn less, other things constant, than those who are surrounded by low unemployment."* [The Wage Curve, p. 360] This relationship, the exact opposite of that predicted by neo-classical economics, was found in many different countries and time periods, with the curve being similar for different countries. Thus, the evidence suggests that high unemployment is associated with low earnings, not high, and vice versa.

Looking at less extensive evidence we find that, taking the example of the USA, if minimum wages and unions cause unemployment, why did the South-eastern states (with a **lower** minimum wage and weaker unions) have a **higher** unemployment rate than North-western states during the 1960's and 1970's? Or why, when the (relative) minimum wage declined under Reagan and Bush, did chronic unemployment accompany it? [Allan Engler, **The Apostles of Greed**, p. 107]

Or the Low Pay Network report *"Priced Into Poverty"* which discovered that in the 18 months before they were abolished, the British Wages Councils (which set minimum wages for various industries) saw a rise of 18,200 in full-time equivalent jobs compared to a net loss of 39,300 full-time equivalent jobs in the 18 months afterwards. Given that nearly half the vacancies in former Wages Council sectors paid less than the rate which it is estimated Wages Councils would now pay, and nearly 15% paid less than the rate at abolition, there should (by the neo-classical argument) have been rises in employment in these sectors as pay falls. The opposite happened. This research shows clearly that the falls in pay associated with Wages Council abolition have not created more employment. Indeed, employment growth was more buoyant prior to abolition than subsequently. So whilst Wages Council abolition has not resulted in more employment, the erosion of pay rates caused by abolition has resulted in more families having to endure poverty pay.

(This does not mean that anarchists support the imposition of a legal minimum wage. Most anarchists do not because it takes the responsibility for wages from unions and other working class organisations, where it belongs, and places it in the hands of the state. We mention these examples in order to highlight that the neo-classical argument has flaws with it.)

While this evidence may come as a shock to neo-classical economics, it fits well with anarchist and other socialist analysis. For anarchists, unemployment is a means of disciplining labour and maintaining a suitable rate of profit (i.e. unemployment is a key means of ensuring that workers are exploited). As full employment is approached, labour's power increases, so reducing the rate of exploitation and so increasing labour's share of the value it produces (and so higher wages). Thus, from an anarchist point of view, the fact that wages are higher in areas of low unemployment is not a surprise, nor is the phenomenon of pro-cyclical real wages. After all, as we noted in [section C.3](#), the ratio between wages and profits are, to a large degree, a product of bargaining power and so we would expect real wages to grow in the upswing of the business cycle, fall in the slump and be high in areas of low unemployment. And, far more importantly, this evidence suggests that the neo-classical claim that unemployment is caused by unions, "too high" wage rates, and so on, is false. Indeed, by stopping capitalists appropriating more of the income created by workers, high wages maintain aggregate demand and contribute to higher employment (although, of course, high employment cannot be maintained indefinitely under wage slavery due to the rise in workers' power this implies). Rather, unemployment is a key aspect of the capitalist system and cannot be got rid off within it and the neo-classical "blame the workers" approach fails to understand the nature and dynamic of the system.

So, perhaps, high real wages for workers increases aggregate demand and reduces unemployment from the level it would be if the wage rate was cut. Indeed, this seems to be supported by research into the "wage curve" of numerous countries. This means that a "free market" capitalism, marked by a fully competitive labour market, no welfare programmes, unemployment benefits, higher inequality and extensive business power to break unions and strikes would see aggregate demand constantly rise and fall, in line with the business cycle, and unemployment would follow suit. Moreover, unemployment would be higher over most of the business cycle (and particularly at the bottom of the slump) than under a capitalism with social programmes, militant unions and legal rights to organise because the real wage would not be able to stay at levels that could support aggregate demand nor could the unemployed use their benefits to stimulate the production of consumer goods.

In other words, a fully competitive labour market would increase the instability of the market, as welfare programmes and union activity maintain aggregate income for working people, who spend most of their income, so stabilising aggregate demand -- an analysis which was confirmed in during the 1980s (*"the relationship between measured inequality and economic stability. . . was weak but if anything it suggests that the more egalitarian countries showed a more stable pattern of growth after 1979"* [Dan Corry and Andrew Glyn, *"The Macroeconomics of equality, stability and growth"*, in **Paying for Inequality**, Andrew Glyn and David Miliband (Eds.) pp. 212-213]).

### **C.9.3 Are "flexible" labour markets the answer to unemployment?**

The usual neo-liberal argument is that labour markets must become more "flexible" to solve the problem of unemployment. This is done by weakening unions, reducing (or abolishing) the welfare state, and so on. However, we should note that the current arguments for greater "flexibility" within the labour market

as the means of reducing unemployment seem somewhat phoney. The argument is that by increasing flexibility, making the labour market more "perfect", the so-called "natural" rate of unemployment will drop (this is the rate at which inflation is said to start accelerating upwards) and so unemployment can fall without triggering an accelerating inflation rate. Of course, that the real source of inflation is capitalists trying to maintain their profit levels is not mentioned (after all, profits, unlike wages, are to be maximised for the greater good). Nor is it mentioned that the history of labour market flexibility is somewhat at odds with the theory:

*"it appears to be only relatively recently that the maintained greater flexibility of US labour markets has apparently led to a superior performance in terms of lower unemployment, despite the fact this flexibility is no new phenomenon. Comparing, for example, the United States with the United Kingdom, in the 1960s the United States averaged 4.8 per cent, with the United Kingdom at 1.9 per cent; in the 1970s the United States rate rose to 6.1 per cent, with the United Kingdom rising to 4.3 per cent, and it was only in the 1980s that the ranking was reversed with the United States at 7.2 per cent and the United Kingdom at 10 per cent. . . Notice that this reversal of rankings in the 1980s took place despite all the best efforts of Mrs Thatcher to create labour market flexibility. . . [I]f labour market flexibility is important in explaining the level of unemployment. . . why does the level of unemployment remain so persistently high in a country, Britain, where active measures have been taken to create flexibility?" [Keith Cowling and Roger Sugden, **Beyond Capitalism**, p. 9]*

If we look at the fraction of the labour force without a job in America, we find that in 1969 it was 3.4% (7.3% including the underemployed) and **rose** to 6.1% in 1987 (16.8% including the underemployed). Using more recent data, we find that, on average, the unemployment rate was 6.2% in 1990-97 compared to 5.0% in the period 1950-65. In other words, labour market "flexibility" has not reduced unemployment levels, in fact "flexible" labour markets have been associated with higher levels of unemployment.

Of course we are comparing different time periods. A lot has changed between the 1960s and the 1990s and so comparing these periods cannot be the whole answer. After all, the rise in flexibility and the increase in unemployment may be unrelated. However, if we look at different countries over the same time period we can see if "flexibility" actually reduces unemployment. As one British economist notes, this may not be the case:

*"Open unemployment is, of course, lower in the US. But once we allow for all forms of non-employment [such as underemployment, jobless workers who are not officially registered as such and so on], there is little difference between Europe and the US: between 1988 and 1994, 11 per cent of men aged 25-55 were not in work in France, compared with 13 per cent in the UK, 14 per cent in the US and 15 per cent in Germany." [Richard Layard quoted by John Gray in **False Dawn**, p. 113]*

In addition, all estimates of America's unemployment record must take into account America's incarceration rates. Over a million people more would be seeking work if the US penal policies resembled those of any other Western nation. [John Gray, **Op. Cit.**, p. 113]

Taking the period 1983 to 1995, we find that around 30 per cent of the population of OECD Europe lived in countries with average unemployment rates lower than the USA and around 70 per cent in countries with lower unemployment than Canada (whose relative wages are only slightly less flexible than the USA). Furthermore, the European countries with the lowest unemployment rates were not noted for their wage flexibility (Austria 3.7%, Norway 4.1%, Portugal 6.4%, Sweden 3.9% and Switzerland 1.7%). Britain, which probably had the most flexible labour market had an average unemployment rate higher than half of Europe. And the unemployment rate of Germany is heavily influenced by areas which were formally in East Germany. Looking at the former West German regions only, unemployment between 1983 and 1995 was 6.3%, compared to 6.6% in the USA (and 9.8% in the UK).

So, perhaps, "flexibility" is not the solution to unemployment some claim it is (after all, the lack of a welfare state in the 19th century did not stop unemployment nor long depressions occurring). Indeed, a case could be made that the higher open unemployment in Europe has a lot less to do with "rigid" structures and "pampered" citizens than it does with the fiscal and monetary austerity required by European unification as expressed in the Maastricht Treaty. As this Treaty has the support of most of Europe's ruling class such an explanation is off the political agenda.

Moreover, if we look at the rationale behind "flexibility" we find a strange fact. While the labour market is to be made more "flexible" and in line with ideal of "perfect competition", on the capitalist side no attempt is being made to bring **it** into line with that model. Let us not forget that perfect competition (the theoretical condition in which all resources, including labour, will be efficiently utilised) states that there must be a large number of buyers and sellers. This is the case on the sellers side of the "flexible" labour market, but this is **not** the case on the buyers (where, as indicated in [section C.4](#), oligopoly reigns). Most who favour labour market "flexibility" are also those most against breaking up of big business and oligopolistic markets or the stopping of mergers between dominant companies in and across markets. The model requires **both** sides to be "flexible," so why expect making one side more "flexible" will have a positive effect on the whole? There is no logical reason for this to be the case. Indeed, with the resulting shift in power on the labour market things may get worse as income is distributed from labour to capital. It is a bit like expecting peace to occur between two warring factions by disarming one side and arguing that because the number of guns have been halved peacefulness has doubled! Of course, the only "peace" that would result would be the peace of the graveyard or a conquered people -- subservience can pass for peace, if you do not look too close. In the end, calls for the "flexibility" of labour indicate the truism that, under capitalism, labour exists to meet the requirements of capital (or living labour exists to meet the needs of dead labour, a truly insane way to organise a society).

All this is unsurprising for anarchists as we recognise that "flexibility" just means weakening the bargaining power of labour in order to increase the power and profits of the rich (hence the expression "**flexploitation**"!). Increased "flexibility" has been associated with **higher**, not lower unemployment.

This, again, is unsurprising, as a "flexible" labour market basically means one in which workers are glad to have any job and face increased insecurity at work (actually, "insecurity" would be a more honest word to use to describe the ideal of a competitive labour market rather than "flexibility" but such honesty would let the cat out of the bag). In such an environment, workers' power is reduced, meaning that capital gets a larger share of the national income than labour and workers are less inclined to stand up for their rights. This contributes to a fall in aggregate demand, so increasing unemployment. In addition, we should note that "flexibility" may have little effect on unemployment (although not on profits) as a reduction of labour's bargaining power may result in **more** rather than less unemployment. This is because firms can fire "excess" workers at will, increase the hours of those who remain (the paradox of overwork and unemployment is just an expression of how capitalism works) and stagnating or falling wages reduces aggregate demand. Thus the paradox of increased "flexibility" resulting in higher unemployment is only a paradox in the neo-classical framework. From an anarchist perspective, it is just the way the system works.

And we must add that whenever governments have attempted to make the labour market "fully competitive" it has either been the product of dictatorship (e.g. Chile under Pinochet) or occurred at the same time increased centralisation of state power and increased powers for the police and employers (e.g. Britain under Thatcher, Reagan in the USA). Latin American Presidents trying to introduce neo-liberalism into their countries have had to follow suit and *"ride roughshod over democratic institutions, using the tradition Latin American technique of governing by decree in order to bypass congressional opposition. . . Civil rights have also taken a battering. In Bolivia, the government attempted to defuse union opposition . . . by declaring a state of siege and imprisoning 143 strike leaders. . . In Colombia, the government used anti-terrorist legislation in 1993 to try 15 trade union leaders opposing the privatisation of the state telecommunications company. In the most extreme example, Peru's Alberto Fujimori dealt with a troublesome Congress by simply dissolving it . . . and seizing emergency powers."* [Duncan Green, **The Silent Revolution**, p. 157]

This is unsurprising. People, when left alone, will create communities, organise together to collectively pursue their own happiness, protect their communities and environment. In other words, they will form associations and unions to influence the decisions that affect them. In order to create a "fully competitive" labour market, individuals must be atomised and unions, communities and associations weakened, if not destroyed, in order to fully privatise life. State power must be used to disempower the mass of the population, restrict their liberty, control popular organisations and social protest and so ensure that the free market can function without opposition to the human suffering, misery and pain it would cause. People, to use Rousseau's evil term, "must be forced to be free." And, unfortunately for neo-liberalism, the countries that tried to reform their labour market still suffered from high unemployment, plus increased social inequality and poverty and were still subject to the booms and slumps of the business cycle.

Ultimately, the only real solution to unemployment is to end wage labour and liberate humanity from the needs of capital.



## C.9.4 Is unemployment voluntary?

Here we point out another aspect of the neo-classical "blame the workers" argument, of which the diatribes against unions and workers' rights highlighted above is only a part. This is the argument that unemployment is not involuntary but is freely chosen by workers. As the left-wing economist Nicholas Kaldor put it, for "free market" economists involuntary employment *"cannot exist because it is excluded by the assumptions."* [**Further Essays on Applied Economics**, p. x] The neo-classical economists claim that unemployed workers calculate that their time is better spent searching for more highly paid employment (or living on welfare than working) and so desire to be jobless. That this argument is taken seriously says a lot about the state of modern capitalist economic theory, but as it is popular in many right-wing circles, we should discuss it.

Firstly, when unemployment rises it is because of layoffs, not voluntary quitings, are increasing. When a company fires a number of its workers, it can hardly be said that the sacked workers have calculated that their time is better spent looking for a new job. They have no option. Secondly, unemployed workers normally accept their first job offer. Neither of these facts fits well with the hypothesis that most unemployment is "voluntary."

Of course, there are numerous jobs advertised in the media. Does this not prove that capitalism always provides jobs for those who want them? Hardly, as the number of jobs advertised must have some correspondence to the number of unemployed. If 100 jobs are advertised in an areas reporting 1,000 unemployed, it can scarcely be claimed that capitalism tends to full employment.

In addition, it is worthwhile to note that the right-wing assumption that higher unemployment benefits and a healthy welfare state promote unemployment is not supported by the evidence. As a moderate member of the British Conservative Party notes, the *"OECD studied seventeen industrial countries and found no connect between a country's unemployment rate and the level of its social-security payments."* [**Dancing with Dogma**, p. 118] Moreover, the economists David Blanchflower and Andrew Oswald "Wage Curve" for many different countries is approximately the same for each of the fifteen countries they looked at. This also suggests that labour market unemployment is independent of social-security conditions as their "wage curve" can be considered as a measure of wage flexibility. Both of these facts suggest that unemployment is involuntary in nature and cutting social-security will **not** affect unemployment.

Another factor in considering the nature of unemployment is the effect of nearly 20 years of "reform" of the welfare state conducted in both the USA and UK. During the 1960s the welfare state was far more generous than it was in the 1990s and unemployment was lower. If unemployment was "voluntary" and due to social-security being high, we would expect a decrease in unemployment as welfare was cut (this was, after all, the rationale for cutting it in the first place). In fact, the reverse occurred, with unemployment rising as the welfare state was cut. Lower social-security payments did not lead to lower unemployment, quite the reverse in fact.

Faced with these facts, some may conclude that as unemployment is independent of social security payments then the welfare state can be cut. However, this is not the case as the size of the welfare state does affect the poverty rates and how long people remain in poverty. In the USA, the poverty rate was 11.7% in 1979 and rose to 13% in 1988, and continued to rise to 15.1% in 1993. The net effect of cutting the welfare state was to help **increase** poverty. Similarly, in the UK during the same period, to quote the ex-Thatcherite John Gray, there *"was the growth of an underclass. The percentage of British (non-pensioner) households that are wholly workless - that is, none of whose members is active in the productive economy - increased from 6.5 per cent in 1975 to 16.4 per cent in 1985 and 19.1 per cent in 1994. . . Between 1992 and 1997 there was a 15 per cent increase in unemployed lone parents. . . This dramatic growth of an underclass occurred as a direct consequence of neo-liberal welfare reforms, particularly as they affected housing."* [False Dawn, p. 30] This is the opposite of the predictions of right-wing theories and rhetoric. As John Gray correctly argues, the *"message of the American [and other] New Right has always been that poverty and the under class are products of the disincentive effects of welfare, not the free market."* He goes on to note that it *"has never squared with the experience of the countries of continental Europe where levels of welfare provision are far more comprehensive than those of the United States have long co-existed with the absence of anything resembling an American-style underclass. It does not touch at virtually any point the experience of other Anglo-Saxon countries."* [Op. Cit., p. 42] He goes on to notes that:

*"In New Zealand, the theories of the American New Right achieved a rare and curious feat - self-refutation by their practical application. Contrary to the New Right's claims, the abolition of nearly all universal social services and the stratification of income groups for the purpose of targeting welfare benefits selectively created a neo-liberal poverty trap."* [Ibid.]

So while the level of unemployment benefits and the welfare state may have little impact on the level of unemployment (which is to be expected if the nature of unemployment is essentially involuntary), it **does** have an effect on the nature, length and persistency of poverty. Cutting the welfare state increases poverty and the time spent in poverty (and by cutting redistribution, it would also increase inequality).

If we look at the relative size of a nation's social security transfers as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product and its relative poverty rate we find a correlation. Those nations with a high level of spending have lower rates of poverty. In addition, there is a correlation between the spending level and the number of persistent poor. Those nations with high spending levels have more of their citizens escape poverty. For example, Sweden has a single-year poverty rate of 3% and a poverty escape rate of 45% and Germany has figures of 8% and 24% (and a persistent poverty rate of 2%). In contrast, the USA has figures of 20% and 15% (and a persistent poverty rate of 42%) [Greg J. Duncan of the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, 1994].

Given that a strong welfare state acts as a kind of floor under the wage and working conditions of labour, it is easy to see why capitalists and the supporters of "free market" capitalism seek to undermine it. By undermining the welfare state, by making labour "flexible," profits and power can be protected from working people standing up for their rights and interests. Little wonder the claimed benefits of

"flexibility" have proved to be so elusive for the vast majority while inequality has exploded. The welfare state, in other words, reduces the attempts of the capitalist system to commodify labour and increases the options available to working class people. While it did not reduce the need to get a job, the welfare state did undermine dependence on any particular employer and so increased workers' independence and power. It is no coincidence that the attacks on unions and the welfare state was and is framed in the rhetoric of protecting the "right of management to manage" and of driving people back into wage slavery. In other words, an attempt to increase the commodification of labour by making work so insecure that workers will not stand up for their rights.

The human costs of unemployment are well documented. There is a stable correlation between rates of unemployment and the rates of mental-hospital admissions. There is a connection between unemployment and juvenile and young-adult crime. The effects on an individual's self-respect and the wider implications for their community and society are massive. As David Schweickart concludes:

*"The costs of unemployment, whether measured in terms of the cold cash of lost production and lost taxes or in the hotter unions of alienation, violence, and despair, are likely to be large under Laissez Faire."* [**Against Capitalism**, p. 109]

Of course, it could be argued that the unemployed should look for work and leave their families, home towns, and communities in order to find it. However, this argument merely states that people should change their whole lives as required by "market forces" (and the wishes -- "*animal spirits*," to use Keynes' term -- of those who own capital). In other words, it just acknowledges that capitalism results in people losing their ability to plan ahead and organise their lives (and that, in addition, it can deprive them of their sense of identity, dignity and self-respect as well), portraying this as somehow a requirement of life (or even, in some cases, noble).

It seems that capitalism is logically committed to viciously contravening the very values upon which it claims it be built, namely the respect for the innate worth and separateness of individuals. This is hardly surprising, as capitalism is based on reducing individuals to the level of another commodity (called "labour"). To requote Karl Polanyi:

*"In human terms such a postulate [of a labour market] implied for the worker extreme instability of earnings, utter absence of professional standards, abject readiness to be shoved and pushed about indiscriminately, complete dependence on the whims of the market. [Ludwig Von] Mises justly argued that if workers 'did not act as trade unionists, but reduced their demands and changed their locations and occupations according to the labour market, they would eventually find work.' This sums up the position under a system based on the postulate of the commodity character of labour. It is not for the commodity to decide where it should be offered for sale, to what purpose it should be used, at what price it should be allowed to change hands, and in what manner it should be consumed or destroyed."* [**The Great Transformation**, p. 176]

However, people are **not** commodities but living, thinking, feeling individuals. The "labour market" is more a social institution than an economic one and people and work more than mere commodities. If we reject the neo-liberals' assumptions for the nonsense they are, their case fails. Capitalism, ultimately, cannot provide full employment simply because labour is **not** a commodity (and as we discussed in [section C.7](#), this revolt against commodification is a key part of understanding the business cycle and so unemployment).

## C.3 What determines the distribution between profits and wages within companies?

At any time, there is a given amount of unpaid labour in circulation in the form of goods or services representing more added value than workers were paid for. This given sum of unpaid labour represents total available profits. Each company tries to maximise its share of that total, and if a company does realise an above-average share, it means that some other companies receive less than average. The larger the company, the more likely it is to obtain a larger share of the available surplus, for reasons discussed later (see [section C.5](#)). The important thing to note here is that companies compete on the market to realise their share of the total surplus of profits (unpaid labour). However, the **source** of these profits does not lie in the market, but in production. One cannot buy what does not exist and if one gains, another loses.

As indicated above, production prices determine market prices. In any company, wages determine a large percentage of the production costs. Looking at other costs (such as raw materials), again wages play a large role in determining their price. Obviously the division of a commodity's price into costs and profits is not a fixed ratio, which means that prices are the result of complex interactions of wage levels and productivity.

Within the limits of a given situation, the class struggle between employers and employees over wages, working conditions and benefits determines the degree of exploitation within a workplace and industry, and so determines the relative amount of money which goes to labour (i.e. wages) and the company (profits). As Proudhon argued, the expression "*the relations of profits to wages*" meant "*the war between labour and capital*." [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 130] This also means that an increase in wages may not drive up prices, as it may reduce profits or be tied to productivity; but this will have more widespread effects, as capital will move to other industries and countries in order to improve profit rates, if this is required.

The essential point is that the extraction of surplus value from workers is not a simple technical operation like the extraction of so many joules from a ton of coal. It is a bitter struggle, in which the capitalists lose half the time. Labour power is unlike all other commodities - it is and remains inseparably embodied in human beings. The division of profits and wages in a company and in the economy as a whole is dependent upon and modified by the actions of workers, both as individuals and as a class.

We are not saying that economic and objective factors play no role in the determination of the wage level. On the contrary, at any moment the class struggle can only act within a given economic framework. However, these objective conditions are constantly modified by the class struggle and it is this conflict between the human and commodity aspects of labour power that ultimately brings capitalism into crisis (see [section C.7](#)).

From this perspective, the neo-classical argument that a factor in production (labour, capital or land) receives an income share that indicates its productive power "at the margin" is false. Rather, it is a question of power -- and the willingness to use it. As Christopher Eaton Gunn points out, this argument *"take[s] no account of power -- of politics, conflict, and bargaining -- as more likely indicators of relative shares of income in the real world."* [**Workers' Self-Management in the United States**, p. 185] If the power of labour is increasing, its share in income will tend to increase and, obviously, if the power of labour decreased it would fall. And the history of the post-war economy supports such an analysis, with labour in the advanced countries share of income falling from 68% in the 1970s to 65.1% in 1995 (in the EU, it fell from 69.2% to 62%). In the USA, labour's share of income in the manufacturing sector fell from 74.8% to 70.6% over the 1979-89 period, reversing the rise in labour's share that occurred over the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The reversal in labour's share occurred at the same time as labour's power was undercut by right-wing governments and high unemployment.

Thus, for many anarchists, the relative power between labour and capital determines the distribution of income between them. In periods of full employment or growing workplace organisation and solidarity, workers wages will tend to rise faster. In periods where there is high unemployment and weaker unions and less direct action, labour's share will fall. From this analysis anarchists support collective organisation and action in order to increase the power of labour and ensure we receive more of the value we produce.

The neo-classical notion that rising productivity allows for increasing wages is one that has suffered numerous shocks since the early 1970s. Usually wage increases lag behind productivity. For example, during Thatcher's reign of freer markets, productivity rose by 4.2%, 1.4% higher than the increase in real earnings between 1980-88. Under Reagan, productivity increased by 3.3%, accompanied by a fall of 0.8% in real earnings. Remember, though, these are averages and hide the actual increases in pay between workers and managers. To take one example, the real wages for employed single men between 1978 and 1984 in the UK rose by 1.8% for the bottom 10% of that group, for the highest 10%, it was a massive 18.4%. The average rise (10.1%) hides the vast differences between top and bottom. In addition, these figures ignore the starting point of these rises -- the often massive differences in wages between employees (compare the earnings of the CEO of McDonalds and one of its cleaners). In other words, 2.8% of nearly nothing is still nearly nothing!

Looking at the USA again, we find that workers who are paid by the hour (the majority of employees) saw their average pay peak in 1973. Since then, it had declined substantially and stood at its mid-1960s level in 1992. For over 80 per cent of the US workforce (production and non-supervisory workers), real wages have fallen by 19.2 per cent for weekly earnings and 13.4 per cent for hourly earnings between 1973 and 1994. Productivity had risen by 23.2 per cent. Combined with this drop in real wages in the USA, we have seen an increase in hours worked. In order to maintain their current standard of living, working class people have turned to both debt and longer working hours. Since 1979, the annual hours worked by middle-income families rose from 3 020 to 3 206 in 1989, 3 287 in 1996 and 3 335 in 1997. In Mexico we find a similar process. Between 1980 and 1992, productivity rose by 48 per cent while

salaries (adjusted for inflation) fell by 21 per cent.

Between 1989 to 1997, productivity increased by 9.7% in the USA while medium compensation decreased by 4.2%. In addition, medium family working hours grew by 4% (or three weeks of full-time work) while its income increased by only 0.6 % (in other words, increases in working hours helped to create this slight growth). If the wages of workers were related to their productivity, as argued by neo-classical economics, you would expect wages to increase as productivity rose, rather than fall. However, if wages are related to economic power, then this fall is to be expected. This explains the desire for "flexible" labour markets, where workers' bargaining power is eroded and so more income can go to profits rather than wages. Of course, it will be argued that only in a perfectly competitive market (or, more realistically, a truly "free" one) will wages increase in-line with productivity. However, you would expect that a regime of **freer** markets would make things better, not worse. Moreover, the neo-classical argument that unions, struggling over wages and working conditions will harm workers in the "long run" has been dramatically refuted over the last 30 years -- the decline of the labour movement in the USA has been marked by falling wages, not rising ones, for example.

Unsurprisingly, in a hierarchical system those at the top do better than those at the bottom. The system is set up so that the majority enrich the minority. That is way anarchists argue that workplace organisation and resistance is essential to maintain -- and even increase -- labour's income. For if the share of income between labour and capital depends on their relative power -- and it does -- then only the actions of workers themselves can improve their situation and determine the distribution of the value they create.

## C.5 Why does Big Business get a bigger slice of profits?

As described in the [last section](#), due to the nature of the capitalist market, large firms soon come to dominate. Once a few large companies dominate a particular market, they form an oligopoly from which a large number of competitors have effectively been excluded, thus reducing competitive pressures. In this situation there is a tendency for prices to rise above what would be the "market" level, as the oligopolistic producers do not face the potential of new capital entering "their" market (due to the relatively high capital costs and other entry/movement barriers). This form of competition results in Big Business having an "unfair" slice of available profits. As there is an **objective** level of profits existing in the economy at any one time, oligopolistic profits are "*created at the expense of individual capitals still caught up in competition.*" [Paul Mattick, **Economics, Politics, and the Age of Inflation**, p. 38]

As argued in section [C.1](#), the price of a commodity will tend towards its production price (which is costs plus average profit). In a developed capitalist economy it is not as simple as this -- there are various "average" profits depending on what Michal Kalecki termed the "***degree of monopoly***" within a market. This theory "*indicates that profits arise from monopoly power, and hence profits accrue to firms with more monopoly power. . . A rise in the degree of monopoly caused by the growth of large firms would result in the shift of profits from small business to big business.*" [Malcolm C. Sawyer, **The Economics of Michal Kalecki**, p. 36] Thus a market with a high "degree of monopoly" will have a higher average profit level (or rate of return) than one which is more competitive.

The "degree of monopoly" reflects such factors as level of market concentration and power, market share, extent of advertising, barriers to entry/movement, collusion and so on. The higher these factors, the higher the degree of monopoly and the higher the mark-up of prices over costs (and so the share of profits in value added). Our approach to this issue is similar to Kalecki's in many ways although we stress that the degree of monopoly affects how profits are distributed **between** firms, **not** how they are created in the first place (which come, as argued in section [C.2](#), from the "*unpaid labour of the poor*" -- to use Kropotkin's words).

There is substantial evidence to support such a theory. J.S Bain in **Barriers in New Competition** noted that in industries where the level of seller concentration was very high and where entry barriers were also substantial, profit rates were higher than average. Research has tended to confirm Bain's findings. Keith Cowling summarises this later evidence:

*"[A]s far as the USA is concerned. . . there are grounds for believing that a significant, but not very strong, relationship exists between profitability and concentration. . . [along with] a significant relationship between advertising and profitability [an important factor in a market's "degree of monopoly"] . . . [Moreover w]here the estimation is restricted to*



*an appropriate cross-section [of industry] . . . both concentration and advertising appeared significant [for the UK]. By focusing on the impact of changes in concentration overtime . . . [we are] able to circumvent the major problems posed by the lack of appropriate estimates of price elasticities of demand . . . [to find] a significant and positive concentration effect. . . It seems reasonable to conclude on the basis of evidence for both the USA and UK that there is a significant relationship between concentration and price-cost margins." [Monopoly Capitalism, pp. 109-110]*

We must note that the price-cost margin variable typically used in these studies subtracts the wage and **salary** bill from the value added in production. This would have a tendency to reduce the margin as it does not take into account that most management salaries (particularly those at the top of the hierarchy) are more akin to profits than costs (and so should **not** be subtracted from value added). Also, as many markets are regionalised (particularly in the USA) nation-wide analysis may downplay the level of concentration existing in a given market.

This means that large firms can maintain their prices and profits above "normal" (competitive) levels without the assistance of government simply due to their size and market power (and let us not forget the important fact that Big Business rose during the period in which capitalism was closest to "laissez faire" and the size and activity of the state was small). As much of mainstream economics is based on the idea of "perfect competition" (and the related concept that the free market is an efficient allocator of resources when it approximates this condition) it is clear that such a finding cuts to the heart of claims that capitalism is a system based upon equal opportunity, freedom and justice. The existence of Big Business and the impact it has on the rest of the economy and society at large exposes capitalist economics as a house built on sand (see sections [C.4.2](#) and [C.4.3](#)).

Another side effect of oligopoly is that the number of mergers will tend to increase in the run up to a slump. Just as credit is expanded in an attempt to hold off the crisis (see section [C.8](#)), so firms will merge in an attempt to increase their market power and so improve their profit margins by increasing their mark-up over costs. As the rate of profit levels off and falls, mergers are an attempt to raise profits by increasing the degree of monopoly in the market/economy. However, this is a short term solution and can only postpone, but stop, the crisis as its roots lie in production, **not** the market (see section [C.7](#)) -- there is only so much surplus value around and the capital stock cannot be wished away. Once the slump occurs, a period of cut-throat competition will start and then, slowly, the process of concentration will start again (as weak firms go under, successful firms increase their market share and capital stock and so on).

The development of oligopolies within capitalism thus causes a redistribution of profits away from small capitalists to Big Business (i.e. small businesses are squeezed by big ones due to the latter's market power and size). Moreover, the existence of oligopoly can and does result in increased costs faced by Big Business being passed on in the form of price increases, which can force other companies, in unrelated markets, to raise **their** prices in order to realise sufficient profits. Therefore, oligopoly has a tendency to create price increases across the market as a whole and can thus be inflationary.

For these (and other) reasons many small businessmen and members of the middle-class wind up hating Big Business (while trying to replace them!) and embracing ideologies which promise to wipe them out. Hence we see that both ideologies of the "radical" middle-class -- Libertarianism and fascism -- attack Big Business, either as "the socialism of Big Business" targeted by Libertarianism or the "International Plutocracy" by Fascism.

As Peter Sabatini notes in **Libertarianism: Bogus Anarchy**, "*[a]t the turn of the century, local entrepreneurial (proprietorship/partnership) business [in the USA] was overshadowed in short order by transnational corporate capitalism. . . . The various strata comprising the capitalist class responded differentially to these transpiring events as a function of their respective position of benefit. Small business that remained as such came to greatly resent the economic advantage corporate capitalism secured to itself, and the sweeping changes the latter imposed on the presumed ground rules of bourgeois competition. Nevertheless, because capitalism is liberalism's raison d'etre, small business operators had little choice but to blame the state for their financial woes, otherwise they moved themselves to another ideological camp (anti-capitalism). Hence, the enlarged state was imputed as the primary cause for capitalism's 'aberration' into its monopoly form, and thus it became the scapegoat for small business complaint.*"

However, despite the complaints of small capitalists, the tendency of markets to become dominated by a few big firms is an obvious side-effect of capitalism itself. "*If the home of 'Big Business' was once the public utilities and manufacturing it now seems to be equally comfortable in any environment*" [M.A. Utton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 29]. This is because in their drive to expand (which they must do in order to survive), capitalists invest in new machinery and plants in order to reduce production costs and so increase profits (see section [C.2](#) and related sections). Hence a successful capitalist firm will grow in size over time and squeeze out competitors.

## C.5.1 Aren't the super-profits of Big Business due to its higher efficiency?

Obviously the analysis of Big Business profitability presented in section [C.5](#) is denied by supporters of capitalism. H. Demsetz of the pro-"free" market "Chicago School" of economists (which echoes the right-libertarian "Austrian" position that whatever happens on a free market is for the best) argues that **efficiency** (not degree of monopoly) is the cause of the super-profits for Big Business. His argument is that if oligopolistic profits are due to high levels of concentration, then the big firms in an industry will not be able to stop smaller ones reaping the benefits of this in the form of higher profits. So if concentration leads to high profits (due, mostly, to collusion between the dominant firms) then smaller firms in the same industry should benefit too.

However, his argument is flawed as it is not the case that oligopolies practice overt collusion. The barriers to entry/mobility are such that the dominant firms in an oligopolistic market do not have to compete by price and their market power allows a mark-up over costs which market forces cannot

undermine. As their only possible competitors are similarly large firms, collusion is not required as these firms have no interest in reducing the mark-up they share and so they "compete" over market share by non-price methods such as advertising (advertising, as well as being a barrier to entry, reduces price competition and increases mark-up).

In his study, Demsetz notes that while there is a positive correlation between profit rate and market concentration, smaller firms in the oligarchic market are **not** more profitable than their counterparts in other markets [see M.A. Utton, **The Political Economy of Big Business**, p. 98]. From this Demsetz concludes that oligopoly is irrelevant and that the efficiency of increased size is the source of excess profits. But this misses the point -- smaller firms in concentrated industries will have a similar profitability to firms of similar size in less concentrated markets, **not** higher profitability. The existence of super profits across **all** the firms in a given industry would attract firms to that market, so reducing profits. However, because profitability is associated with the large firms in the market the barriers of entry/movement associated with Big Business stops this process happening. **If** small firms were as profitable, then entry would be easier and so the "degree of monopoly" would be low and we would see an influx of smaller firms.

While it is true that bigger firms may gain advantages associated with economies of scale the question surely is, what stops the smaller firms investing and increasing the size of their companies in order to reap economies of scale within and between workplaces? What is stopping market forces eroding super-profits by capital moving into the industry and increasing the number of firms, and so increasing supply? If barriers exist to stop this process occurring, then concentration, market power and other barriers to entry/movement (not efficiency) is the issue. Competition is a **process**, not a state, and this indicates that "efficiency" is not the source of oligopolistic profits (indeed, what creates the apparent "efficiency" of big firms is likely to be the barriers to market forces which add to the mark-up!).

It seems likely that large firms gather "economies of scale" due to the size of the firm, not plant, as well as from the level of concentration within an industry. "*Considerable evidence indicates that economies of scale [at plant level] . . . do not account for the high concentration levels in U.S. industry*" [Richard B. Du Boff, **Accumulation and Power**, p. 174] and, further, "*the explanation for the enormous growth in aggregate concentration must be found in factors other than economies of scale at plant level.*" [M.A. Utton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 44] Co-ordination of individual plants by the visible hand of management seems to be the key to creating and maintaining dominant positions within a market. And, of course, these structures are costly to create and maintain as well as taking time to build up. Thus the size of the firm, with the economies of scale **beyond** the workplace associated with the administrative co-ordination by management hierarchies, also creates formidable barriers to entry/movement.

Another important factor influencing the profitability of Big Business is the clout that market power provides. This comes in two main forms - horizontal and vertical controls:

*"Horizontal controls allow oligopolies to control necessary steps in an economic process from material supplies to processing, manufacturing, transportation and distribution.*

*Oligopolies. . . [control] more of the highest quality and most accessible supplies than they intend to market immediately. . . competitors are left with lower quality or more expensive supplies. . . [It is also] based on exclusive possession of technologies, patents and franchises as well as on excess productive capacity [. . .]*

*"Vertical controls substitute administrative command for exchange between steps of economic processes. The largest oligopolies procure materials from their own subsidiaries, process and manufacture these in their own refineries, mills and factories, transport their own goods and then market these through their own distribution and sales network." [Allan Engler, **Apostles of Greed**, p. 51]*

Moreover, large firms reduce their costs due to their privileged access to credit and resources. Both credit and advertising show economies of scale, meaning that as the size of loans and advertising increase, costs go down. In the case of finance, interest rates are usually cheaper for big firms than small one and while *"firms of all sizes find most [about 70% between 1970 and 1984] of their investments without having to resort to [financial] markets or banks"* size does have an impact on the *"importance of banks as a source of finance"*: *"Firms with assets under \$100 million relied on banks for around 70% of their long-term debt. . . those with assets from \$250 million to \$1 billion, 41%; and those with over \$1 billion in assets, 15%"* [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 75]. Also dominant firms can get better deals with independent suppliers and distributors due to their market clout and their large demand for goods/inputs, also reducing their costs.

This means that oligopolies are more "efficient" (i.e. have higher profits) than smaller firms due to the benefits associated with their market power rather than vice versa. Concentration (and firm size) leads to "economies of scale" which smaller firms in the same market cannot gain access to. Hence the claim that any positive association between concentration and profit rates is simply recording the fact that the largest firms tend to be most efficient, and hence more profitable, is wrong. In addition, *"Demsetz's findings have been questioned by non-Chicago [school] critics"* due to the inappropriateness of the evidence used as well as some of his analysis techniques. Overall, *"the empirical work gives limited support"* to this "free-market" explanation of oligopolistic profits and instead suggest market power plays the key role. [William L. Baldwin, **Market Power, Competition and Anti-Trust Policy**, p. 310, p. 315]

Unsurprisingly we find that the *"bigger the corporation in size of assets or the larger its market share, the higher its rate of profit: these findings confirm the advantages of market power. . . Furthermore, 'large firms in concentrated industries earn systematically higher profits than do all other firms, about 30 percent more. . . on average,' and there is less variation in profit rates too."* [Richard B. Du Boff, **Accumulation and Power**, p. 175]

Thus, concentration, not efficiency, is the key to profitability, with those factors what create "efficiency" themselves being very effective barriers to entry which helps maintain the "degree of monopoly" (and so mark-up and profits for the dominant firms) in a market. Oligopolies have varying degrees of

administrative efficiency and market power, all of which consolidate its position -- "[t]he barriers to entry posed by decreasing unit costs of production and distribution and by national organisations of managers, buyers, salesmen, and service personnel made oligopoly advantages cumulative - and were as global in their implications as they were national." [Ibid., p. 150]

This recent research confirms Kropotkin's analysis of capitalism found in his classic work **Fields, Factories and Workshops** (first published in 1899). Kropotkin, after extensive investigation of the actual situation within the economy, argued that "it is not the superiority of the **technical** organisation of the trade in a factory, nor the economies realised on the prime-mover, which militate against the small industry . . . but the more advantageous conditions for **selling** the produce and for **buying** the raw produce which are at the disposal of big concerns." Since the "manufacture being a strictly private enterprise, its owners find it advantageous to have all the branches of a given industry under their own management: they thus cumulate the profits of the successful transformations of the raw material. . . [and soon] the owner finds his advantage in being able to hold the command of the market. But from a **technical** point of view the advantages of such an accumulation are trifling and often doubtful." He sums up by stating that "[t]his is why the 'concentration' so much spoken of is often nothing but an amalgamation of capitalists for the purpose of **dominating the market**, not for cheapening the technical process." [Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow, p. 147, p. 153 and p. 154]

All this means is that the "degree of monopoly" within an industry helps determine the distribution of profits within an economy, with some of the surplus value "created" by other companies being realised by Big Business. Hence, the oligopolies reduce the pool of profits available to other companies in more competitive markets by charging consumers higher prices than a more competitive market would. As high capital costs reduce mobility within and exclude most competitors from entering the oligopolistic market, it means that only if the oligopolies raise their prices **too** high can real competition become possible (i.e. profitable) again and so "it should not be concluded that oligopolies can set prices as high as they like. If prices are set too high, dominant firms from other industries would be tempted to move in and gain a share of the exceptional returns. Small producers -- using more expensive materials or out-dated technologies -- would be able to increase their share of the market and make the competitive rate of profit or better." [Allan Engler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 53]

Big Business, therefore, receives a larger share of the available surplus value in the economy, due to its size advantage and market power, not due to "higher efficiency".

## C.4 Why does the market become dominated by Big Business?

*"The facts show. . .that capitalist economies tend over time and with some interruptions to become more and more heavily concentrated."* [M.A. Utton, **The Political Economy of Big Business**, p. 186] The dynamic of the "free" market is that it tends to become dominated by a few firms (on a national, and increasingly, international, level), resulting in oligopolistic competition and higher profits for the companies in question (see [next section](#) for details and evidence). This occurs because only established firms can afford the large capital investments needed to compete, thus reducing the number of competitors who can enter or survive in a given the market. Thus, in Proudhon's words, *"competition kills competition."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 242]

*This "does not mean that new, powerful brands have not emerged [after the rise of Big Business in the USA after the 1880s]; they have, but in such markets. . . which were either small or non-existent in the early years of this century."* The dynamic of capitalism is such that the *"competitive advantage [associated with the size and market power of Big Business], once created, prove[s] to be enduring."* [Paul Ormerod, **The Death of Economics**, p. 55]

For people with little or no capital, entering competition is limited to new markets with low start-up costs (*"In general, the industries which are generally associated with small scale production. . . have low levels of concentration"* [Malcolm C. Sawyer, **The Economics of Industries and Firms**, p. 35]). Sadly, however, due to the dynamics of competition, these markets usually in turn become dominated by a few big firms, as weaker firms fail, successful ones grow and capital costs increase -- *"Each time capital completes its cycle, the individual grows smaller in proportion to it."* [Josephine Guerts, **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed** no. 41, p. 48]

For example, between 1869 and 1955 *"there was a marked growth in capital per person and per number of the labour force. Net capital per head rose. . . to about four times its initial level. . . at a rate of about 17% per decade."* The annual rate of gross capital formation rose *"from \$3.5 billion in 1869-1888 to \$19 billion in 1929-1955, and to \$30 billion in 1946-1955. This long term rise over some three quarters of a century was thus about nine times the original level."* [Simon Kuznets, **Capital in the American Economy**, p. 33 and p. 394, constant (1929) dollars]. To take the steel industry as an illustration: in 1869 the average cost of steel works in the USA was \$156,000, but by 1899 it was \$967,000 -- a 520% increase. From 1901 to 1950, gross fixed assets increased from \$740,201 to \$2,829,186 in the steel industry as a whole, with the assets of Bethlehem Steel increasing by 4,386.5% from 1905 (\$29,294) to 1950 (\$1,314,267). These increasing assets are reflect both in the size of workplaces and in the administration levels in the company as a whole (i.e. **between** individual workplaces).

With the increasing ratio of capital to worker, the cost of starting a rival firm in a given, well-developed, market prohibits all but other large firms from doing so (and here we ignore advertising and other

distribution expenses, which increase start-up costs even more - "*advertising raises the capital requirements for entry into the industry*" -- Sawyer, **Op. Cit.**, p. 108). J.S Bain [**Barriers in New Competition**] identified three main sources of entry barrier: economies of scale (i.e. increased capital costs and their more productive nature); product differentiation (i.e. advertising); and a more general category he called "*absolute cost advantage*."

This last barrier means that larger companies are able to outbid smaller companies for resources, ideas, etc. and put more money into Research and Development and buying patents. Therefore they can have a technological and material advantage over the small company. They can charge "uneconomic" prices for a time (and still survive due to their resources) -- an activity called "*predatory pricing*" -- and/or mount lavish promotional campaigns to gain larger market share or drive competitors out of the market. In addition, it is easier for large companies to raise external capital, and risk is generally less.

In addition, large firms can have a major impact on innovation and the development of technology -- they can simply absorb newer, smaller, enterprises by way of their economic power, buying out (and thus controlling) new ideas, much the way oil companies hold patents on a variety of alternative energy source technologies, which they then fail to develop in order to reduce competition for their product (of course, at some future date they may develop them when it becomes profitable for them to do so). Also, when control of a market is secure, oligopolies will usually delay innovation to maximise their use of existing plant and equipment or introduce spurious innovations to maximise product differentiation. If their control of a market is challenged (usually by other big firms, such as the increased competition Western oligopolies faced from Japanese ones in the 1970s and 1980s), they can speed up the introduction of more advanced technology and usually remain competitive (due, mainly, to the size of the resources they have available).

These barriers work on two levels - **absolute** (entry) barriers and **relative** (movement) barriers. As business grows in size, the amount of capital required to invest in order to start a business also increases. This restricts entry of new capital into the market (and limits it to firms with substantial financial and/or political backing behind them):

*"Once dominant organisations have come to characterise the structure of an industry, immense barriers to entry face potential competitors. Huge investments in plant, equipment, and personnel are needed. . . [T]he development and utilisation of productive resources **within** the organisation takes considerable time, particularly in the face of formidable incumbents . . . It is therefore one thing for a few business organisations to emerge in an industry that has been characterised by . . . highly competitive conditions. It is quite another to break into an industry. . . [marked by] oligopolistic market power."* [William Lazonick, **Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, pp. 86-87]

Moreover, **within** the oligopolistic industry, the large size and market power of the dominant firms mean that smaller firms face expansion disadvantages which reduce competition. The dominant firms have

many advantages over their smaller rivals -- significant purchasing power (which gains better service and lower prices from suppliers as well as better access to resources), privileged access to financial resources, larger amounts of retained earnings to fund investment, economies of scale both within and **between** workplaces, the undercutting of prices to "uneconomical" levels and so on (and, of course, they can **buy** the smaller company -- IBM paid \$3.5 billion for Lotus in 1995. That is about equal to the entire annual output of Nepal, which has a population of 20 million). The large firm or firms can also rely on its established relationships with customers or suppliers to limit the activities of smaller firms which are trying to expand (for example, using their clout to stop their contacts purchasing the smaller firms products).

Little wonder Proudhon argued that "*[i]n competition. . . victory is assured to the heaviest battalions.*" [Op. Cit., p. 260]

As a result of these entry/movement barriers, we see the market being divided into two main sectors -- an oligopolistic sector and a more competitive one. These sectors work on two levels -- within markets (with a few firms in a given market having very large market shares, power and excess profits) and within the economy itself (some markets being highly concentrated and dominated by a few firms, other markets being more competitive). This results in smaller firms in oligopolistic markets being squeezed by big business along side firms in more competitive markets. Being protected from competitive forces means that the market price of oligopolistic markets is **not** forced down to the average production price by the market, but instead it tends to stabilise around the production price of the smaller firms in the industry (which do not have access to the benefits associated with dominant position in a market). This means that the dominant firms get super-profits while new capital is not tempted into the market as returns would not make the move worthwhile for any but the biggest companies, who usually get comparable returns in their own oligopolised markets (and due to the existence of market power in a few hands, entry can potentially be disastrous for small firms if the dominant firms perceive expansion as a threat).

Thus whatever super-profits Big Business reap are maintained due to the advantages it has in terms of concentration, market power and size which reduce competition (see [section C.5](#) for details).

And, we must note, that the processes that saw the rise of national Big Business is also at work on the global market. Just as Big Business arose from a desire to maximise profits and survive on the market, so "*[t]ransnationals arise because they are a means of consolidating or increasing profits in an oligopoly world.*" [Keith Cowling and Roger Sugden, **Transnational Monopoly Capitalism**, p. 20] So while a strictly national picture will show a market dominated by, say, four firms, a global view shows us twelve firms instead and market power looks much less worrisome. But just as the national market saw an increased concentration of firms over time, so will global markets. Over time a well-evolved structure of global oligopoly will appear, with a handful of firms dominating most global markets (with turnovers larger than most countries GDP -- which is the case even now. For example, in 1993 Shell had assets of US\$ 100.8 billion, which is more than double the GDP of New Zealand and three times that of Nigeria, and total sales of US\$ 95.2 billion).



Thus the very dynamic of capitalism, the requirements for survival on the market, results in the market becoming dominated by Big Business ("*the more competition develops, the more it tends to reduce the number of competitors.*" [P-J Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 243]). The irony that competition results in its destruction and the replacement of market co-ordination with planned allocation of resources is one usually lost on supporters of capitalism.

## C.4.1 How extensive is Big Business?

The effects of Big Business on assets, sales and profit distribution are clear. In the USA, in 1985, there were 14,600 commercial banks. The 50 largest owned 45.7 of all assets, the 100 largest held 57.4%. In 1984 there were 272,037 active corporations in the manufacturing sector, 710 of them (one-fourth of 1 percent) held 80.2 percent of total assets. In the service sector (usually held to home of small business), 95 firms of the total of 899,369 owned 28 percent of the sector's assets. In 1986 in agriculture, 29,000 large farms (only 1.3% of all farms) accounted for one-third of total farm sales and 46% of farm profits. In 1987, the top 50 firms accounted for 54.4% of the total sales of the **Fortune** 500 largest industrial companies. [Richard B. Du Boff, **Accumulation and Power**, p. 171]

The process of market domination is reflected by the increasing market share of the big companies. In Britain, the top 100 manufacturing companies saw their market share rise from 16% in 1909, to 27% in 1949, to 32% in 1958 and to 42% by 1975. In terms of net assets, the top 100 industrial and commercial companies saw their share of net assets rise from 47% in 1948 to 64% in 1968 to 80% in 1976 [RCO Matthews (ed.), **Economy and Democracy**, p. 239]. Looking wider afield, we find that in 1995 about 50 firms produce about 15 percent of the manufactured goods in the industrialised world. There are about 150 firms in the world-wide motor vehicle industry. But the two largest firms, General Motors and Ford, together produce almost one-third of all vehicles. The five largest firms produce half of all output and the ten largest firms produce three-quarters. Four appliance firms manufacture 98 percent of the washing machines made in the United States. In the U. S. meatpacking industry, four firms account for over 85 percent of the output of beef, while the other 1,245 firms have less than 15 percent of the market.

While the concentration of economic power is most apparent in the manufacturing sector, it is not limited to manufacturing. We are seeing increasing concentration in the service sector - airlines, fast-food chains and the entertainment industry are just a few examples.

The other effect of Big Business is that large companies tend to become more diversified as the concentration levels in individual industries increase. This is because as a given market becomes dominated by larger companies, these companies expand into other markets (using their larger resources to do so) in order to strengthen their position in the economy and reduce risks. This can be seen in the rise of "subsidiaries" of parent companies in many different markets, with some products apparently competing against each other actually owned by the same company!

Tobacco companies are masters of this diversification strategy; most people support their toxic industry

without even knowing it! Don't believe it? Well, if you ate any Jell-O products, drank Kool-Aid, used Log Cabin syrup, munched Minute Rice, quaffed Miller beer, gobbled Oreos, smeared Velveeta on Ritz crackers, and washed it all down with Maxwell House coffee, you supported the tobacco industry, all without taking a puff on a cigarette!

Ironically, the reason why the economy becomes dominated by Big Business has to do with the nature of competition itself. In order to survive (by maximising profits) in a competitive market, firms have to invest in capital, advertising, and so on. This survival process results in barriers to potential competitors being created, which results in more and more markets being dominated by a few big firms. This oligopolisation process becomes self-supporting as oligopolies (due to their size) have access to more resources than smaller firms. Thus the dynamic of competitive capitalism is to negate itself in the form of oligopoly.

## C.4.2 What are the effects of Big Business on society?

Unsurprisingly many pro-capitalist economists and supporters of capitalism try to downplay the extensive evidence on the size and dominance of Big Business in capitalism.

Some deny that Big Business is a problem - if the market results in a few companies dominating it, then so be it (the right-libertarian "Austrian" school is at the forefront of this kind of position - although it does seem somewhat ironic that "Austrian" economists and other "market advocates" should celebrate the suppression of market co-ordination by **planned** co-ordination within the economy that the increased size of Big Business marks). According to this perspective, oligopolies and cartels usually do not survive very long, unless they are doing a good job of serving the customer.

We agree -- it is oligopolistic **competition** we are discussing here. Big Business has to be responsive to demand (when not manipulating/creating it by advertising, of course), otherwise they lose market share to their rivals (usually other dominant firms in the same market, or big firms from other countries). However, the "free market" response to the reality of oligopoly ignores the fact that we are more than just consumers and that economic activity and the results of market events impact on many different aspects of life. Thus our argument is not focused on the fact we pay more for some products than we would in a more competitive market -- it is the **wider** results of oligopoly we are concerned with here. If a few companies receive excess profits just because their size limits competition the effects of this will be felt **everywhere**.

For a start, these "excessive" profits will tend to end up in few hands, so skewing the income distribution (and so power and influence) within society. The available evidence suggests that *"more concentrated industries generate a lower wage share for workers"* in a firm's value-added. [Keith Cowling, **Monopoly Capitalism**, p. 106] The largest firms retain only 52% of their profits, the rest is paid out as dividends, compared to 79% for the smallest ones and *"what might be called rentiers share of the corporate surplus - dividends plus interest as a percentage of pretax profits and interest - has risen sharply, from 20-30% in the 1950s to 60-70% in the early 1990s."* [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 75,

p. 73] The top 10% of the US population own well over 80% of stock and bonds owned by individuals while the top 5% of stockowners own 94.5% of all stock held by individuals. Little wonder wealth has become so concentrated since the 1970s [**Ibid.**, pp. 66-67]. At its most basic, this skewing of income provides the capitalist class with more resources to fight the class war but its impact goes much wider than this.

Moreover, the *"level of aggregate concentration helps to indicate the degree of centralisation of decision-making in the economy and the economic power of large firms."* [Malcolm C. Sawyer, **Op. Cit.**, p. 261] Thus oligopoly increases and centralises economic power over investment decisions and location decisions which can be used to play one region/country and/or workforce against another to lower wages and conditions for all (or, equally likely, investment will be moved away from countries with rebellious work forces or radical governments, the resulting slump teaching them a lesson on whose interests count). As the size of business increases, the power of capital over labour and society also increases with the threat of relocation being enough to make workforces accept pay cuts, worsening conditions, "down-sizing" and so on and communities increased pollution, the passing of pro-capital laws with respect to strikes, union rights, etc. (and increased corporate control over politics due to the mobility of capital).

Also, of course, oligopoly results in political power as their economic importance and resources gives them the ability to influence government to introduce favourable policies -- either directly, by funding political parties, or indirectly by investment decisions or influence the media and funding political think-tanks. Economic power also extends into the labour market, where restricted labour opportunities as well as negative effects on the work process itself may result. All of which shapes the society we live in the laws we are subject to, the "evenness" and "levelness" of the "playing field" we face in the market and the ideas dominant in society (see sections [D.2](#) and [D.3](#)).

So, with increasing size, comes the increasing power, the power of oligopolies to *"influence the terms under which they choose to operate. Not only do they **react** to the level of wages and the pace of work, they also **act** to determine them. . . The credible threat of the shift of production and investment will serve to hold down wages and raise the level of effort [required from workers] . . . [and] may also be able to gain the co-operation of the state in securing the appropriate environment . . . [for] a redistribution towards profits"* in value/added and national income. [Keith Cowling and Roger Sugden, **Transnational Monopoly Capitalism**, p. 99]

Since the market price of commodities produced by oligopolies is determined by a mark-up over costs, this means that they contribute to inflation as they adapt to increasing costs or falls in their rate of profit by increasing prices. However, this does not mean that oligopolistic capitalism is not subject to slumps. Far from it. Class struggle will influence the share of wages (and so profit share) as wage increases will not be fully offset by price increases -- higher prices mean lower demand and there is always the threat of competition from other oligopolies. In addition, class struggle will also have an impact on productivity and the amount of surplus value in the economy as a whole, which places major limitations on the stability of the system. Thus oligopolistic capitalism still has to contend with the effects of social

resistance to hierarchy, exploitation and oppression that afflicted the more competitive capitalism of the past.

The distributive effects of oligopoly skews income, thus the degree of monopoly has a major impact on the degree of inequality in household distribution. The flow of wealth to the top helps to skew production away from working class needs (by outbidding others for resources and having firms produce goods for elite markets while others go without). The empirical evidence presented by Keith Cowling "*points to the conclusion that a redistribution from wages to profits will have a depressive impact on consumption*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 51] which may cause depression. High profits also means that more can be retaining by the firm to fund investment (or pay high level managers more salaries or increase dividends, of course). When capital expands faster than labour income over-investment is an increasing problem and aggregate demand cannot keep up to counteract falling profit shares (see [section C.7](#) on more about the business cycle). Moreover, as the capital stock is larger, oligopoly will also have a tendency to deepen the eventual slump, making it last long and harder to recover from.

Looking at oligopoly from an efficiency angle, the existence of super profits from oligopolies means that the higher price within a market allows inefficient firms to continue production. Smaller firms can make average (non-oligopolistic) profits **in spite** of having higher costs, sub-optimal plant and so on. This results in inefficient use of resources as market forces cannot work to eliminate firms which have higher costs than average (one of the key features of capitalism according to its supporters). And, of course, oligopolistic profits skew allocative efficiency as a handful of firms can out-bid all the rest, meaning that resources do not go where they are most needed but where the largest effective demand lies.

Such large resources available to oligopolistic companies also allows inefficient firms to survive on the market even in the face of competition from other oligopolistic firms. As Richard B. Du Boff points out, efficiency can also be "*impaired when market power so reduces competitive pressures that administrative reforms can be dispensed with. One notorious case was . . . U.S. Steel [formed in 1901]. Nevertheless, the company was hardly a commercial failure, effective market control endured for decades, and above normal returns were made on the watered stock. . . Another such case was Ford. The company survived the 1930s only because of cash reserves socked away in its glory days. Ford provides an excellent illustration of the fact that a really large business organisation can withstand a surprising amount of mismanagement.*" [**Accumulation and Power**, p. 174]

Thus Big Business reduces efficiency within an economy on many levels as well as having significant and lasting impact on society's social, economic and political structure.

The effects of the concentration of capital and wealth on society are very important, which is why we are discussing capitalism's tendency to result in big business. The impact of the wealth of the few on the lives of the many is indicated in [section D](#) of the FAQ. As shown there, in addition to involving direct authority over employees, capitalism also involves indirect control over communities through the power that stems from wealth.

Thus capitalism is not the free market described by such people as Adam Smith -- the level of capital concentration has made a mockery of the ideas of free competition.

### C.4.3 What does the existence of Big Business mean for economic theory and wage labour?

Here we indicate the impact of Big Business on economic theory itself and wage labour. In the words of Michal Kalecki, perfect competition is *"a most unrealistic assumption"* and *"when its actual status of a handy model is forgotten becomes a dangerous myth."* [quoted by Malcolm C. Sawyer, **The Economics of Michal Kalecki**, p. 8] Unfortunately mainstream capitalist economics is **built** on this myth. Ironically, it was against a *"background [of rising Big Business in the 1890s] that the grip of marginal economics, an imaginary world of many small firms. . . was consolidated in the economics profession."* Thus, *"[a]lmost from its conception, the theoretical postulates of marginal economics concerning the nature of companies [and of markets, we must add] have been a travesty of reality."* [Paul Ormerod, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 55-56]

That the assumptions of economic ideology so contradicts reality has important considerations on the "voluntary" nature of wage labour. If the competitive model assumed by neo-classical economics held we would see a wide range of ownership types (including co-operatives, extensive self-employment and workers hiring capital) as there would be no "barriers of entry" associated with firm control. This is not the case -- workers hiring capital is non-existent and self-employment and co-operatives are marginal. The dominant control form is capital hiring labour (wage slavery).

With a model based upon "perfect competition," supporters of capitalism could build a case that wage labour is a voluntary choice -- after all, workers (in such a market) could hire capital or form co-operatives relatively easily. But the **reality** of the "free" market is such that this model does not exist -- and as an assumption, it is seriously misleading. If we take into account the actuality of the capitalist economy, we soon have to realise that oligopoly is the dominant form of market and that the capitalist economy, by its very nature, restricts the options available to workers -- which makes the notion that wage labour is a "voluntary" choice untenable.

If the economy is so structured as to make entry into markets difficult and survival dependent on accumulating capital, then these barriers are just as effective as government decrees. If small businesses are squeezed by oligopolies then chances of failure are increased (and so off-putting to workers with few resources) and if income inequality is large, then workers will find it very hard to find the collateral required to borrow capital and start their own co-operatives. Thus, looking at the **reality** of capitalism (as opposed to the textbooks) it is clear that the existence of oligopoly helps to maintain wage labour by restricting the options available on the "free market" for working people.

As we noted in [section C.4](#), those with little capital are reduced to markets with low set-up costs and low concentration. Thus, claim the supporters of capitalism, workers still have a choice. However, this

choice is (as we have indicated) somewhat limited by the existence of oligopolistic markets -- so limited, in fact, that less than 10% of the working population are self-employed workers. Moreover, it is claimed, technological forces may work to increase the number of markets that require low set-up costs (the computing market is often pointed to as an example). However, similar predictions were made over 100 years ago when the electric motor began to replace the steam engine in factories. *"The new technologies [of the 1870s] may have been compatible with small production units and decentralised operations. . . That. . . expectation was not fulfilled."* [Richard B. Du Boff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 65] From the history of capitalism, we imagine that markets associated with new technologies will go the same way.

The reality of capitalist development is that even **if** workers invested in new markets, one that require low set-up costs, the dynamic of the system is such that over time these markets will also become dominated by a few big firms. Moreover, to survive in an oligopolised economy small cooperatives will be under pressure to hire wage labour and otherwise act as capitalist concerns (see [section J.5.11](#)). Therefore, even if we ignore the massive state intervention which created capitalism in the first place (see [section B.3.2](#)), the dynamics of the system are such that relations of domination and oppression will always be associated with it -- they cannot be "competed" away as the actions of competition creates and re-enforces them (also see sections [J.5.11](#) and [J.5.12](#) on the barriers capitalism place on co-operatives and self-management even though they are more efficient).

So the effects of the concentration of capital on the options open to us are great and very important. The existence of Big Business has a direct impact on the "voluntary" nature of wage labour as it produces very effective "barriers of entry" for alternative modes of production. The resultant pressures big business place on small firms also reduces the viability of co-operatives and self-employment to survive **as** co-operatives and non-employers of wage labour, effectively marginalising them as true alternatives. Moreover, even in new markets the dynamics of capitalism are such that **new** barriers are created all the time, again reducing our options.

Overall, the **reality** of capitalism is such that the equality of opportunity implied in models of "perfect competition" is lacking. And without such equality, wage labour cannot be said to be a "voluntary" choice between available options -- the options available have been skewed so far in one direction that the other alternatives have been marginalised.

## D.2 What influence does wealth have over politics?

The short answer is: a great deal of influence, directly and indirectly. We have already touched on this in section B.2.3 (["How does the ruling class maintain control of the state?"](#)) Here we will expand on those remarks.

State policy in a capitalist democracy is usually well-insulated from popular influence but very open to elite influence and money interests. Let's consider the possibility of direct influence first. It's obvious that elections cost money and that only the rich and corporations can realistically afford to take part in a major way. Even union donations to political parties cannot effectively compete with those from the business classes. For example, in the 1972 US presidential elections, of the \$500 million spent, only about \$13 million came from trade unions. The vast majority of the rest undoubtedly came from Big Business and wealthy individuals. For the 1956 elections, the last year for which direct union-business comparisons are possible, the contributions of 742 businessmen matched those of unions representing 17 million workers. And this was at a time when unions had large memberships and before the decline of organised labour.

Therefore, logically, politics will be dominated by the rich and powerful -- in fact if not in theory -- since only the rich can afford to run and only parties supported by the wealthy will gain enough funds and favourable press coverage to have a chance (see section D.3, ["How does wealth influence the mass media?"](#)). Even in countries with strong union movements which support labour-based parties, the political agenda is dominated by the media. As the media are owned by and dependent upon advertising from business, it is hardly surprising that independent labour-based political agendas are difficult to follow or be taken seriously. Moreover, the funds available for labour parties are always less than those of capitalist supported parties, meaning that the ability of the former to compete in "fair" elections is hindered. And this is ignoring the fact that the state structure is designed to ensure that real power lies not in the hands of elected representatives but rather in the hands of the state bureaucracy (see [section J.2.2](#)) which ensures that any pro-labour political agenda will be watered down and made harmless to the interests of the ruling class.

To this it must be added that wealth has a massive **indirect** influence over politics (and so over society and the law). We have noted above that wealth controls the media and their content. However, beyond this there is what can be called "Investor Confidence," which is another important source of influence. If a government starts to pass laws or act in ways that conflict with the desires of business, capital may become reluctant to invest (and may even disinvest and move elsewhere). The economic downturn that results will cause political instability, giving the government no choice but to regard the interests of business as privileged. "What is good for business" really is good for the country, because if business suffers, so will everyone else.

David Noble provides a good summary of the effects of such indirect pressures when he writes firms *"have the ability to transfer production from one country to another, to close a plant in one and reopen it elsewhere, to direct and redirect investment wherever the 'climate' is most favourable [to business]. . . . [I]t has enabled the corporation to play one workforce off against another in the pursuit of the cheapest and most compliant labour (which gives the misleading appearance of greater efficiency). . . . [I]t has compelled regions and nations to compete with one another to try and attract investment by offering tax incentives, labour discipline, relaxed environmental and other regulations and publicly subsidised infrastructure. . . . Thus has emerged the great paradox of our age, according to which those nations that prosper most (attract corporate investment) by most readily lowering their standard of living (wages, benefits, quality of life, political freedom). The net result of this system of extortion is a universal lowering of conditions and expectations in the name of competitiveness and prosperity."* [**Progress Without People**, pp. 91-92]

And, we must note, even when a country **does** lower its standard of living to attract investment or encourage its own business class to invest (as the USA and UK did by means of recession to discipline the workforce by high unemployment), it is no guarantee that capital will stay. US workers have seen their companies' profits rise while their wages have stagnated and (in reward) hundreds of thousands have been "down-sized" or seen their jobs moved to Mexico or South East Asia sweatshops. In the far east, Japanese, Hong Kong, and South Korean workers have also seen their manufacturing jobs move to low wage (and more repressive/authoritarian) countries such as China and Indonesia.

As well as the mobility of capital, there is also the threat posed by public debt. As Doug Henwood notes, *"[p]ublic debt is a powerful way of assuring that the state remains safely in capital's hands. The higher a government's debt, the more it must please its bankers. Should bankers grow displeased, they will refuse to roll over old debts or to extend new financing on any but the most punishing terms (if at all). The explosion of [US] federal debt in the 1980s vastly increased the power of creditors to demand austere fiscal and monetary policies to dampen the US economy as it recovered . . . from the 1989-92 slowdown."* [**Wall Street**, pp. 23-24] And, we must note, Wall street made a fortune on the debt, directly and indirectly.

Commenting on Clinton's plans for the devolution of welfare programmes from Federal to State government in America, Noam Chomsky makes the important point that *"under conditions of relative equality, this could be a move towards democracy. Under existing circumstances, devolution is intended as a further blow to the eroding democratic processes. Major corporations, investment firms, and the like, can constrain or directly control the acts of national governments and can set one national workforce against another. But the game is much easier when the only competing player that might remotely be influenced by the 'great beast' is a state government, and even middle-sized enterprise can join in. The shadow cast by business [over society and politics] can thus be darker, and private power can move on to greater victories in the name of freedom."* [Noam Chomsky, "Rollback III", **Z Magazine**, March, 1995]

Economic blackmail is a very useful weapon in deterring freedom.



## D.2.1 Is capital flight really that powerful?

Yes. By capital flight, business can ensure that any government which becomes too independent and starts to consider the interests of those who elected it will be put back into its place. Therefore we cannot expect a different group of politicians to react in different ways to the same institutional influences and interests. It's no coincidence that the Australian Labour Party and the Spanish Socialist Party introduced "Thatcherite" policies at the same time as the "Iron Lady" implemented them in Britain. The New Zealand Labour government is a case in point, where *"within a few months of re-election [in 1984], finance minister Roger Douglas set out a programme of economic 'reforms' that made Thatcher and Reagan look like wimps. . . . [A]lmost everything was privatised and the consequences explained away in marketspeak. Division of wealth that had been unknown in New Zealand suddenly appeared, along with unemployment, poverty and crime."* [John Pilger, "Breaking the one party state," **New Statesman**, 16/12/94]

An extreme example of capital flight being used to "discipline" a naughty administration can be seen in the 1974 to '79 Labour government in Britain. In January, 1974, the FT Index for the London Stock Exchange stood at 500 points. In February, the Miner's went on strike, forcing Heath (the Tory Prime Minister) to hold (and lose) a general election. The new Labour government (which included many left-wingers in its cabinet) talked about nationalising the banks and much heavy industry. In August, 1974, Tony Benn announced plans to nationalise the ship building industry. By December, the FT index had fallen to 150 points. By 1976 the Treasury was spending \$100 million a day buying back its own money to support the pound [**The Times**, 10/6/76].

**The Times** noted that *"the further decline in the value of the pound has occurred despite the high level of interest rates. . . . [D]ealers said that selling pressure against the pound was not heavy or persistent, but there was an almost total lack of interest amongst buyers. The drop in the pound is extremely surprising in view of the unanimous opinion of bankers, politicians and officials that the currency is undervalued."* [27/5/76]

The Labour government, faced with the power of international capital, ended up having to receive a temporary "bailing out" by the IMF, which imposed a package of cuts and controls, to which Labour's response was, in effect, *"We'll do anything you say,"* as one economist described. The social costs of these policies were disastrous, with unemployment rising to the then unheard-of-height of one million. And let's not forget that they *"cut expenditure by twice the amount the IMF were promised"* in an attempt to appear business-friendly. it [Peter Donaldson, **A Question of Economics**, p. 89]

Capital will not invest in a country that does not meet its approval. In 1977, the Bank of England failed to get the Labour government to abolish its exchange controls. Between 1979 and 1982 the Tories abolished them and ended restrictions on lending for banks and building societies:

*"The result of the abolition of exchange controls was visible almost immediately: capital*

*hitherto invested in the U.K. began going abroad. In the **Guardian** of 21 September, 1981, Victor Keegan noted that 'Figures published last week by the Bank of England show that pension funds are now investing 25% of their money abroad (compared with almost nothing a few years ago) and there has been no investment at all (net) by unit trusts in the UK since exchange controls were abolished'" [Robin Ramsay, **Lobster** no. 27, p. 3].*

Why? What was so bad about the UK? Simply stated, the working class was too militant, the trade unions were not "*shackled by law and subdued,*" as **The Economist** recently put it [February 27, 1993], and the welfare state could be lived on. The partial gains from previous struggles still existed, and people had enough dignity not to accept any job offered or put up with an employer's authoritarian practices. These factors created "inflexibility" in the labour market, so that the working class had to be taught a lesson in "good" economics.

By capital flight a rebellious population and a slightly radical government were brought to heel.

## D.2.2 How extensive is business propaganda?

Business spends a lot of money to ensure that people accept the status quo. Referring again to the US as an example (where such techniques are common), various means are used to get people to identify "free enterprise" (meaning state-subsidised private power with no infringement of managerial prerogatives) as "the American way." The success of these campaigns is clear, since many working people now object to unions as having too much power or irrationally rejecting all radical ideas as "Communism" regardless of their content.

By 1978, American business was spending \$1 billion a year on grassroots propaganda (known as "Astroturf" by PR insiders, to reflect the appearance of popular support, without the substance, and "grasstops" whereby influential citizens are hired to serve as spokespersons for business interests). In 1983, there existed 26 general purpose foundations for this purpose with endowments of \$100 million or more, as well as dozens of corporate foundations. These, along with media power, ensure that force -- always an inefficient means of control -- is replaced by the "manufacture of consent": the process whereby the limits of acceptable expression are defined by the wealthy.

This process has been going on for some time. For example "*[i]n April 1947, the Advertising Council announced a \$100 million campaign to use all media to 'sell' the American economic system -- as they conceived it -- to the American people; the program was officially described as a 'major project of educating the American people about the economic facts of life.'* Corporations '*started extensive programs to indoctrinate employees,*' the leading business journal **Fortune** reported, subjected their captive audiences to '*Courses in Economic Education*' and testing them for commitment to the '*free enterprise system -- that is, Americanism.*' A survey conducted by the American Management Association (AMA) found that many corporate leaders regarded '*propaganda*' and '*economic education*' as synonymous, holding that '*we want our people to think right.*' . . . [*and that*] '*some employers view. . . [it] as a sort of 'battle of loyalties' with the unions*' -- a rather unequal battle, given the resources

*available.*" [Noam Chomsky, **World Orders, Old and New**, pp. 89-90]

Various institutions are used to get Big Business's message across, for example, the Joint Council on Economic Education, ostensibly a charitable organisation, funds economic education for teachers and provides books, pamphlets and films as teaching aids. In 1974, 20,000 teachers participated in its workshops. The aim is to induce teachers to present corporations in an uncritical light to their students. Funding for this propaganda machine comes from the American Bankers Association, AT&T, the Sears Roebuck Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

As G. William Domhoff points out, "*[a]lthough it [and other bodies like it] has not been able to bring about active acceptance of all power elite policies and perspectives, on economic or other domestic issues, it has been able to ensure that opposing opinions have remained isolated, suspect and only partially developed.*" [**Who Rules America Now?**, pp. 103-4] In other words, "unacceptable" ideas are marginalised, the limits of expression defined, and all within a society apparently based on "the free marketplace of ideas."

The effects of this business propaganda are felt in all other aspects of life, ensuring that while the US business class is extremely class conscious, the rest of the American population considers "class" a swear word!

## D.3 How does wealth influence the mass media?

Anarchists have developed detailed and sophisticated analyses of how the wealthy and powerful use the media to propagandise in their own interests. Perhaps the best of these analyses is the "*Propaganda Model*" expounded in **Manufacturing Consent** by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, whose main theses we will summarise in this section (See also Chomsky's **Necessary Illusions** for a further discussion of this model of the media).

Chomsky and Herman's "propaganda model" of the media postulates a set of five "*filters*" that act to screen the news and other material disseminated by the media. These "filters" result in a media that reflects elite viewpoints and interests and mobilises "*support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity.*" [**Manufacturing Consent**, p. xi]. These "filters" are: (1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; (2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; (3) the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; (4) "flak" (negative responses to a media report) as a means of disciplining the media; and (5) "anticommunism" as a national religion and control mechanism.

*"The raw material of news must pass through successive filters leaving only the cleansed residue fit to print,"* Chomsky and Herman maintain. The filters "*fix the premises of discourse and interpretation, and the definition of what is newsworthy in the first place, and they explain the basis and operations of what amount to propaganda campaigns*" [**Manufacturing Consent**, p. 2]. We will briefly consider the nature of these five filters below (examples are mostly from the US media).

We stress again, before continuing, that this is a **summary** of Herman's and Chomsky's thesis and we cannot hope to present the wealth of evidence and argument available in either **Manufacturing Consent** or **Necessary Illusions**. We recommend either of these books for more information on and evidence to support the "propaganda model" of the media.

### D.3.1 How does the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms affect media content?

Even a century ago, the number of media with any substantial outreach was limited by the large size of the necessary investment, and this limitation has become increasingly effective over time. As in any well developed market, this means that there are very effective **natural** barriers to entry into the media industry. Due to this process of concentration, the ownership of the major media has become increasingly concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. As Ben Bagdikian's stresses in his book **Media Monopoly**, the 29 largest media systems account for over half of the output of all newspapers, and most

of the sales and audiences in magazines, broadcasting, books, and movies. The "top tier" of these -- somewhere between 10 and 24 systems -- along with the government and wire services, "defines the news agenda and supplies much of the national and international news to the lower tiers of the media, and thus for the general public" [**Ibid.**, p. 5]

The twenty-four top-tier companies are large, profit-seeking corporations, owned and controlled by very wealthy people. Many of these companies are fully integrated into the financial market, with the result that the pressures of stockholders, directors, and bankers to focus on the bottom line are powerful. These pressures have intensified in recent years as media stocks have become market favourites and as deregulation has increased profitability and so the threat of take-overs.

The media giants have also diversified into other fields. For example GE, and Westinghouse, both owners of major television networks, are huge, diversified multinational companies heavily involved in the controversial areas of weapons production and nuclear power. GE and Westinghouse depend on the government to subsidise their nuclear power and military research and development, and to create a favourable climate for their overseas sales and investments. Similar dependence on the government affect other media.

Because they are large corporations with international investment interests, the major media tend to have a right-wing political bias. In addition, members of the business class own most of the mass media, the bulk of which depends for their existence on advertising revenue (which in turn comes from private business). Business also provides a substantial share of "experts" for news programmes and generates massive "flak." Claims that they are "left-leaning" are sheer disinformation manufactured by the "flak" organisations described below.

Thus Herman and Chomsky:

*"the dominant media forms are quite large businesses; they are controlled by very wealthy people or by managers who are subject to sharp constraints by owners and other market-profit-oriented forces; and they are closely interlocked, and have important common interests, with other major corporations, banks, and government. This is the first powerful filter that effects news choices."* [**Ibid.**, p. 14]

Needless to say, reporters and editors will be selected based upon how well their work reflects the interests and needs of their employers. Thus a radical reporter and a more mainstream one both of the same skills and abilities would have very different careers within the industry. Unless the radical reporter toned down their copy, they are unlikely to see it printed unedited or unchanged. Thus the structure within the media firm will tend to penalise radical viewpoints, encouraging an acceptance of the status quo in order to further a career. This selection process ensures that owners do not need to order editors or reporters what to do -- to be successful they will have to internalise the values of their employers.

## **D.3.2 What is the effect of advertising as the primary income**

## source of the mass media?

The main business of the media is to sell audiences to advertisers. Advertisers thus acquire a kind of de facto licensing authority, since without their support the media would cease to be economically viable. And it is **affluent** audiences that get advertisers interested. As Chomsky and Herman put it, *"The idea that the drive for large audiences makes the mass media 'democratic' thus suffers from the initial weakness that its political analogue is a voting system weighted by income!"* [Ibid., p.16].

Political discrimination is therefore structured into advertising allocations by the emphasis on people with money to buy. In addition, *"many companies will always refuse to do business with ideological enemies and those whom they perceive as damaging their interests."* Thus overt discrimination adds to the force of the *"voting system weighted by income."* Accordingly, large corporate advertisers almost never sponsor programs that contain serious criticisms of corporate activities, such as negative ecological impacts, the workings of the military-industrial complex, or corporate support of and benefits from Third World dictatorships. More generally, advertisers will want *"to avoid programs with serious complexities and disturbing controversies that interfere with the 'buying mood.'"* [Ibid., p. 18].

This also has had the effect of placing working class and radical papers at a serious disadvantage. Without access to advertising revenue, even the most popular paper will fold or price itself out of the market. Chomsky and Herman cite the UK pro-labour and pro-union **Daily Herald** as an example of this process. The Daily Herald had almost double the readership of **The Times**, the **Financial Times** and **The Guardian** combined, but even with 8.1% of the national circulation it got 3.5% of net advertising revenue and so could not survive on the "free market".

As Herman and Chomsky note, a *"mass movement without any major media support, and subject to a great deal of active press hostility, suffers a serious disability, and struggles against grave odds."* [Ibid., pp. 15-16] With the folding of the **Daily Herald**, the labour movement lost its voice in the mainstream media.

Thus advertising is an effective filter for new choice (and, indeed, survival in the market).

### D.3.3 Why do the media rely on information provided by government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by government and business?

Two of the main reasons for the media's reliance on such sources are economy and convenience: Bottom-line considerations dictate that the media concentrate their resources where important news often occurs, where rumours and leaks are plentiful, and where regular press conferences are held. The White House, Pentagon, and the State Department, in Washington, D.C., are centres of such activity.

Government and corporate sources also have the great merit of being recognisable and credible by their

status and prestige; moreover, they have the most money available to produce a flow of news that the media can use. For example, the Pentagon has a public-information service employing many thousands of people, spending hundreds of millions of dollars every year, and far outspending not only the public-information resources of any dissenting individual or group but the **aggregate** of such groups.

Only the corporate sector has the resources to produce public information and propaganda on the scale of the Pentagon and other government bodies. The Chamber of Commerce, a business **collective**, had a 1983 budget for research, communications, and political activities of \$65 million. Besides the US Chamber of Commerce, there are thousands of state and local chambers of commerce and trade associations also engaged in public relations and lobbying activities.

To maintain their pre-eminent position as sources, government and business-news agencies expend much effort to make things easy for news organisations. They provide the media organisations with facilities in which to gather, give journalists advance copies of speeches and upcoming reports; schedule press conferences at hours convenient for those needing to meet news deadlines; write press releases in language that can be used with little editing; and carefully organise press conferences and "photo opportunity" sessions. This means that, in effect, the large bureaucracies of the power elite **subsidise** the mass media by contributing to a reduction of the media's costs of acquiring the raw materials of, and producing, news. In this way, these bureaucracies gain special access to the media.

*Thus "[e]conomics dictates that they [the media] concentrate their resources where significant news often occurs, where important rumours and leaks abound, and where regular press conferences are held. . . [Along with state bodies] business corporations and trade groups are also regular purveyors of stories deemed newsworthy. These bureaucracies turn out a large volume of material that meets the demands of news organisations for reliable, scheduled flows." [Ibid., pp. 18-19]*

The dominance of official sources would, of course, be weakened by the existence of highly respectable unofficial sources that gave dissident views with great authority. To alleviate this problem, the power elite uses the strategy of "*co-opting the experts*" -- that is, putting them on the payroll as consultants, funding their research, and organising think tanks that will hire them directly and help disseminate the messages deemed essential to elite interests. "Experts" on TV panel discussions and news programs are often drawn from such organisations, whose funding comes primarily from the corporate sector and wealthy families -- a fact that is, of course, never mentioned on the programs where they appear.

### **D.3.4 How is "flak" used by the wealthy and powerful as a means of disciplining the media?**

"Flak" refers to negative responses to a media statement or program. Such responses may be expressed as phone calls, letters, telegrams, e-mail messages, petitions, lawsuits, speeches, bills before Congress, or other modes of complaint, threat, or punishment. Flak may be generated by organisations or it may come from the independent actions of individuals. Large-scale flak campaigns, either by organisations or

individuals with substantial resources, can be both uncomfortable and costly to the media.

Advertisers are very concerned to avoid offending constituencies who might produce flak, and their demands for inoffensive programming exerts pressure on the media to avoid certain kinds of facts, positions, or programs that are likely to call forth flak. The most deterrent kind of flak comes from business and government, who have the funds to produce it on a large scale.

For example, during the 1970s and 1980s, the corporate community sponsored the creation of such institutions as the American Legal Foundation, the Capital Legal Foundation, the Media Institute, the Center for Media and Public Affairs, and Accuracy in Media (AIM), which may be regarded as organisations designed for the specific purpose of producing flak. Freedom House is an older US organisation which had a broader design but whose flak-producing activities became a model for the more recent organisations.

The Media Institute, for instance, was set up in 1972 and is funded by wealthy corporate patrons, sponsoring media monitoring projects, conferences, and studies of the media. The main focus of its studies and conferences has been the alleged failure of the media to portray business accurately and to give adequate weight to the business point of view, but it also sponsors works such as John Corry's "expose" of alleged left-wing bias in the mass media.

The government itself is a major producer of flak, regularly attacking, threatening, and "correcting" the media, trying to contain any deviations from the established propaganda lines in foreign or domestic policy.

And, we should note, while the flak machines steadily attack the media, the media treats them well. While effectively ignoring radical critiques (such as the "propaganda model"), flak receives respectful attention and their propagandistic role and links to corporations and a wider right-wing program rarely mentioned or analysed.

### **D.3.5 Why do the power elite use "anticommunism" as a national religion and control mechanism?**

"Communism," or indeed any form of socialism, is of course regarded as the ultimate evil by the corporate rich, since the ideas of collective ownership of productive assets, giving workers more bargaining power, or allowing ordinary citizens more voice in public policy decisions threatens the very root of the class position and superior status of the elite.

Hence the ideology of anticommunism has been very useful, because it can be used to discredit anybody advocating policies regarded as harmful to corporate interests. It also helps to divide the Left and labour movements, justifies support for pro-US right-wing regimes abroad as "lesser evils" than communism, and discourages liberals from opposing such regimes for fear of being branded as heretics from the



national religion.

Since the end of the Cold War, anti-communism has not been used as extensively as it once was to mobilise support for elite crusades. Instead, the "Drug War" or "anti-terrorism" now often provide the public with "official enemies" to hate and fear. Thus the Drug War was the excuse for the Bush administration's invasion of Panama, and "fighting narco-terrorists" has more recently been the official reason for shipping military hardware and surveillance equipment to Mexico (where it's actually being used against the Zapatista rebels in Chiapas, whose uprising is threatening to destabilise the country and endanger US investments).

Of course there are still a few official communist enemy states, like North Korea, Cuba, and China, and abuses or human rights violations in these countries are systematically played up by the media while similar abuses in client states are downplayed or ignored. Chomsky and Herman refer to the victims of abuses in enemy states as **worthy victims**, while victims who suffer at the hands of US clients or friends are **unworthy victims**. Stories about worthy victims are often made the subject of sustained propaganda campaigns, to score political points against enemies.

*"If the government of corporate community and the media feel that a story is useful as well as dramatic, they focus on it intensively and use it to enlighten the public. This was true, for example, of the shooting down by the Soviets of the Korean airliner KAL 007 in early September 1983, which permitted an extended campaign of denigration of an official enemy and greatly advanced Reagan administration arms plans."*

*"In sharp contrast, the shooting down by Israel of a Libyan civilian airliner in February 1973 led to no outcry in the West, no denunciations for 'cold-blooded murder,' and no boycott. This difference in treatment was explained by the **New York Times** precisely on the grounds of utility: 'No useful purpose is served by an acrimonious debate over the assignment of blame for the downing of a Libyan airliner in the Sinai peninsula last week.' There **was** a very 'useful purpose' served by focusing on the Soviet act, and a massive propaganda campaign ensued." [Ibid., p. 32]*

### **D.3.6 Isn't it a "conspiracy theory" to suggest that the media are used as propaganda instruments by the elite?**

Chomsky and Herman address this charge in the Preface to **Manufacturing Consent**: *"Institutional critiques such as we present in this book are commonly dismissed by establishment commentators as 'conspiracy theories,' but this is merely an evasion. We do not use any kind of 'conspiracy' hypothesis to explain mass-media performance. In fact, our treatment is much closer to a 'free market' analysis, with the results largely an outcome of the workings of market forces."*

They go on to suggest what some of these "market forces" are. One of the most important is the weeding-out process that determines who gets the journalistic jobs in the major media. *"Most biased choices in*

*the media arise from the preselection of right-thinking people, internalised preconceptions, and the adaptation of personnel to the constraints of ownership, organisation, market, and political power."*

In other words, important media employees learn to internalise the values of their bosses. *"Censorship is largely self-censorship, by reporters and commentators who adjust to the realities of source and media organisational requirements, and by people at higher levels within media organisations who are chosen to implement, and have usually internalised, the constraints imposed by proprietary and other market and governmental centres of power."* [Ibid., p. xii].

But, it may be asked, isn't it still a conspiracy theory to suggest that media leaders all have similar values? Not at all. Such leaders *"do similar things because they see the world through the same lenses, are subject to similar constraints and incentives, and thus feature stories or maintain silence together in tacit collective action and leader-follower behaviour."* [Ibid.]

The fact that media leaders share the same fundamental values does not mean, however, that the media are a solid monolith on all issues. The powerful often disagree on the tactics needed to attain generally shared aims, and this gets reflected in media debate. But views that challenge the legitimacy of those aims or suggest that state power is being exercised in elite interests rather than the "national" interest" will be excluded from the mass media.

Therefore the "propaganda model" has as little in common with a "conspiracy theory" as saying that the management of General Motors acts to maintain and increase its profits.

### **D.3.7 Isn't the "propaganda thesis" about the media contradicted by the "adversarial" nature of much media reporting, e.g. its exposes of government and business corruption?**

As noted above, the claim that the media are "adversarial" or (more implausibly) that they have a "left-wing bias" is due to right-wing PR organisations. This means that some "inconvenient facts" are occasionally allowed to pass through the filters in order to give the **appearance** of "objectivity"--precisely so the media can deny charges of engaging in propaganda. As Chomsky and Herman put it: *"the 'naturalness' of these processes, with inconvenient facts allowed sparingly and within the proper framework of assumptions, and fundamental dissent virtually excluded from the mass media (but permitted in a marginalised press), makes for a propaganda system that is far more credible and effective in putting over a patriotic agenda than one with official censorship"* [Ibid., Preface].

To support their case against the "adversarial" nature of the media, Herman and Chomsky look into the claims of such right-wing media PR machines as Freedom House. However, it is soon discovered that *"the very examples offered in praise of the media for their independence, or criticism of their excessive zeal, illustrate exactly the opposite."* [Ibid.] Such flak, while being worthless as serious analysis, does

help to reinforce the myth of an "adversarial media" (on the right the *"existing level of subordination to state authority is often deemed unsatisfactory"* and **this** is the source of their criticism! [**Ibid.**, p. 301]) and so is taken seriously by the media.

Therefore the "adversarial" nature of the media is a myth, but this is not to imply that the media does not present critical analysis. Herman and Chomsky in fact argue that the *"mass media are not a solid monolith on all issues."* [**Ibid.**, p. xii] and do not deny that it does present facts (which they do sometimes themselves cite). But, as they argue, *"[t]hat the media provide some facts about an issue. . . proves absolutely nothing about the adequacy or accuracy of that coverage. The mass media do, in fact, literally suppress a great deal . . . But even more important in this context is the question given to a fact - its placement, tone, and repetitions, the framework within which it is presented, and the related facts that accompany it and give it meaning (or provide understanding) . . . there is no merit to the pretence that because certain facts may be found by a diligent and sceptical researcher, the absence of radical bias and de facto suppression is thereby demonstrated."* [**Ibid.**, pp xiv-xv]

# Section D - How does statism and capitalism affect society?

## Introduction

### D.1 Why does state intervention occur?

D.1.1 Does state intervention cause the problems to begin with?

D.1.2 Is state intervention the result of democracy?

D.1.3 Is state intervention socialistic?

### D.2 What influence does wealth have over politics?

D.2.1 Is capital flight that powerful?

D.2.2 How extensive is business propaganda?

### D.3 How does wealth influence the mass media?

D.3.1 How does the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms affect media content?

D.3.2 What is the effect of advertising as the primary income source of the mass media?

D.3.3 Why do the media rely on information provided by government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power?

D.3.4 How is "flak" used by the wealthy and powerful as a means of disciplining the media?

D.3.5 Why do the wealthy and powerful use "anticommunism" as a national religion and control mechanism?

D.3.6 Isn't it a "conspiracy theory" to suggest that the media are used as propaganda instruments by the elite?

**D.3.7 Isn't the "propaganda thesis" about the media contradicted by the "adversarial" nature of much media reporting, e.g. its exposes of government and business corruption?**

**D.4 What is the relationship between capitalism and the ecological crisis?**

**D.4.1 Why must capitalist firms "grow or die?"**

**D.5 What causes imperialism?**

**D.5.1 Has imperialism changed over time?**

**D.5.2 Is imperialism just a product of private capitalism?**

**D.5.3 Does globalisation mean the end of imperialism?**

**D.5.4 What is the relationship between imperialism and the social classes within capitalism?**

**D.6 Are anarchists against Nationalism?**

**D.7 Are anarchists opposed to National Liberation struggles?**

**D.8 What causes militarism and what are its effects?**

**D.8.1 Will militarism change with the apparent end of the Cold War?**

**D.9 What is the relationship between wealth polarisation and authoritarian government?**

**D.9.1 Why does political power become concentrated under capitalism?**

**D.9.2 What is "invisible government"?**

**D.9.3 Why are incarceration rates rising?**

**D.9.4 Why is government "secrecy and surveillance of citizens on the increase?"**

**D.9.5 But doesn't authoritarian government always involve censorship?**

**D.9.6 What does the Right want?**

**D.10 How does capitalism affect technology?**

**D.11 What causes justifications for racism to appear?**

**D.11.1 Does free market ideology play a part in racist tendencies to increase?**

# Section D - How does statism and capitalism affect society?

This section of the FAQ indicates how both statism and capitalism affect the society they exist in. It is a continuation of sections B ( [Why do anarchists oppose the current system?](#)) and C ( [What are the myths of capitalist economics?](#)) and it discusses the impact of the underlying social and power relationships within the current system on society.

This section is important because the institutions and social relationships capitalism and statism spawn do not exist in a social vacuum, they have deep impacts on our everyday lives. These effects go beyond us as individuals (for example, the negative effects of hierarchy on our individuality) and have an effect on how the political institutions in our society work, how technology develops, how the media operates and so on. Therefore it is worthwhile to point out how (and why) statism and capitalism affect society as a whole outwith the narrow bounds of politics and economics.

So here we try and sketch some of the impact of concentrations of political and economic power has upon society. While many people attack the **results** of these processes (like state intervention, ecological destruction, imperialism, etc.) they ignore their **causes**. This means that the struggle against social evils will be never-ending, like a doctor fighting the symptoms of a disease without treating the disease itself. We have indicated the roots of the problems we face in sections [B](#) and [C](#); now we discuss some of the other problems they create. This section of the FAQ explores the interactions of the causes and results and draws out how the authoritarian and exploitative nature of capitalism affects the world we live in.

It is important to remember that most supporters of capitalism refuse to do this. Yes, many of them point out **some** flaws and problems within society but they never relate them to the system as such. As Noam Chomsky points out, they will attribute the catastrophes of capitalism "*to any other cause **other** than the system that consistently brings them about.*" [**Detering Democracy**, p. 232]

That the system and its effects are interwoven can best be seen from the fact that while right-wing parties have been elected to office promising to reduce the role of the state in society, the actual size and activity of the state has not been reduced, indeed it has usually increased in scope (both in size and in terms of power and centralisation). This is unsurprising, as "free market" implies strong (and centralised) state -- the "freedom" of Management to manage means that the freedom of workers to resist authoritarian management structures must be weakened by state action. Thus, ironically, state intervention within society will continue to be needed in order to ensure that society survives the rigours of market forces and that elite power and privilege are protected from the masses.

# **Section B - Why do anarchists oppose the current system?**

## **Introduction**

### **B.1 Why are anarchists against authority and hierarchy?**

**B.1.1 What are the effects of authoritarian social relationships?**

**B.1.2 Is capitalism hierarchical?**

**B.1.3 What kind of hierarchy of values does capitalism create?**

**B.1.4 Why do racism, sexism and homophobia exist?**

**B.1.5 How is the mass-psychological basis for authoritarian civilisation created?**

### **B.2 Why are anarchists against the state?**

**B.2.1 What is the main function of the state?**

**B.2.2 Does the state have subsidiary functions?**

**B.2.3 How does the ruling class maintain control of the state?**

**B.2.4 How does state centralisation affect freedom?**

**B.2.5 Who benefits from centralisation?**

### **B.3 Why are anarchists against private property?**

**B.3.1 What is the difference between private property and possession?**

**B.3.2 What kinds of private property does the state protect?**

**B.3.3 Why is private property exploitative?**

**B.3.4 Can private property be justified?**

### **B.4 How does capitalism affect liberty?**

**B.4.1 Is capitalism based on freedom?**



**B.4.2 Is capitalism based on self-ownership?**

**B.4.3 But no one forces you to work for them!**

**B.4.4 But what about periods of high demand for labour?**

**B.4.5 But I want to be "left alone"!**

**B.5 Is capitalism empowering and based on human action?**

**B.6 But will not the decisions made by intelligent individuals with their own financial success or failure on the line will be better most of the time?**

**B.7 What classes exist within modern society?**

**B.7.1 But do classes actually exist?**

**B.7.2 Why is the existence of classes denied?**

**B.7.3 What do anarchists mean by "*class consciousness*"?**

# Section B - Why do anarchists oppose the current system?

This section of the FAQ presents an analysis of the basic social relationships of modern society and the structures which create them, particularly those aspects of society that anarchists want to change.

Anarchism is, essentially, a revolt against capitalism. It was born at the same time as capitalism was born and grew in influence as capitalism colonised more and more parts of society. This does not mean that anarchistic ideas have not existed within society since before the dawn of capitalism. Far from it. Thinkers whose ideas can be classified as anarchist go back thousands of years and are found in Eastern as well as Western civilisations. It would be no exaggeration to say that anarchism was born the moment the state and private property were created.

However, anarchism as a political movement was the product of the transformation of society which accompanied the creation of the modern (nation-) state and capital. As such, the analysis and critique presented in this section of the FAQ will concentrate on modern, capitalist society.

Anarchists realise that the power of governments and other forms of hierarchy depends upon the agreement of the governed. Fear is not the whole answer, it is far more *"because they [the oppressed] subscribe to the same values as their governors. Rulers and ruled alike believe in the principle of authority, of hierarchy, of power."* [Colin Ward, **Anarchy in Action**, p. 15] With this in mind, we present in this section of the FAQ our arguments to challenge this "consensus," to present the case why we should become anarchists, why authoritarian social relationships and organisations are not in our interests.

From this discussion, it will become apparent why anarchists are dissatisfied with the very limited amount of freedom in modern mass society and why they want to create a truly free society. In the words of Noam Chomsky, the anarchist critique of modern society means:

*"to seek out and identify structures of authority, hierarchy, and domination in every aspect of life, and to challenge them; unless a justification for them can be given, they are illegitimate, and should be dismantled, to increase the scope of human freedom. That includes political power, ownership and management, relations among men and women, parents and children, our control over the fate of future generations (the basic moral imperative behind the environmental movement. . .), and much else."* ["Anarchism, Marxism and Hope for the Future", **Red and Black Revolution**, No. 2]

In [section J](#) of the FAQ will discuss how anarchists try to encourage this process of justification, this critical evaluation of authority and domination, this undermining of what previously was considered

"natural" or "common-sense" **until we started to question it.** Part of this process is to encourage **direct action** (see [section J.2](#)) by the oppressed against their oppressors as well as encouraging the anarchistic tendencies and awareness that exist (to a greater or lesser degree) in any hierarchical society.

However, this section of the FAQ is concerned directly with the critical or "negative" aspect of anarchism, the exposing of the evil inherent in all authority, be it from state, property or whatever. Later sections will indicate how, after analysing the world, anarchists plan to change it constructively, but some of the constructive core of anarchism will be seen even in this section. After this broad critique of the current system, we move onto more specific areas. [Section C](#) explains the anarchist critique of the economics of capitalism and [section D](#) discusses how the social relationships and institutions described in this section impact on society as a whole.

# Section J - What do anarchists do?

## Introduction

### J.1 Are anarchists involved in social struggles?

J.1.1 Why are social struggles important?

J.1.2 Are anarchists against reforms?

J.1.3 Why are anarchists against reformism?

J.1.4 What attitude do anarchists take to "single-issue" campaigns?

J.1.5 Why do anarchists try to generalise social struggles?

### J.2 What is direct action?

J.2.1 Why do anarchists favour using direct action to change things?

J.2.2 Why do anarchists reject voting as a means for change?

J.2.3 What are the political implications of voting?

J.2.4 Surely voting for radical parties will be effective?

J.2.5 Why do anarchists support abstentionism and what are its implications?

J.2.6 What are the effects of radicals using electioneering?

J.2.7 Surely we should vote for reformist parties in order to show them up for what they are?

J.2.8 Will abstentionism lead to the right winning elections?

J.2.9 What do anarchists do instead of voting?

J.2.10 Does rejecting electioneering mean that anarchists are apolitical?

### J.3 What forms of organisation do anarchists build?

J.3.1 What are affinity groups?

J.3.2 What are "synthesis" federations?

J.3.3 What is the "Platform"?

[J.3.4 Why do many anarchists oppose the "Platform"?](#)

[J.3.5 Are there other kinds of anarchist federation?](#)

[J.3.6 What role do these groups play in anarchist theory?](#)

[J.3.7 Doesn't Bakunin's "Invisible Dictatorship" prove that anarchists are secret authoritarians?](#)

[J.3.8 What is anarcho-syndicalism?](#)

[J.3.9 Why are many anarchists not anarcho-syndicalists?](#)

## [J.4 What trends in society aid anarchist activity?](#)

[J.4.1 Why is social struggle a good sign?](#)

[J.4.2 Won't social struggle do more harm than good?](#)

[J.4.3 Are the new social movements a positive development for anarchists?](#)

[J.4.4 What is the "economic structural crisis"?](#)

[J.4.5 Why is this "economic structural crisis" important to social struggle?](#)

[J.4.6 What are implications of anti-government and anti-big business feelings?](#)

[J.4.7 What about the communications revolution?](#)

[J.4.8 What is the significance of the accelerating rate of change and the information explosion?](#)

[J.4.9 What are Netwars?](#)

## [J.5 What alternative social organisations do anarchists create?](#)

[J.5.1 What is community unionism?](#)

[J.5.2 Why do anarchists support industrial unionism?](#)

[J.5.3 What attitude do anarchists take to existing unions?](#)

[J.5.4 What are industrial networks?](#)

[J.5.5 What forms of co-operative credit do anarchists support?](#)

[J.5.6 What are the key features of mutual credit schemes?](#)

[J.5.7 Do most anarchists think mutual credit is sufficient to abolish capitalism?](#)

[J.5.8 What would a modern system of mutual banking look like?](#)

[J.5.9 How does mutual credit work?](#)

[J.5.10 Why do anarchists support co-operatives?](#)

[J.5.11 If workers really want self-management, why aren't there more producer co-operatives?](#)

[J.5.12 If self-management is more efficient, surely capitalist firms will be forced to introduce it by the market?](#)

[J.5.13 What are Modern Schools?](#)

[J.5.14 What is Libertarian Municipalism?](#)

[J.5.15 What attitude do anarchists take to the welfare state?](#)

[J.5.16 Are there any historical examples of collective self-help?](#)

## [J.6 What methods of child rearing do anarchists advocate?](#)

[J.6.1 What are the main principles of raising free children and the main obstacles to implementing those principles?](#)

[J.6.2 What are some examples of libertarian child-rearing methods applied to the care of newborn infants](#)

[J.6.3 What are some examples of libertarian child-rearing methods applied to the care of young children?](#)

[J.6.4 If children have nothing to fear, how can they be good?](#)

[J.6.5 But how can children learn \*ethics\* if they are not given punishments, prohibitions, and religious instruction?](#)

[J.6.6 But how will a free child ever learn unselfishness?](#)

[J.6.7 Isn't what you call "libertarian child-rearing" just another name for spoiling the child?](#)

[J.6.8 What is the anarchist position on teenage sexual liberation?](#)

[J.6.9 But isn't this concern with teenage sexual liberation just a distraction from issues that should be of more concern to anarchists, like restructuring the economy?](#)

## [J.7 What do anarchists mean by "\*social revolution\*"?](#)

**J.7.1 Are all anarchists revolutionaries?**

**J.7.2 Is social revolution possible?**

**J.7.3 Doesn't revolution mean violence?**

**J.7.4 What would a social revolution involve?**

**J.7.5 What is the role of anarchists in a social revolution?**

**J.7.6 How could an anarchist revolution defend itself?**

## Section J - What do anarchists do?

This section discusses what anarchists get up to. There is little point thinking about the world unless you also want to change it for the better. And by trying to change it, you change yourself and others, making radical change more of a possibility. Therefore anarchists give their whole-hearted support to attempts by ordinary people to improve their lives by their own actions. As Max Stirner pointed out, "*[t]he true man does not lie in the future, an object of longing, but lies, existent and real, in the present.*" [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 327]

For anarchists, the future is **already appearing in the present** and is expressed by the autonomy of working class self-activity. Anarchy is not some-day-to-be-achieved utopia, it is a living reality whose growth only needs to be freed from constraint. As such anarchist activity is about discovering and aiding emerging trends of mutual aid which work against capitalist domination (i.e. what is actually developing), so the Anarchist "*studies society and tries to discover its **tendencies**, past and present, its growing needs, intellectual and economic, and in his [or her] ideal he merely points out in which direction evolution goes.*" [Peter Kropotkin, **Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 47]

The kinds of activity outlined in this section are a general overview of anarchist work. It is by no means exclusive as we are sure to have left something out. However, the key aspect of \*real\* anarchist activity is **direct action** - self-activity, self-help, self-liberation and solidarity. Such activity may be done by individuals (for example, propaganda work), but usually anarchists emphasis collective activity. This is because most of our problems are of a social nature, meaning that their solutions can only be worked on collectively. Individual solutions to social problems are doomed to failure (for example green consumerism).

In addition, collective action gets us used to working together, promoting the experience of self-management and building organisations that will allow us to activity manage our own affairs. Also, and we would like to emphasis this, it's **fun** to get together with other people and work with them, it's fulfilling and empowering.

Anarchists do not ask those in power to give up that power. No, they promote forms of activity and organisation by which all the oppressed can liberate themselves by their own hands. In other words, we do not think that those in power will altruistically give up that power or their privileges. Instead, the oppressed must take the power **back** into their own hands by their own actions. We must free ourselves, no one else can do it for use.

As we have noted before, anarchism is more than just a critique of statism and capitalism or a vision of a freer, better way of life. It is first and foremost a movement, the movement of working class people attempting to change the world. Therefore the kind of activity we discuss in this section of the FAQ forms the bridge between capitalism and anarchy. By self-activity and direct action, people can change



both themselves and their surroundings. They develop within themselves the mental, ethical and spiritual qualities which can make an anarchist society a viable option.

As Noam Chomsky argues:

*"Only through their own struggle for liberation will ordinary people come to comprehend their true nature, suppressed and distorted within institutional structures designed to assure obedience and subordination. Only in this way will people develop more humane ethical standards, 'a new sense of right', 'the consciousness of their strength and their importance as a social factor in the life of their time' and their capacity to realise the strivings of their 'inmost nature.' Such direct engagement in the work of social reconstruction is a prerequisite for coming to perceive this 'inmost nature' and is the indispensable foundations upon which it can flourish"* [preface to Rudolf Rocker's **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. viii]

In other words, anarchism is not primarily a vision of a better future, but the actual social movement which is fighting within the current unjust and unfree society for that better future and to improve things in the here and now. Without standing up for yourself and what you believe is right, nothing will change. Therefore anarchists would agree whole-heartedly with Frederick Douglass (an Abolitionist) who stated that:

*"If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are people who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. That struggle might be a moral one; it might be a physical one; it might be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and never will. People might not get all that they work for in this world, but they must certainly work for all they get."*

In this section of the FAQ we will discuss anarchist ideas on struggle, what anarchists actually (and, almost as importantly, do not) do in the here and now and the sort of alternatives anarchists try to build within statism and capitalism in order to destroy them. As well as a struggle against oppression, anarchist activity is also struggle for freedom. As well as fighting against material poverty, anarchists combat spiritual poverty. By resisting hierarchy we emphasize the importance of **living** and of **life as art**. By proclaiming *"Neither Master nor Slave"* we urge an ethical transformation, a transformation that will help create the possibility of a truly free society.

This point was argued by Emma Goldman after she saw the defeat of the Russian Revolution by a combination of Leninist politics and capitalist armed intervention:

*"the ethical values which the revolution is to establish must be initiated with the revolutionary activities. . . The latter can only serve as a real and dependable bridge to the better life if built of the same material as the life to be achieved."* [**Red Emma**

**Speaks, p. 358]**

In other words, anarchist activity is more than creating libertarian alternatives and resisting hierarchy, it is about building the new world in the shell of the old not only with regards to organisations and self-activity, but also within the individual. It is about transforming yourself while transforming the world - both processes obviously interacting and supporting each other -- *"the first aim of Anarchism is to assert and make the dignity of the individual human being."* [Charlotte Wilson, **Three Essays on Anarchism**, p. 17]

And by direct action, self-management and self-activity we can make the words first heard in Paris, 1968 a living reality:

***"All power to the imagination!"***

Words, we are sure, the classic anarchists would have whole-heartedly agreed with. There is a power in humans, a creative power, a power to alter what is into what should be. Anarchists try to create alternatives that will allow that power to be expressed, the power of imagination.

In the sections that follow we will discuss the forms of self-activity and self-organisation (collective and individual) which anarchists think will stimulate and develop the imagination of those oppressed by hierarchy, build anarchy in action and help create a free society.

## D.10 How does capitalism affect technology?

Technology has an obvious effect on individual freedom, in some ways increasing it, in others restricting it. However, since capitalism is a social system based on inequalities of power, it is a truism that technology will reflect those inequalities, as it does not develop in a social vacuum.

No technology evolves and spreads unless there are people who benefit from it and have sufficient means to disseminate it. In a capitalist society, technologies useful to the rich and powerful are generally the ones that spread. This can be seen from capitalist industry, where technology has been implemented specifically to deskill the worker, so replacing the skilled, valued craftperson with the easily trained (and eliminated!) "mass worker." By making trying to make any individual worker dispensable, the capitalist hopes to deprive workers of a means of controlling the relation between their effort on the job and the pay they receive. In Proudhon's words, the *"machine, or the workshop, after having degraded the labourer by giving him a master, completes his degeneracy by reducing him from the rank of artisan to that of common workman."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 202]

So, unsurprisingly, technology within a hierarchical society will tend to re-enforce hierarchy and domination. Managers/capitalists will select technology that will protect and extend their power (and profits), not weaken it. Thus, while it is often claimed that technology is "neutral" this is not (and can never be) the case. Simply put, "progress" within a hierarchical system will reflect the power structures of that system.

As George Reitzer notes, technological innovation under a hierarchical system soon results in *"increased control and the replacement of human with non-human technology. In fact, the replacement of human with non-human technology is very often motivated by a desire for greater control, which of course is motivated by the need for profit-maximisation. The great sources of uncertainty and unpredictability in any rationalising system are people. . . .McDonaldisation involves the search for the means to exert increasing control over both employees and customers"* [George Reitzer, **The McDonaldisation of Society**, p. 100]. For Reitzer, capitalism is marked by the *"irrationality of rationality,"* in which this process of control results in a system based on crushing the individuality and humanity of those who live within it.

In this process of controlling employees for the purpose of maximising profit, deskilling comes about because skilled labour is more expensive than unskilled or semi-skilled and skilled workers have more power over their working conditions and work due to the difficulty in replacing them. In addition it is easier to "rationalise" the production process with methods like Taylorism, a system of strict production schedules and activities based on the amount of time (as determined by management) that workers "need" to perform various operations in the workplace, thus requiring simple, easily analysed and timed movements. And as companies are in competition, each has to copy the most "efficient" (i.e. profit maximising) production techniques introduced by the others in order to remain profitable, no matter how dehumanising this may be for workers. Thus the evil effects of the division of labour and deskilling

becoming widespread. Instead of managing their own work, workers are turned into human machines in a labour process they do not control, instead being controlled by those who own the machines they use (see also Harry Braverman, **Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century**, Monthly Review Press, 1974).

As Max Stirner noted (echoing Adam Smith), this process of deskilling and controlling work means that *"When everyone is to cultivate himself into man, condemning a man to **machine-like labour** amounts to the same thing as slavery. . . . Every labour is to have the intent that the man be satisfied. Therefore he must become a **master** in it too, be able to perform it as a totality. He who in a pin-factory only puts on heads, only draws the wire, works, as it were mechanically, like a machine; he remains half-trained, does not become a master: his labour cannot **satisfy** him, it can only **fatigue** him. His labour is nothing by itself, has no object **in itself**, is nothing complete in itself; he labours only into another's hands, and is **used**. (exploited) by this other"* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 121] Kropotkin makes a similar argument against the division of labour ("*machine-like labour*") in **The Conquest of Bread** (see chapter XV -- "*The Division of Labour*") as did Proudhon (see chapters III and IV of **System of Economical Contradictions**).

Modern industry is set up to ensure that workers do not become "masters" of their work but instead follow the orders of management. The evolution of technology lies in the relations of power within a society. This is because *"the viability of a design is not simply a technical or even economic evaluation but rather a political one. A technology is deemed viable if it conforms to the existing relations of power."* [David Noble, **Progress without People**, p. 63]

This process of controlling, restricting, and de-individualising labour is a key feature of capitalism. Work that is skilled and controlled by workers is empowering to them in two ways. Firstly it gives them pride in their work and themselves. Secondly, it makes it harder to replace them or suck profits out of them. Therefore, in order to remove the "subjective" factor (i.e. individuality and worker control) from the work process, capital needs methods of controlling the workforce to prevent workers from asserting their individuality, thus preventing them from arranging their own lives and work and resisting the authority of the bosses.

This need to control workers can be seen from the type of machinery introduced during the Industrial Revolution. According to Andrew Ure, a consultant for the factory owners, *"[i]n the factories for spinning coarse yarn. . . the mule-spinners [skilled workers] have abused their powers beyond endurance, domineering in the most arrogant manner. . . over their masters. High wages. . . have, in too many cases, cherished pride and supplied funds for supporting refractory spirits in strikes. . . . During a disastrous turmoil of [this] kind. . . several capitalists. . . had recourse to the celebrated machinists. . . of Manchester. . . [to construct] a self-acting mule. . . . This invention confirms the great doctrine already propounded, that when capital enlists science in her service, the refractory hand of labour will always be taught docility"* [Andrew Ure, **Philosophy of Manufactures**, pp. 336-368 -- quoted by Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 125]

Why is it necessary for workers to be "*taught docility*"? Because "[b]y the infirmity of human nature, it happens that the more skilful the workman, the more self-willed and intractable he is apt to become, and of course the less fit a component of mechanical system in which... he may do great damage to the whole." [**Ibid.**] Proudhon quotes an English Manufacturer who argues the same point:

*"The insubordination of our workmen has given us the idea of dispensing with them. We have made and stimulated every imaginable effort to replace the service of men by tools more docile, and we have achieved our object. Machinery has delivered capital from the oppression of labour."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 189]

As David Noble summarises, during the Industrial Revolution "*Capital invested in machines that would reinforce the system of domination [in the workplace], and this decision to invest, which might in the long run render the chosen technique economical, was not itself an economical decision but a political one, with cultural sanction.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 6]

A similar process was at work in the US, where the rise in trade unionism resulted in "*industrial managers bec[oming] even more insistent that skill and initiative not be left on the shop floor, and that, by the same token, shop floor workers not have control over the reproduction of relevant skills through craft-regulated apprenticeship training. Fearful that skilled shop-floor workers would use their scare resources to reduce their effort and increase their pay, management deemed that knowledge of the shop-floor process must reside with the managerial structure.*" [William Lazonick, **Organisation and Technology in Capitalist Development**, p. 273]

American managers happily embraced Taylorism (aka "*scientific management*"), according to which the task of the manager was to gather into his possession all available knowledge about the work he oversaw and reorganise it. Taylor himself considered the task for workers was "*to do what they are told to do promptly and without asking questions or making suggestions.*" [quoted by David Noble, **American By Design**, p. 268] Taylor also relied exclusively upon incentive-pay schemes which mechanically linked pay to productivity and had no appreciation of the subtleties of psychology or sociology (which would have told him that enjoyment of work and creativity is more important for people than just higher pay). Unsurprisingly, workers responded to his schemes by insubordination, sabotage and strikes and it was "*discovered . . . that the 'time and motion' experts frequently knew very little about the proper work activities under their supervision, that often they simply guessed at the optimum rates for given operations . . . it meant that the arbitrary authority of management has simply been reintroduced in a less apparent form.*" [David Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 272] Although, now, the power of management could hide begin the "objectivity" of "science."

Katherine Stone also argues (in her account of "*The Origins of Job Structure in the Steel Industry*" in America) that the "*transfer of skill [from the worker to management] was not a response to the necessities of production, but was, rather, a strategy to rob workers of their power*" by "*tak[ing] knowledge and authority from the skilled workers and creating a management cadre able to direct production.*" Stone highlights that this deskilling process was combined by a "*divide and rule*" policy by

management by wage incentives and new promotion policies. This created a reward system in which workers who played by the rules would receive concrete gains in terms of income and status. Over time, such a structure would become to be seen as *"the natural way to organise work and one which offered them personal advancement"* even though, *"when the system was set up, it was neither obvious nor rational. The job ladders were created just when the skill requirements for jobs in the industry were diminishing as a result of the new technology, and jobs were becoming more and more equal as to the learning time and responsibility involved."* The modern structure of the capitalist workplace was created to break workers resistance to capitalist authority and was deliberately *"aimed at altering workers' ways of thinking and feeling -- which they did by making workers' individual 'objective' self-interests congruent with that of the employers and in conflict with workers' collective self-interest."* It was a means of *"labour discipline"* and of *"motivating workers to work for the employers' gain and preventing workers from uniting to take back control of production."* Stone notes that the *"development of the new labour system in the steel industry was repeated throughout the economy in different industries. As in the steel industry, the core of these new labour systems were the creation of artificial job hierarchies and the transfer of skills from workers to the managers."* [Root & Branch (ed.), **Root and Branch: The Rise of the Workers' Movements**, pp. 152-5]

This process was recognised by libertarians at the time, with the I.W.W., for example, arguing that *"[l]abourers are no longer classified by difference in trade skill, but the employer assigns them according to the machine which they are attached. These divisions, far from representing differences in skill or interests among the labourers, are imposed by the employers that workers may be pitted against one another and spurred to greater exertion in the shop, and that all resistance to capitalist tyranny may be weakened by artificial distinctions."* [quoted by Katherine Stone, **Op. Cit.**, p. 157] For this reason, anarchists and syndicalists argued for, and built, industrial unions -- one union per workplace and industry -- in order to combat these divisions and effectively resist capitalist tyranny.

Needless to say, such management schemes never last in the long run nor totally work in the short run either -- which explains why hierarchical management continues, as does technological deskilling (workers always find ways of using new technology to increase their power within the workplace and so undermine management decisions to their own advantage).

This of process deskilling workers was complemented by many factors -- state protected markets (in the form of tariffs and government orders -- the *"lead in technological innovation came in armaments where assured government orders justified high fixed-cost investments"*); the use of *"both political and economic power [by American Capitalists] to eradicate and diffuse workers' attempts to assert shop-floor control"*; and *"repression, instigated and financed both privately and publicly, to eliminate radical elements [and often not-so-radical elements as well, we must note] in the American labour movement."* [William Lazonick, **Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor**, p. 218, p. 303]) Thus state action played a key role in destroying craft control within industry, along with the large financial resources of capitalists compared to workers.

Bringing this sorry story up to date, we find *"many, if not most, American managers are reluctant to develop skills [and initiative] on the shop floor for the fear of losing control of the flow of*

*work.*" [William Lazonick, **Organisation and Technology in Capitalist Development**, pp. 279-280] Given that there is a division of knowledge in society (and, obviously, in the workplace as well) this means that capitalism has selected to introduce a management and technology mix which leads to inefficiency and waste of valuable knowledge, experience and skills.

Thus the capitalist workplace is both produced by and is a weapon in the class struggle and reflects the shifting power relations between workers and employers. The creation of artificial job hierarchies, the transfer of skills away from workers to managers and technological development are all products of class struggle. Thus technological progress and workplace organisation within capitalism have little to do with "efficiency" and far more to do with profits and power.

This means that while self-management has consistently proven to be more efficient (and empowering) than hierarchical management structures (see section [J.5.12](#)), capitalism actively selects **against** it. This is because capitalism is motivated purely by increasing profits, and the maximisation of profits is best done by disempowering workers and empowering bosses (i.e. the maximisation of power) -- even though this concentration of power harms efficiency by distorting and restricting information flow and the gathering and use of widely distributed knowledge within the firm (as in any command economy).

Thus the last refuge of the capitalist/technophile (namely that the productivity gains of technology outweigh the human costs or the means used to achieve them) is doubly flawed. Firstly, disempowering technology may maximise profits, but it need not increase efficient utilisation of resources or workers time, skills or potential (and as we argue in greater detail later, in section [J.5.12](#), efficiency and profit maximisation are two different things, with such deskilling and management control actually **reducing** efficiency -- compared to workers' control -- but as it allows managers to maximise profits the capitalist market selects it). Secondly, *"when investment does in fact generate innovation, does such innovation yield greater productivity? . . . After conducting a poll of industry executives on trends in automation, **Business Week** concluded in 1982 that 'there is a heavy backing for capital investment in a variety of labour-saving technologies that are designed to fatten profits without necessarily adding to productive output.'*" David Noble concludes that *"whenever managers are able to use automation to 'fatten profits' and enhance their authority (by eliminating jobs and extorting concessions and obedience from the workers who remain) without at the same time increasing social product, they appear more than ready to do."* [David Noble, **Progress Without People**, pp. 86-87 and p. 89]

Of course the claim is that higher wages follow increased investment and technological innovation ("in the long run" -- although usually "the long run" has to be helped to arrive by workers' struggle and protest!). Passing aside the question of whether slightly increased consumption really makes up for dehumanising and uncreative work, we must note that it is usually the capitalist who **really** benefits from technological change in money terms. For example, between 1920 and 1927 (a period when unemployment caused by technology became commonplace) the automobile industry (which was at the forefront of technological change) saw wages rise by 23.7%. Thus, claim supporters of capitalism, technology is in all our interests. However, capital surpluses rose by 192.9% during the same period -- 8 times faster! Little wonder wages rose! Similarly, over the last 20 years the USA and many other

countries have seen companies "down-sizing" and "right-sizing" their workforce and introducing new technologies. The result? Simply put, the 1970s saw the start of "*no-wage growth expansions*." Before the early 1970s, "*real wage growth tracked the growth of productivity and production in the economy overall. After . . . , they ceased to do so. . . Real wage growth fell sharply below measured productivity growth.*" [James K. Galbraith, **Created Unequal**, p. 79] So while real wages have stagnated, profits have been increasing as productivity rises and the rich have been getting richer -- technology yet again showing whose side it is on.

Overall, as David Noble notes (with regards to manufacturing):

*"U.S. Manufacturing industry over the last thirty years . . . [has seen] the value of capital stock (machinery) relative to labour double, reflecting the trend towards mechanisation and automation. As a consequence . . . the absolute output person hour increased 115%, more than double. But during this same period, real earnings for hourly workers . . . rose only 84%, less than double. Thus, after three decades of automation-based progress, workers are now earning less relative to their output than before. That is, they are producing more for less; working more for their boss and less for themselves."* [Op. Cit., pp. 92-3]

Noble continues:

*"For if the impact of automation on workers has not been ambiguous, neither has the impact on management and those it serves -- labour's loss has been their gain. During the same first thirty years of our age of automation, corporate after tax profits have increased 450%, more than five times the increase in real earnings for workers."* [Op. Cit., p. 95]

But why? Because labour has the ability to produce a flexible amount of output (use value) for a given wage. Unlike coal or steel, a worker can be made to work more intensely during a given working period and so technology can be utilised to maximise that effort as well as increasing the pool of potential replacements for an employee by deskilling their work (so reducing workers' power to get higher wages for their work). Thus technology is a key way of increasing the power of the boss, which in turn can increase output per worker while ensuring that the workers' receive relatively less of that output back in terms of wages -- "*Machines*," argued Proudhon, "*promised us an increase of wealth they have kept their word, but at the same time endowing us with an increase of poverty. They promised us liberty. . . [but] have brought us slavery.*" [Op. Cit., p. 199]

But do not get us wrong, technological progress does not imply that we are victims. Far from it, much innovation is the direct result of our resistance to hierarchy and its tools. For example, capitalists turned to Taylorism and "scientific management" in response to the power of skilled craft workers to control their work and working environment (the famous 1892 Homestead strike, for example, was a direct product of the desire of the company to end the skilled workers' control and power on the shop-floor). In response to this, factory and other workers created a whole new structure of working class power -- a



new kind of unionism based on the industrial level. This can be seen in many different countries. For example, in Spain, the C.N.T. (an anarcho-syndicalist union) adopted the *sindicato unico* (one union) in 1918 which united all workers of the same workplace in the same union (by uniting skilled and unskilled in a single organisation, the union increased their fighting power). In the UK, the shop stewards movement arose during the first world war based on workplace organisation (a movement inspired by the pre-war syndicalist revolt and which included many syndicalist activists). This movement was partly in response to the reformist TUC unions working with the state during the war to suppress class struggle. In Germany, the 1919 near revolution saw the creation of revolutionary workplace unions and councils (and a large increase in the size of the anarcho-syndicalist union FAU which was organised by industry). In the USA, the 1930s saw a massive and militant union organising drive by the C.I.O. based on industrial unionism and collective bargaining (inspired, in part, by the example of the I.W.W. and its broad organisation of unskilled workers).

More recently, workers in the 1960s and 70s responded to the increasing reformism and bureaucratic nature of such unions as the CIO and TUC by organising themselves directly on the shop floor to control their work and working conditions. This informal movement expressed itself in wildcat strikes against both unions and management, sabotage and unofficial workers' control of production (see John Zerzan's essay "*Organised Labour and the Revolt Against Work*" in **Elements of Refusal**). In the UK, the shop stewards' movement revived itself, organising much of the unofficial strikes and protests which occurred in the 1960s and 70s. A similar tendency was seen in many countries during this period.

So in response to a new developments in technology and workplace organisation, workers' developed new forms of resistance which in turn provokes a response by management. Thus technology and its (ab) uses is very much a product of the class struggle, of the struggle for freedom in the workplace.

With a given technology, workers and radicals soon learn to use it in ways never dreamed off to resist their bosses and the state (which necessitates a transformation of within technology again to try and give the bosses an upper hand!). The use of the Internet, for example, to organise, spread and co-ordinate information, resistance and struggles is a classic example of this process (see Jason Wehling, "*Netwars' and Activists Power on the Internet*", **Scottish Anarchist** no. 2 for details). There is always a "guerrilla war" associated with technology, with workers and radicals developing their own tactics to gain counter control for themselves. Thus much technological change reflects **our** power and activity to change our own lives and working conditions. We must never forget that.

While some may dismiss our analysis as "Luddite," to do so is make "technology" an idol to be worshipped rather than something to be critically analysed. Moreover, to do so is to misrepresent the ideas of the Luddites themselves -- they never actually opposed **all** technology or machinery. Rather, they opposed "*all Machinery hurtful to Commonality*" (as a March 1812 letter to a hated Manufacturer put it). Rather than worship technological progress (or view it uncritically), the Luddites subjected technology to critical analysis and evaluation. They opposed those forms of machinery that harmed themselves or society. Unlike those who smear others as "Luddites," the labourers who broke machines were not intimidated by the modern notion of progress. Their sense of right and wrong was not clouded by the notion that technology was somehow inevitable or neutral. They did not think that **human** values

(or their own interests) were irrelevant in evaluating the benefits and drawbacks of a given technology and its effects on workers and society as a whole. Nor did they consider their skills and livelihood as less important than the profits and power of the capitalists. In other words, they would have agreed with Proudhon's comment that machinery "*plays the leading role in industry, man is secondary*" **and** they acted to change this relationship. [Op. Cit., p. 204] Indeed, it would be tempting to argue that worshippers of technological progress are, in effect, urging us **not** to think and to sacrifice ourselves to a new abstraction like the state or capital. The Luddites were an example of working people deciding what their interests were and acting to defend them by their own direct action -- in this case opposing technology which benefited the ruling class by giving them an edge in the class struggle. Anarchists follow this critical approach to technology, recognising that it is not neutral nor above criticism.

For capital, the source of problems in industry is people. Unlike machines, people can think, feel, dream, hope and act. The "evolution" of technology will, therefore, reflect the class struggle within society and the struggle for liberty against the forces of authority. Technology, far from being neutral, reflects the interests of those with power. Technology will only be truly our friend once we control it ourselves and **modify** to reflect **human** values (this may mean that some forms of technology will have to be written off and replaced by new forms in a free society). Until that happens, most technological processes -- regardless of the other advantages they may have -- will be used to exploit and control people.

Thus Proudhon's comments that "*in the present condition of society, the workshop with its hierarchical organisation, and machinery*" could only serve "*exclusively the interests of the least numerous, the least industrious, and the wealthiest class*" rather than "*be employed for the benefit of all.*" [Op. Cit., p. 205]

While resisting technological "progress" (by means up to and including machine breaking) is essential in the here and now, the issue of technology can only be truly solved when those who use a given technology control its development, introduction and use. Little wonder, therefore, that anarchists consider workers' self-management as a key means of solving the problems created by technology. Proudhon, for example, argued that the solution to the problems created by the division of labour and technology could only be solved by "*association*" and "*by a broad education, by the obligation of apprenticeship, and by the co-operation of all who take part in the collective work.*" This would ensure that "*the division of labour can no longer be a cause of degradation for the workman [or workwoman].*" [The General Idea of the Revolution, p. 223]

While as far as technology goes, it may not be enough to get rid of the boss, this is a necessary first step in creating a technology which enhances freedom rather than controlling and shaping the worker (or user in general) and enhancing the power and profits of the capitalist (see also section I.4.9 -- [Should technological advance be seen as anti-anarchistic?](#)).

## I.4 How could an anarchist economy function?

This is an important question facing all opponents of a given system -- what will you replace it with? We can say, of course, that it is pointless to make blueprints of how a future anarchist society will work as the future will be created by everyone, not just the few anarchists and libertarian socialists who write books and FAQs. This is very true, we cannot predict what a free society will actually be like or develop and we have no intention to do so here. However, this reply (whatever its other merits) ignores a key point, people need to have some idea of what anarchism aims for before they decide to spend their lives trying to create it.

So, how would an anarchist system function? That depends on the economic ideas people have. A mutualist economy will function differently than a communist one, for example, but they will have similar features. As Rudolf Rocker put it:

*"Common to all Anarchists is the desire to free society of all political and social coercive institutions which stand in the way of the development of a free humanity. In this sense, Mutualism, Collectivism, and Communism are not to be regarded as closed systems permitting no further development, but merely assumptions as to the means of safeguarding a free community. There will even probably be in the society of the future different forms of economic co-operation existing side-by-side, since any social progress must be associated with that free experimentation and practical testing-out for which in a society of free communities there will be afforded every opportunity."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 16]

So, given the common aims of anarchists, it's unsurprising that the economic systems they suggest will have common features such as workers' self-management, federation, free agreement and so on. For all anarchists, the "economy" is seen as a *"voluntary association that will organise labour, and be the manufacturer and distributor of necessary commodities"* and this *"is to make what is useful. The individual is to make what is beautiful."* [Oscar Wilde, **The Soul of Man Under Socialism**, p. 1183] For example, the machine *"will supersede hand-work in the manufacture of plain goods. But at the same time, hand-work very probably will extend its domain in the artistic finishing of many things which are made entirely in the factory."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Fields, Factories and Workplaces Tomorrow**, p. 152] Murray Bookchin, decades later, argued for the same idea: *"the machine will remove the toil from the productive process, leaving its artistic completion to man."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 134]

This *"organisation of labour touches only such labours as others can do for us. . . the rest remain egoistic, because no one can in your stead elaborate your musical compositions, carry out your projects of painting, etc.; nobody can replace Raphael's labours. The latter are labours of a unique person, which only he is competent to achieve."* [Max Stirner, **The Ego and Its Own**, p. 268] Stirner goes on to ask *"for whom is time to be gained [by association]? For what does man require more time than is necessary to refresh his wearied powers of labour? Here Communism is silent."* He then answers his

own question by arguing it is gained for the individual "*[t]o take comfort in himself as unique, after he has done his part as man!*" [Op. Cit., p. 269] Which is exactly what Kropotkin also argued:

*"He [sic!] will discharge his task in the field, the factory, and so on, which he owes to society as his contribution to the general production. And he will employ the second half of his day, his week, or his year, to satisfy his artistic or scientific needs, or his hobbies."* [Conquest of Bread, p. 111]

Thus, while **authoritarian** Communism ignores the unique individual (and that was the only kind of Communism existing when Stirner wrote his classic book) **libertarian** communists agree with Stirner and are not silent. Like him, they consider the whole point of organising labour as the means of providing the individual the time and resources required to express their individuality. In other words, to pursue "*labours of a unique person.*" Thus all anarchists base their arguments for a free society on how it will benefit actual individuals, rather than abstracts or amorphous collectives (such as "*society*"). Hence chapter 9 of **The Conquest of Bread**, "*The Need for Luxury*" and, for that matter, chapter 10, "*Agreeable Work.*"

Or, to bring this ideal up to day, as Chomsky put it, "*[t]he task for a modern industrial society is to achieve what is now technically realisable, namely, a society which is really based on free voluntary participation of people who produce and create, live their lives freely within institutions they control, and with limited hierarchical structures, possibly none at all.*" [quoted by Albert and Hahnel in **Looking Forward: Participatory Economics for the Twenty First Century**, p. 62]

In other words, anarchists desire to organise voluntary workers associations which will try to ensure a minimisation of mindless labour in order to maximise the time available for creative activity both inside and outside "*work.*" This is to be achieved by free co-operation between equals, for while competition may be the "*law of the jungle*", co-operation is the law of civilisation.

This co-operation is **not** based on "*altruism,*" but self-interest. As Proudhon argued, "*[m]utuality, reciprocity exists when all the workers in an industry instead of working for an entrepreneur who pays them and keeps their products, work for one another and thus collaborate in the making of a common product whose profits they share amongst themselves. Extend the principle of reciprocity as uniting the work of every group, to the Workers' Societies as units, and you have created a form of civilisation which from all points of view - political, economic and aesthetic - is radically different from all earlier civilisations.*" [quoted by Martin Buber, **Paths in Utopia**, pp. 29-30] In other words, solidarity and co-operation allows us time to enjoy life and to gain the benefits of our labour ourselves - Mutual Aid results in a better life than mutual struggle and so "*the association for struggle will be a much more effective support for civilisation, progress, and evolution than is the struggle for existence with its savage daily competitions.*" [Luigi Geallani, **The End of Anarchism**, p. 26]

In the place of the rat race of capitalism, economic activity in an anarchist society would be one of the means to humanise and individualise ourselves and society, to move from **surviving** to **living**.

Productive activity should become a means of self-expression, of joy, of art, rather than something we have to do to survive. Ultimately, "work" should become more akin to play or a hobby than the current alienated activity. The priorities of life should be towards individual self-fulfilment and humanising society rather than "*running society as an adjunct to the market*," to use Polanyi's expression, and turning ourselves into commodities on the labour market. Thus anarchists agree with John Stuart Mill when he wrote:

*"I confess I am not charmed with an ideal of life held out by those who think that the normal state of human beings is that of struggling to get on; that the trampling, crushing, elbowing, and treading on each other's heels, which form the existing type of social life, are the most desirable lot of human kind, or anything but the disagreeable symptoms of one of the phases of industrial progress."* [**Collected Works**, vol. III, p. 754]

The aim of anarchism is far more than the end of poverty. Hence Proudhon's comment that socialism's "*underlying dogma*" is that the "*objective of socialism is the emancipation of the proletariat and the eradication of poverty*." This emancipation would be achieved by ending "*wage slavery*" via "*democratically organised workers' associations*." [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 57 and p.62] Or, in Kropotkin's words, "*well-being for all*" -- physical, mental and moral! Indeed, by concentrating on just poverty and ignoring the emancipation of the proletariat, the real aims of socialism are obscured. As Kropotkin argued:

*"The 'right to well-being' means the possibility of living like human beings, and of bringing up children to be members of a society better than ours, whilst the 'right to work' only means the right to be a wage-slave, a drudge, ruled over and exploited by the middle class of the future. The right to well-being is the Social Revolution, the right to work means nothing but the Treadmill of Commercialism. It is high time for the worker to assert his right to the common inheritance, and to enter into possession of it."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 44]

Combined with this desire for free co-operation is a desire to end centralised systems. The opposition to centralisation is often framed in a distinctly false manner. This can be seen when Alex Nove, a leading market socialist, argues that "*there are horizontal links (market), there are vertical links (hierarchy). What other dimension is there?*" [Alex Nove, **The Economics of Feasible Socialism**, p. 226] In other words, Nove states that to oppose central planning means to embrace the market. This, however, is not true. Horizontal links need not be market based any more than vertical links need be hierarchical. But the core point in his argument is very true, an anarchist society must be based essentially on horizontal links between individuals and associations, freely co-operating together as they (not a central body) sees fit. This co-operation will be source of any "*vertical*" links in an anarchist economy. When a group of individuals or associations meet together and discuss common interests and make common decisions they will be bound by their own decisions. This is radically different from a central body giving out orders because those affected will determine the content of these decisions. In other words, instead of decisions being handed down from the top, they will be created from the bottom up.

So, while refusing to define exactly how an anarchist system will work, we will explore the implications of how the anarchist principles and ideals outlined above could be put into practice. Bear in mind that this is just a possible framework for a system which has few historical examples to draw upon as evidence. This means that we can only indicate the general outlines of what an anarchist society could be like. Those seeking "*recipes*" and exactness should look elsewhere. In all likelihood, the framework we present will be modified and changed (even ignored) in light of the real experiences and problems people will face when creating a new society.

Lastly we should point out that there may be a tendency for some to compare this framework with the **theory** of capitalism (i.e. perfectly functioning "*free*" markets or quasi-perfect ones) as opposed to its reality. A perfectly working capitalist system only exists in text books and in the heads of ideologues who take the theory as reality. No system is perfect, particularly capitalism, and to compare "*perfect*" capitalism with any system is a pointless task. In addition, there will be those who seek to apply the "*scientific*" principles of the neo-classical economics to our ideas. By so doing they make what Proudhon called "*the radical vice of political economy*", namely "*affirming as a definitive state a transitory condition -- namely, the division of society into patricians and proletares.*" [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 67] Thus any attempt to apply the "*laws*" developed from theorising about capitalism to anarchism will fail to capture the dynamics of a non-capitalist system (given that neo-classical economics fails to understand the dynamics of capitalism, what hope does it have of understanding non-capitalist systems which reject the proprietary despotism and inequalities of capitalism?).

John Crump stresses this point in his discussion of Japanese anarchism:

*"When considering the feasibility of the social system advocated by the pure anarchists, we need to be clear about the criteria against which it should be measured. It would, for example, be unreasonable to demand that it be assessed against such yardsticks of a capitalist economy as annual rate of growth, balance of trade and so forth . . . evaluating anarchist communism by means of the criteria which have been devised to measure capitalism's performance does not make sense . . . capitalism would be . . . baffled if it were demanded that it assess its operations against the performance indicators to which pure anarchists attached most importance, such as personal liberty, communal solidarity and the individual's unconditional right to free consumption. Faced with such demands, capitalism would either admit that these were not yardsticks against which it could sensibly measure itself or it would have to resort to the type of grotesque ideological subterfuges which it often employs, such as identifying human liberty with the market and therefore with wage slavery. . . The pure anarchists' confidence in the alternative society they advocated derived not from an expectation that it would **quantitatively** outperform capitalism in terms of GNP, productivity or similar capitalist criteria. On the contrary, their enthusiasm for anarchist communism flowed from their understanding that it would be **qualitatively** different from capitalism. Of course, this is not to say that the pure anarchists were indifferent to questions of production and distribution . . . they certainly believed that anarchist communism would provide economic well-being for all. But*

*neither were they prepared to give priority to narrowly conceived economic expansion, to neglect individual liberty and communal solidarity, as capitalism regularly does."* [Hatta Shuzo and **Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan**, pp. 191-3]

As Kropotkin argued, *"academic political economy has been only an enumeration of what happens under the . . . conditions [of capitalism] -- without distinctly stating the conditions themselves. And then, having described **the facts** [academic neo-classical economics usually does not even do that, we must stress, but Kropotkin had in mind the likes of Adam Smith and Ricardo, **not** modern neo-classical economics] which arise in our societies under these conditions, they represent to use these **facts** as rigid, inevitable economic laws."* [Kropotkin's **Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 179] So, by changing the conditions we change the *"economic laws"* of a society and so capitalist economics is not applicable to post (or pre) capitalist society (nor are its justifications for existing inequalities in wealth and power).

### I.4.1 What is the point of economic activity in anarchy?

The basic point of economic activity in an anarchist society is to ensure that we produce what we desire to consume and that our consumption is under our own control and not vice versa. The second point may seem strange; how can consumption control us -- we consume what we desire and no one forces us to do so! It may come as a surprise that the idea that we consume only what we desire is not quite true under a capitalist economy. Capitalism, in order to survive, **must** expand, **must** create more and more profits. This leads to irrational side effects, for example, the advertising industry. While it goes without saying that producers need to let consumers know what is available for consumption, capitalism ensures advertising goes beyond this by creating needs that did not exist.

Therefore, the point of economic activity in an anarchist society is to produce as and when required and not, as under capitalism, to organise production for the sake of production. Production, to use Kropotkin's words, is to become *"the mere servant of consumption; it must mould itself on the wants of the consumer, not dictate to him [or her] conditions."* [Act For Yourselves, p. 57] However, while the basic aim of economic activity in an anarchist society is, obviously, producing wealth -- i.e. of satisfying individual needs -- without enriching capitalists or other parasites in the process, it is far more than that. Yes, an anarchist society will aim to create society in which everyone will have a standard of living suitable for a fully human life. Yes, it will aim to eliminate poverty, inequality, individual want and social waste and squalor, but it aims for far more than that. It aims to create free individuals who express their individuality within and without *"work."* After all, what is the most important thing that comes out of a workplace? Pro-capitalists may say profits, others the finished commodity or good. In fact, the most important thing that comes out of a workplace is the **worker**. What happens to them in the workplace will have an impact on all aspects of their life and so cannot be ignored.

Therefore, for anarchists, *"[r]eal wealth consists of things of utility and beauty, in things that help create strong, beautiful bodies and surroundings inspiring to live in."* Anarchism's *"goal is the freest possible expression of all the latent powers of the individual . . . [and this] is only possible in a state of society where man [and woman] is free to choose the mode of work, the conditions of work, and the freedom to*

*work. One whom making a table, the building of a house, or the tilling of the soil is what the painting is to the artist and the discovery to the scientist -- the result of inspiration, of intense longing, and deep interest in work as a creative force.*" [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, p. 53 and p. 54]

To value "*efficiency*" above all else, as capitalism says it does (it, in fact, values **profits** above all else and hinders developments like workers' control which increase efficiency but harm power and profits), is to deny our own humanity and individuality. Without an appreciation for grace and beauty there is no pleasure in creating things and no pleasure in having them. Our lives are made drearier rather than richer by "*progress*." How can a person take pride in their work when skill and care are considered luxuries (if not harmful to "*efficiency*" and, under capitalism, the profits and power of the capitalist and manager)? We are not machines. We have a need for craftspersonship and anarchist recognises this and takes it into account in its vision of a free society.

This means that, in an anarchist society, economic activity is the process by which we produce what is both useful **and** beautiful in a way that empowers the individual. As Oscar Wilde put it, individuals will produce what is beautiful. Such production will be based upon the "*study of the needs of mankind, and the means of satisfying them with the least possible waste of human energy.*" [Peter Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 175] This means that anarchist economic ideas are the same as what Political Economy should be, not what it actually is, namely the "*essential basis of all Political Economy, the study of the most favourable conditions for giving society the greatest amount of useful products with the least waste of human energy*" (and, we must add today, the least disruption of nature). [**Op. Cit.**, p. 144]

The anarchists charge capitalism with wasting human energy and time due to its irrational nature and workings, energy that could be spent creating what is beautiful (both in terms of individualities and products of labour). Under capitalism we are "*toiling to live, that we may live to toil.*" [William Morris, **Useful Work Versus Useless Toil**, p. 37]

In addition, we must stress that the aim of economic activity within an anarchist society is **not** to create equality of outcome -- i.e. everyone getting exactly the same goods. As we noted in [section A.2.5](#), such a "*vision*" of "*equality*" attributed to socialists by pro-capitalists indicates more the poverty of imagination and ethics of the critics of socialism than a true account of socialist ideas. Anarchists, like other socialists, support equality in order to maximise freedom, including the freedom to choose between options to satisfy ones needs.

To treat people equally, as equals, means to respect their desires and interests, to acknowledge their right to equal liberty. To make people consume the same as everyone else does not respect the equality of all to develop ones abilities as one sees fit. Thus it means equality of opportunity to satisfy desires and interests, not the imposition of an abstract minimum (or maximum) on unique individuals. To treat unique individuals equally means to acknowledge that uniqueness, not to deny it.

Thus the **real** aim of economic activity within an anarchy is to ensure "*that every human being should have the material and moral means to develop his humanity.*" [Michael Bakunin, **The Political**



**Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 295] And you cannot develop your humanity if you cannot express yourself freely. Needless to say, to treat unique people "*equally*" (i.e. identically) is simply evil. You cannot, say, have a 70 year old woman do the same work in order to receive the same income as a 20 year old man. No, anarchists do not subscribe to such "*equality*," which is a product of the "*ethics of mathematics*" of capitalism and **not** of anarchist ideas. Such a scheme is alien to a free society. The equality anarchists desire is a social equality, based on control over the decisions that affect you. The aim of anarchist economic activity, therefore, is provide the goods required for "*equal freedom for all, an equality of conditions such as to allow everyone to do as they wish.*" [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 49] Thus anarchists "*demand not natural but social equality of individuals as the condition for justice and the foundations of morality.*" [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 249]

Under capitalism, instead of humans controlling production, production controls them. Anarchists want to change this and desire to create an economic network which will allow the maximisation of an individual's free time in order for them to express and develop their individuality (or to "*create what is beautiful*"). So instead of aiming just to produce because the economy will collapse if we did not, anarchists want to ensure that we produce what is useful in a manner which liberates the individual and empowers them in all aspects of their lives. They share this desire with (some of) the classical Liberals and agree totally with Humbolt's statement that "*the end of man . . . is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole.*" [quoted by J.S. Mill in **On Liberty and Other Essays**, p. 64]

This desire means that anarchists reject the capitalist definition of "*efficiency.*" Anarchists would agree with Albert and Hahnel when they argue that "*since people are conscious agents whose characteristics and therefore preferences develop over time, to access long-term efficiency we must access the impact of economic institutions on people's development.*" [**The Political Economy of Participatory Economics**, p. 9] Capitalism, as we have explained before, is highly inefficient in this light due to the effects of hierarchy and the resulting marginalisation and disempowerment of the majority of society. As Albert and Hahnel go on to note, "*self-management, solidarity, and variety are all legitimate valiative criteria for judging economic institutions . . . Asking whether particular institutions help people attain self-management, variety, and solidarity is sensible.*" [**Ibid.**]

In other words, anarchists think that any economic activity in a free society is to do useful things in such a way that gives those doing it as much pleasure as possible. The point of such activity is to express the individuality of those doing it, and for that to happen they must control the work process itself. Only by self-management can work become a means of empowering the individual and developing his or her powers.

In a nutshell, to use William Morris' expression, useful work will replace useless toil in an anarchist society.

## I.4.2 Why do anarchists desire to abolish work?

Anarchists desire to see humanity liberate itself from "work." This may come as a shock for many people and will do much to "prove" that anarchism is essentially utopian. However, we think that such an abolition is not only necessary, it is possible. This is because "work" is one of the major dangers to freedom we face.

If by freedom we mean self-government, then it is clear that being subjected to hierarchy in the workplace subverts our abilities to think and judge for ourselves. Like any skill, critical analysis and independent thought have to be practised continually in order to remain at their full potential. However, as well as hierarchy, the workplace environment created by these power structures also helps to undermine these abilities. This was recognised by Adam Smith:

*"The understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments." That being so, "the man whose life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects too are, perhaps, always the same, or nearly the same, has no occasion to extend his understanding . . . and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to be . . . But in every improved and civilised society this is the state into which the labouring poor, that is the great body of the people, must necessarily fall, unless government takes pains to prevent it."* [Adam Smith, quoted by Noam Chomsky, **Year 501**, p. 18]

Smith's argument (usually ignored by those who claim to follow his ideas) is backed up by extensive evidence. The different types of authority structures and different technologies have different effects on those who work within them. Carole Pateman (in **Participation and Democratic Theory**) notes that the evidence suggests that "[o]nly certain work situations were found to be conducive to the development of the psychological characteristics [suitable for freedom, such as] . . . the feelings of personal confidence and efficacy that underlay the sense of political efficacy." [p. 51] She quotes one expert (R. Blauner from his **Freedom and Alienation**) who argues that within capitalist companies based upon highly rationalised work environment, extensive division of labour and "no control over the pace or technique of his [or her] work, no room to exercise skill or leadership" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 51] workers, according to a psychological study, is "resigned to his lot . . . more dependent than independent . . . he lacks confidence in himself . . . he is humble . . . the most prevalent feeling states . . . seem to be fear and anxiety." [p. 52]

However, in workplaces where "the worker has a high degree of personal control over his work . . . and a very large degree of freedom from external control . . . [or has] collective responsibility of a crew of employees . . . [who] had control over the pace and method of getting the work done, and the work crews were largely internally self-disciplining" [p. 52] a different social character is seen. This was characterised by "a strong sense of individualism and autonomy, and a solid acceptance of citizenship in the large society . . . [and] a highly developed feeling of self-esteem and a sense of self-worth and is therefore ready to participate in the social and political institutions of the community." [p. 52] She notes that R. Blauner states that the "nature of a man's work affects his social character and personality" and that an "industrial environment tends to breed a distinct social type." [cited by Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 52]

As Bob Black argues:

*"You are what you do. If you do boring, stupid, monotonous work, chances are you'll end up boring, stupid, and monotonous. Work is a much better explanation for the creeping cretinisation all around us than even such significant moronising mechanisms as television and education. People who are regimented all their lives, handed to work from school and bracketed by the family in the beginning and the nursing home in the end, are habituated to hierarchy and psychologically enslaved. Their aptitude for autonomy is so atrophied that their fear of freedom is among their few rationally grounded phobias. Their obedience training at work carries over into the families they start, thus reproducing the system in more ways than one, and into politics, culture and everything else. Once you drain the vitality from people at work, they'll likely submit to hierarchy and expertise in everything. They're used to it."* [The Abolition of Work]

For this reason anarchists desire, to use Bob Black's phrase, *"the abolition of work."* "Work," in this context, does not mean any form of productive activity. Far from it. "Work" (in the sense of doing necessary things) will always be with us. There is no getting away from it; crops need to be grown, schools built, homes fixed, and so on. No, "work" in this context means any form of labour in which the worker does not control his or her own activity. In other words, **wage labour** in all its many forms. As Kropotkin put it, *"the right to work" simply "means the right to be always a wage-slave, a drudge, ruled over and exploited by the middle class of the future"* and he contrasted this to the *"right to well-being"* which meant *"the possibility of living like human beings, and of bringing up children to be members of a society better than ours."* [The Conquest of Bread, p. 44]

A society based upon wage labour (i.e. a capitalist society) will result in a society within which the typical worker uses few of their abilities, exercise little or no control over their work because they are governed by a boss during working hours. This has been proved to lower the individual's self-esteem and feelings of self-worth, as would be expected in any social relationship that denied self-government to workers. Capitalism is marked by an extreme division of labour, particularly between mental labour and physical labour. It reduces the worker to a mere machine operator, following the orders of his or her boss. Therefore, a libertarian that does not support economic liberty (i.e. self-management) is no libertarian at all.

Capitalism bases its rationale for itself on consumption. However, this results in a viewpoint which minimises the importance of the time we spend in productive activity. Anarchists consider that it is essential for individual's to use and develop their unique attributes and capacities in all walks of life, to maximise their powers. Therefore, the idea that "work" should be ignored in favour of consumption is totally mad. Productive activity is an important way of developing our inner-powers and express ourselves; in other words, be creative. Capitalism's emphasis on consumption shows the poverty of that system. As Alexander Berkman argues:

*"We do not live by bread alone. True, existence is not possible without opportunity to satisfy our physical needs. But the gratification of these by no means constitutes all of life. Our present system of disinheriting millions, made the belly the centre of the universe, so*

*to speak. But in a sensible society . . . [t]he feelings of human sympathy, of justice and right would have a chance to develop, to be satisfied, to broaden and grow."* [**ABC of Anarchism**, p. 15]

Therefore, capitalism is based on a constant process of alienated consumption, as workers try to find the happiness associated within productive, creative, self-managed activity in a place it does not exist -- on the shop shelves. This can partly explain the rise of both mindless consumerism and of religions, as individuals try to find meaning for their lives and happiness, a meaning and happiness frustrated in wage labour and hierarchy.

Capitalism's impoverishment of the individual's spirit is hardly surprising. As William Godwin argued, *"[t]he spirit of oppression, the spirit of servility, and the spirit of fraud, these are the immediate growth of the established administration of property. They are alike hostile to intellectual and moral improvement."* [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 131] In other words, any system based in wage labour or hierarchical relationships in the workplace will result in a deadening of the individual and the creation of a "servile" character. This crushing of individuality springs **directly** from what Godwin called *"the third degree of property"* namely *"a system. . . by which one man enters into the faculty of disposing of the produce of another man's industry"* in other words, capitalism. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 129]

Anarchists desire to change this and create a society based upon freedom in all aspects of life. Hence anarchists desire to abolish work, simply because it restricts the liberty and distorts the individuality of those who have to do it. To quote Emma Goldman:

*"Anarchism aims to strip labour of its deadening, dulling aspect, of its gloom and compulsion. It aims to make work an instrument of joy, of strength, of colour, of real harmony, so that the poorest sort of a man should find in work both recreation and hope."* [**Anarchism and Other Essays**, p. 61]

Anarchists do not think that by getting rid of work we will not have to produce necessary goods and so on. Far from it, an anarchist society *"doesn't mean we have to stop doing things. It does mean creating a new way of life based on play; in other words, a ludic revolution . . . a collective adventure in generalised joy and freely interdependent exuberance. Play isn't passive."* [Bob Black, **Op. Cit.**]

This means that in an anarchist society every effort would be made to reduce boring, unpleasant activity to a minimum and ensure that whatever productive activity is required to be done is as pleasant as possible and based upon voluntary labour. However, it is important to remember Cornelius Castoriadis point that a *"Socialist society will be able to reduce the length of the working day, and will have to do so, but this will not be the fundamental preoccupation. Its first task will be to . . . transform the very nature of work. The problem is not to leave more and more 'free' time to individuals - which might well be empty time - so that they may fill it at will with 'poetry' or the carving of wood. The problem is to make all time a time of liberty and to allow concrete freedom to find expression in creative activity."* Essentially, *"the problem is to put poetry into work."* [**Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self-**

**Managed Society**, p. 14 and p. 15]

This is why anarchists desire to abolish "*work*" (i.e. wage labour), to ensure that whatever "*work*" (i.e. economic activity) is required to be done is under the direct control of those who do it. In this way it can be liberated and so become a means of self-realisation and not a form of self-negation. In other words, anarchists want to abolish work because "*[l]ife, the art of living, has become a dull formula, flat and inert.*" [A. Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 27] Anarchists want to bring the spontaneity and joy of life back into productive activity and save humanity from the dead hand of capital.

All this does not imply that anarchists think that individuals will not seek to "*specialise*" in one form of productive activity rather than another. Far from it, people in a free society will pick activities which interest them as the main focal point of their means of self-expression. "*It is evident,*" noted Kropotkin, "*that all men and women cannot equally enjoy the pursuit of scientific work. The variety of inclinations is such that some will find more pleasure in science, some others in art, and other again in some of the numberless branches of the production of wealth.*" This "*division of work*" is commonplace in humanity and can be seen under capitalism -- most children and teenagers pick a specific line of work because they are interested, or at least desire to do a specific kind of work. This natural desire to do what interests you and what you are good at will be encouraged in an anarchist society. As Kropotkin argued, anarchists "*fully recognise the necessity of specialisation of knowledge, but we maintain that specialisation must follow general education, and that general education must be given in science and handicraft alike. To the division of society into brain workers and manual workers we oppose the combination of both kinds of activities . . . we advocate the **education integrale** [integral education], or complete education, which means the disappearance of that pernicious division.*" He was aware, however, that both individuals and society would benefit from a diversity of activities and a strong general knowledge. In his words, "*[b]ut whatever the occupations preferred by everyone, everyone will be the more useful in his [or her] branch is he [or she] is in possession of a serious scientific knowledge. And, whosoever he [or she] might be . . . he would be the gainer if he spent a part of his life in the workshop or the farm (the workshop **and** the farm), if he were in contact with humanity in its daily work, and had the satisfaction of knowing that he himself discharges his duties as an unprivileged producer of wealth.*" [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 186, p. 172 and p. 186]

However, while specialisation would continue, the permanent division of individuals into manual or brain workers would be eliminated. Individuals will manage all aspects of the "*work*" required (for example, engineers will also take part in self-managing their workplaces), a variety of activities would be encouraged and the strict division of labour of capitalism will be abolished.

In other words, anarchists want to replace the division of labour by the division of work. We must stress that we are not playing with words here. John Crump presents a good summary of the ideas of the Japanese anarchist Hatta Shuzo on this difference:

*"[W]e must recognise the distinction which Hatta made between the 'division of labour' . . . and the 'division of work' . . . he did not see anything sinister in the division of*

*work . . . On the contrary, Hatta believed that the division of work was a benign and unavoidable feature of any productive process: 'it goes without saying that within society, whatever the kind of production, there has to be a division of work.'*" [**Hatta Shuzo and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan**, pp. 146-7]

As Kropotkin argued:

*"while a **temporary** division of functions remains the surest guarantee of success in each separate undertaking, the **permanent** division is doomed to disappear, and to be substituted by a variety of pursuits -- intellectual, industrial, and agricultural -- corresponding to the different capacities of the individual, as well as to the variety of capacities within every human aggregate."* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 26]

As an aside, supporters of capitalism argue that **integrated** labour must be more inefficient than **divided** labour as capitalist firms have not introduced it. This is false for numerous reasons.

Firstly, we have to put out the inhuman logic of the assertion. After all, few would argue in favour of slavery if it were, in fact, **more** productive than wage labour but such is the logical conclusion of this argument. If someone did argue that the only reason slavery was not the dominant mode of labour simply because it was inefficient we would consider them as less than human. Simply put, it is a sick ideology which happily sacrifices individuals for the sake of slightly more products. Sadly, that is what many defenders of capitalism do, ultimately, argue for.

Secondly, capitalist firms are not neutral structures but rather a system of hierarchies, with entrenched interests and needs. Managers will only introduce a work technique that maintains their power (and so their profits). As we argue in [section J.5.12](#), while workers' participation generally see a rise in efficiency managers generally stop the project simply because it undercuts their power by empowering workers who then can fight for a greater slice of the value they produce. So the lack of integrated labour under capitalism simply means that it does not empower management, not that it is less efficient.

Thirdly, the attempts by managers and bosses to introduce "*flexibility*" by eliminating trade unions suggests that integration **is** more efficient. After all, one of the major complains directed towards trade union contracts were that they explicitly documented what workers could and could not do. For example, union members would refuse to do work which was outside their agreed job descriptions. This is usually classed as an example of the evil of regulations.

However, if we look at it from the viewpoint of contract, it exposes the inefficiency and inflexibility of contract as a means of co-operation. After all, what is this refusal actually mean? It means that the worker refuses to do what is not specified in his or her contract! Their job description indicates what they have been contracted to do and anything else has not been agreed upon in advance. It specifies the division of labour in a workplace by means of a contract between worker and boss.

While being a wonderful example of a well-designed contract, managers discovered that they could not operate their workplaces because of them. Rather, they needed a general *"do what you are told"* contract (which of course is hardly an example of contract reducing authority) and such a contract **integrates** numerous work tasks into one. The managers diatribe against union contracts suggests that production needs some form of integrated labour to actually work (as well as showing the hypocrisy of the labour contract under capitalism as labour *"flexibility"* simply means labour *"commodification"* -- a machine does not question what its used for, the ideal for labour under capitalism is a similar unquestioning nature for labour). The union job description indicates that not only is the contract not applicable to the capitalist workplace but that production needs the integration of labour while demanding a division of work. As Cornelius Caastoriadis argued:

*"Modern production has destroyed many traditional professional qualifications. It has created automatic or semi-automatic machines. It has thereby itself demolished its own traditional framework for the industrial division of labour. It has given birth to a universal worker who is capable, after a relatively short apprenticeship, of using most machines. Once one gets beyond its class aspects, the 'posting' of workers to particular jobs in a big modern factory corresponds less and less to a genuine division of **labour** and more and more to a simple division of tasks. Workers are not allocated to given areas of the productive process and then riveted to them because their 'occupational skills' invariably correspond to the 'skills required' by management. They are placed there . . . just because a particular vacancy happened to exist."* [**Political and Social Writings**, vol. 2, p. 117]

Of course, the other option is to get rid of capitalism by self-management. If workers managed their own time and labour, they would have no reason to say *"that is not my job"* as they have no contract with someone who tells them what to do. Similarly, the process of labour integration forced upon the worker would be freely accepted and a task freely accepted always produces superior results than one imposed by coercion (or its threat). This means that *"[u]nder socialism, factories would have no reason to accept the artificially rigid division of labour now prevailing. There will be every reason to encourage a rotation of workers **between shops and departments** and between production and office areas."* The *"residues of capitalism's division of labour gradually will have to be eliminated"* as *"socialist society cannot survive unless it demolishes this division."* [**Ibid.**]

Division of tasks (or work) will replace division of labour in a free society. *"The main subject of social economy,"* argued Kropotkin, is *"the **economy** of energy required for the satisfaction of **human needs.**"* These needs obviously expressed both the needs of the producers for empowering and interesting work and their need for a healthy and balanced environment. Thus Kropotkin discussed the *"advantages"* which could be *"derive[d] from a combination of industrial pursuits with intensive agriculture, and of brain work with manual work."* The *"greatest sum total of well-being can be obtained when a variety of agricultural, industrial and intellectual pursuits are combined in each community; and that man [and woman] shows his best when he is in a position to apply his usually-varied capacities to several pursuits in the farm, the workshop, the factory, the study or the studio, instead of being riveted for life to one of*

*these pursuits only.*" [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, pp. 17-8]

By replacing the division of labour with the division of work, productive activity can be transformed into an enjoyable task (or series of tasks). By integrating labour, all the capacities of the producer can be expressed so eliminating a major source of alienation and unhappiness in society.

One last point on the abolition of work. May 1st -- International Workers' Day -- which, as we discussed in [section A.5.2](#), was created to commemorate the Chicago Anarchist Martyrs. Anarchists then, as now, think that it should be celebrated by strike action and mass demonstrations. In other words, for anarchists, International Workers' Day should be a non-work day! That sums up the anarchist position to work nicely -- that the celebration of workers' day should be based on the rejection of work.

### I.4.3 How do anarchists intend to abolish work?

Basically by workers' self-management of production and community control of the means of production. It is hardly in the interests of those who do the actual "*work*" to have bad working conditions, boring, repetitive labour, and so on. Therefore, a key aspect of the liberation from work is to create a self-managed society, "*a society in which everyone has equal means to develop and that all are or can be at the time intellectual and manual workers, and the only differences remaining between men [and women] are those which stem from the natural diversity of aptitudes, and that all jobs, all functions, give an equal right to the enjoyment of social possibilities.*" [Errico Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 40]

Essential to this task is decentralisation and the use of appropriate technology. Decentralisation is important to ensure that those who do work can determine how to liberate it. A decentralised system will ensure that ordinary people can identify areas for technological innovation, and so understand the need to get rid of certain kinds of work. Unless ordinary people understand and control the introduction of technology, then they will never be fully aware of the benefits of technology and resist advances which may be in their best interests to introduce. This is the full meaning of appropriate technology, namely the use of technology which those most affected feel to be best in a given situation. Such technology may or may not be technologically "*advanced*" but it will be of the kind which ordinary people can understand and, most importantly, control.

The potential for rational use of technology can be seen from capitalism. Under capitalism, technology is used to increase profits, to expand the economy, not to liberate **all** individuals from useless toil (it does, of course, liberate a few from such "*activity*"). As Ted Trainer argues:

*"Two figures drive the point home. In the long term, productivity (i.e. output per hour of work) increases at about 2 percent per annum, meaning that each 35 years we could cut the work week by half while producing as much as we were at the beginning. A number of OECD . . . countries could actually have cut from a five-day work week to around a one-day work week in the last 25 years while maintaining their output at the same level. In this*



*economy we must therefore double the annual amount we consume per person every 35 years just to prevent unemployment from rising and to avoid reduction in outlets available to soak up investable capital.*

*"Second, according to the US Bureau for Mines, the amount of capital per person available for investment in the United States will increase at 3.6 percent per annum (i.e. will double in 20-year intervals). This indicates that unless Americans double the volume of goods and services they consume every 20 years, their economy will be in serious difficulties*

*"Hence the ceaseless and increasing pressure to find more business opportunities" ["What is Development", p 57-90, **Society and Nature**, Issue No. 7, p. 49]*

And, remember, these figures include production in many areas of the economy that would not exist in a free society - state and capitalist bureaucracy, weapons production, and so on. In addition, it does not take into account the labour of those who do not actually produce anything useful and so the level of production for useful goods would be higher than Trainer indicates. In addition, goods will be built to last and so much production will become sensible and not governed by an insane desire to maximise profits at the expense of everything else.

The decentralisation of power will ensure that self-management becomes universal. This will see the end of division of labour as mental and physical work becomes unified and those who do the work also manage it. This will allow *"the free exercise of **all** the faculties of man"* both inside and outside "work." [Peter Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 148] The aim of such a development would be to turn productive activity, as far as possible, into an enjoyable experience. In the words of Murray Bookchin it is the **quality** and **nature** of the work process that counts:

*"If workers' councils and workers' management of production do not transform the work into a joyful activity, free time into a marvellous experience, and the workplace into a community, then they remain merely formal structures, in fact, **class** structures. They perpetuate the limitations of the proletariat as a product of bourgeois social conditions. Indeed, no movement that raises the demand for workers' councils can be regarded as revolutionary unless it tries to promote sweeping transformations in the environment of the work place." [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, p. 146]*

Work will become, primarily, the expression of a person's pleasure in what they are doing and become like an art - an expression of their creativity and individuality. Work as an art will become expressed in the workplace as well as the work process, with workplaces transformed and integrated into the local community and environment (see section I.4.15 -- ["What will the workplace of tomorrow be like?"](#)). This will obviously apply to work conducted in the home as well, otherwise the *"revolution, intoxicated with the beautiful words, Liberty, Equality, Solidarity, would not be a revolution if it maintained slavery at home. Half [of] humanity subjected to the slavery of the hearth would still have to rebel against the*

*other half.*" [Peter Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 128]

In other words, anarchists desire "*to combine the best part (in fact, the only good part) of work -- the production of use-values -- with the best of play . . . its freedom and its fun, its voluntariness and its intrinsic gratification*" -- the transformation of what economists call production into productive play. [Bob Black, **Smokestack Lightning**]

In addition, a decentralised system will build up a sense of community and trust between individuals and ensure the creation of an ethical economy, one based on interactions between individuals and not commodities caught in the flux of market forces. This ideal of a "**moral economy**" can be seen in both social anarchists desire for the end of the market system and the individualists insistence that "*cost be the limit of price.*" Anarchists recognise that the "*traditional local market . . . is essentially different from the market as it developed in modern capitalism. Bartering on a local market offered an opportunity to meet for the purpose of exchanging commodities. Producers and customers became acquainted; they were relatively small groups . . . The modern market is no longer a meeting place but a mechanism characterised by abstract and impersonal demand. One produces for this market, not for a known circle of customers; its verdict is based on laws of supply and demand.*" [Man for Himself, pp. 67-68]

Anarchists reject the capitalist notion that economic activity should be based on maximising profit as the be all and end all of such work (buying and selling on the "*impersonal market*"). As markets only work through people, individuals, who buy and sell (but, in the end, control them -- in the "*free market*" only the market is free) this means that for the market to be "*impersonal*" as it is in capitalism it implies that those involved have to be unconcerned about personalities, including their own. Profit, not ethics, is what counts. The "*impersonal*" market suggests individuals who act in an impersonal, and so unethical, manner. The morality of what they produce, why they produce it and how they produce it is irrelevant, as long as profits are produced.

Instead, anarchists consider economic activity as an expression of the human spirit, an expression of the innate human need to express ourselves and to create. Capitalism distorts these needs and makes economic activity a deadening experience by the division of labour and hierarchy. Anarchists think that "*industry is not an end in itself, but should only be a means to ensure to man his material subsistence and to make accessible to him the blessings of a higher intellectual culture. Where industry is everything and man is nothing begins the realm of a ruthless economic despotism whose workings are no less disastrous than those of any political despotism. The two mutually augment one another, and they are fed from the same source.*" [Rudolph Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 11]

Anarchists think that a decentralised social system will allow "*work*" to be abolished and economic activity humanised and made a means to an end (namely producing useful things and liberated individuals). This would be achieved by, as Rudolf Rocker puts it, the "*alliance of free groups of men and women based on co-operative labour and a planned administration of things in the interest of the community.*" [Op. Cit., p. 62]

However, as things are produced by people, it could be suggested that a *"planned administration of things"* implies a *"planned administration of people"* (although few who suggest this danger apply it to capitalist firms which are like mini-centrally planned states). This objection is false simply because anarchism aims *"to reconstruct the economic life of the peoples from the ground up and build it up anew in the spirit of Socialism"* and, moreover, *"only the producers themselves are fitted for this task, since they are the only value-creating element in society out of which a new future can arise."* Such a reconstructed economic life would be based on anarchist principles, that is *"based on the principles of federalism, a free combination from below upwards, putting the right of self-determination of every member above everything else and recognising only the organic agreement of all on the basis of like interests and common convictions."* [Op. Cit., p. 61 and p. 53]

In other words, those who produce also administer and so govern themselves in free association (and it should be pointed out that any group of individuals in association will make *"plans"* and *"plan,"* the important question is who does the planning and who does the work. Only in anarchy are both functions united into the same people). Rocker emphasises this point when he writes that:

*"Anarcho-syndicalists are convinced that a Socialist economic order cannot be created by the decrees and statutes of a government, but only by the solidaric collaboration of the workers with hand and brain in each special branch of production; that is, through the taking over of the management of all plants by the producers themselves under such form that the separate groups, plants, and branches of industry are independent members of the general economic organism and systematically carry on production and the distribution of the products in the interest of the community on the basis of free mutual agreements."* [Op. Cit., p. 55]

In other words, the *"planned administration of things"* would be done by the producers **themselves**, in independent groupings. This would likely take the form (as we indicated in [section I.3](#)) of confederations of syndicates who communicate information between themselves and respond to changes in the production and distribution of products by increasing or decreasing the required means of production in a co-operative (i.e. *"planned"*) fashion. No *"central planning"* or *"central planners"* governing the economy, just workers co-operating together as equals (as Kropotkin argued, free socialism *"must result from thousands of separate local actions, all directed towards the same aim. It cannot be dictated by a central body: it must result from the numberless local needs and wants."* [Act for Yourselves, p. 54]).

Therefore, an anarchist society would abolish work by ensuring that those who do the work actually control it. They would do so in a network of self-managed associations, a society *"composed of a number of societies banded together for everything that demands a common effort: federations of producers for all kinds of production, of societies for consumption . . . All these groups will unite their efforts through mutual agreement . . . Personal initiative will be encouraged and every tendency to uniformity and centralisation combated."* [Peter Kropotkin, quoted by Buber in **Paths in Utopia**, p. 42]

In response to consumption patterns, syndicates will have to expand or reduce production and will have

to attract volunteers to do the necessary work. The very basis of free association will ensure the abolition of work, as individuals will apply for "work" they enjoy doing and so would be interested in reducing "work" they did not want to do to a minimum. Such a decentralisation of power would unleash a wealth of innovation and ensure that unpleasant work be minimised and fairly shared (see [section I.4.13](#)).

Now, any form of association requires agreement. Therefore, even a society based on the communist-anarchist maxim "*from each according to their ability, to each according to their need*" will need to make agreements in order to ensure co-operative ventures succeed. In other words, members of a co-operative commonwealth would have to make and keep to their agreements between themselves. This means that the members of a syndicate would agree joint starting and finishing times, require notice if individuals want to change "jobs" and so on within and between syndicates. Any joint effort requires some degree of co-operation and agreement. Moreover, between syndicates, an agreement would be reached (in all likelihood) that determined the minimum working hours required by all members of society able to work. How that minimum was actually organised would vary between workplace and commune, with work times, flexi-time, job rotation and so on determined by each syndicate (for example, one syndicate may work 8 hours a day for 2 days, another 4 hours a day for 4 days, one may use flexi-time, another more rigid starting and stopping times).

As Kropotkin argued, an anarchist-communist society would be based upon the following kind of "contract" between its members:

*"We undertake to give you the use of our houses, stores, streets, means of transport, schools, museums, etc., on condition that, from twenty to forty-five or fifty years of age, you consecrate four or five hours a day to some work recognised as necessary to existence. Choose yourself the producing group which you wish to join, or organise a new group, provided that it will undertake to produce necessaries. And as for the remainder of your time, combine together with whomsoever you like, for recreation, art, or science, according to the bent of your taste . . . Twelve or fifteen hundred hours of work a year . . . is all we ask of you. For that amount of work we guarantee to you the free use of all that these groups produce, or will produce."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, pp. 153-4]

With such work "*necessary to existence*" being recognised by individuals and expressed by demand for labour from productive syndicates. It is, of course, up to the individual to decide which work he or she desires to perform from the positions available in the various associations in existence. A union card would be the means by which work hours would be recorded and access to the common wealth of society ensured. And, of course, individuals and groups are free to work alone and exchange the produce of their labour with others, including the confederated syndicates, if they so desired. An anarchist society will be as flexible as possible.

Therefore, we can imagine a social anarchist society being based on two basic arrangements -- firstly, an agreed minimum working week of, say, 20 hours, in a syndicate of your choice, plus any amount of hours doing "work" which you feel like doing -- for example, art, experimentation, DIY, playing music,

composing, gardening and so on. The aim of technological progress would be to reduce the basic working week more and more until the very concept of necessary "work" and free time enjoyments is abolished. In addition, in work considered dangerous or unwanted, then volunteers could trade doing a few hours of such activity for more free time (see [section I.4.13](#) for more on this).

It can be said that this sort of agreement is a restriction of liberty because it is "man-made" (as opposed to the "natural law" of "supply and demand"). This is a common defence of the free market by individualist anarchists against anarcho-communism, for example. However, while in theory individualist-anarchists can claim that in their vision of society, they don't care when, where, or how a person earns a living, as long as they are not invasive about it the fact is that any economy is based on interactions between individuals. The law of "supply and demand" easily, and often, makes a mockery of the ideas that individuals can work as long as they like - usually they end up working as long as required by market forces (i.e. the actions of other individuals, but turned into a force outwith their control, see [section I.1.3](#)). This means that individuals do not work as long as they like, but as long as they have to in order to survive. Knowing that "market forces" is the cause of long hours of work hardly makes them any nicer.

And it seems strange to the communist-anarchist that certain free agreements made between equals can be considered authoritarian while others are not. The individualist-anarchist argument that social co-operation to reduce labour is "authoritarian" while agreements between individuals on the market are not seems illogical to social anarchists. They cannot see how it is better for individuals to be pressured into working longer than they desire by "invisible hands" than to come to an arrangement with others to manage their own affairs to maximise their free time.

Therefore, free agreement between free and equal individuals is considered the key to abolishing work, based upon decentralisation of power and the use of appropriate technology.

## I.4.4 What economic decision making criteria could be used in anarchy?

Firstly, it should be noted that anarchists do not have any set idea about the answer to this question. Most anarchists are communists, desiring to see the end of money, but that does not mean they want to impose communism onto people. Far from it, communism can only be truly libertarian if it is organised from the bottom up. So, anarchists would agree with Kropotkin that it is a case of not "*determining in advance what form of distribution the producers should accept in their different groups -- whether the communist solution, or labour checks, or equal salaries, or any other method*" while considering a given solution best in their opinion. [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 166] Free experiment is a key aspect of anarchism.

While certain anarchists have certain preferences on the social system they want to live in and so argue for that, they are aware that objective circumstances and social desires will determine what is introduced

during a revolution (for example, while Kropotkin was a communist-anarchist and considered it essential that a revolution proceed towards communism as quickly as possible, he was aware that it was unlikely it would be introduced immediately -- see [section I.2.2](#) for details).

However, we will outline some possible means of economic decision making criteria as this question is an important one (it is the crux of the "*libertarian socialism is impossible*" argument, for example). Therefore, we will indicate what possible solutions exist in different forms of anarchism.

In a mutualist or collectivist system, the answer is easy. Prices will exist and be used as a means of making decisions. Mutualism will be more market orientated than collectivism, with collectivism being based on confederations of collectives to respond to changes in demand (i.e. to determine investment decisions and ensure that supply is kept in line with demand). Mutualism, with its system of market based distribution around a network of co-operatives and mutual banks, does not really need a further discussion as its basic operations are the same as in any non-capitalist market system. Collectivism and communism will have to be discussed in more detail. However, all systems are based on workers' self-management and so the individuals directly affected make the decisions concerning what to produce, when to do it, and how to do it. In this way workers retain control of the product of their labour. It is the social context of these decisions and what criteria workers use to make their decisions that differ between anarchist schools of thought.

Although collectivism promotes the greatest autonomy for worker associations, it should not be confused with a market economy as advocated by supporters of mutualism (particularly in its Individualist form). The goods produced by the collectivised factories and workshops are exchanged not according to highest price that can be wrung from consumers, but according to their actual production costs. The determination of these honest prices is to be by a "*Bank of Exchange*" in each community (obviously an idea borrowed from Proudhon). These "*Banks*" would represent the various producer confederations and consumer/citizen groups in the community and would seek to negotiate these "*honest*" prices (which would, in all likelihood, include "*hidden*" costs like pollution). These agreements would be subject to ratification by the assemblies of those involved.

As Guillaume puts it "*the value of the commodities having been established in advance by a contractual agreement between the regional co-operative federations [i.e. confederations of syndicates] and the various communes, who will also furnish statistics to the Banks of Exchange. The Bank of Exchange will remit to the producers negotiable vouchers representing the value of their products; these vouchers will be accepted throughout the territory included in the federation of communes.*" [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 366] These vouchers would be related to hours worked, for example, and when used as a guide for investment decisions could be supplemented with cost-benefit analysis of the kind possibly used in a communist-anarchist society (see below).

Although this scheme bears a strong resemblance to Proudhonian "*People's Banks*," it should be noted that the Banks of Exchange, along with a "*Communal Statistical Commission*," are intended to have a "*planning*" function as well to ensure that supply meets demand. This does not imply a "*command*"

economy, but simple book keeping for "each Bank of Exchange makes sure in advance that these products are in demand [in order to risk] nothing by immediately issuing payment vouchers to the producers." [Op. Cit., p. 367] The workers syndicates would still determine what orders to produce and each commune would be free to choose its suppliers.

As will be discussed in more depth later (see [section I.4.8](#)) information about consumption patterns will be recorded and used by workers to inform their production and investment decisions. In addition, we can imagine that production syndicates would encourage communes as well as consumer groups and co-operatives to participate in making these decisions. This would ensure that produced goods reflect consumer needs. Moreover, as conditions permit, the exchange functions of the communal "banks" would (in all likelihood) be gradually replaced by the distribution of goods "in accordance with the needs of the consumers." In other words, most supporters of collectivist anarchism see it as a temporary measure before anarcho-communism could develop.

Communist anarchism would be similar to collectivism, i.e. a system of confederations of collectives, communes and distribution centres ("*Communal stores*"). However, in an anarcho-communist system, prices are not used. How will economic decision making be done? One possible solution is as follows:

*"As to decisions involving choices of a general nature, such as what forms of energy to use, which of two or more materials to employ to produce a particular good, whether to build a new factory, there is a . . . technique . . . that could be [used] . . . 'cost-benefit analysis' . . . in socialism a points scheme for attributing relative importance to the various relevant considerations could be used . . . The points attributed to these considerations would be subjective, in the sense that this would depend on a deliberate social decision rather than some objective standard, but this is the case even under capitalism when a monetary value has to be attributed to some such 'cost' or 'benefit' . . . In the sense that one of the aims of socialism is precisely to rescue humankind from the capitalist fixation with production time/money, cost-benefit analyses, as a means of taking into account other factors, could therefore be said to be more appropriate for use in socialism than under capitalism. Using points systems to attribute relative importance in this way would not be to recreate some universal unit of evaluation and calculation, but simply to employ a technique to facilitate decision-making in particular concrete cases."* [Adam Buick and John Crump, **State Capitalism: The Wages System Under New Management**, pp. 138-139]

This points system would be the means by which producers and consumers would be able to determine whether the use of a particular good is efficient or not. Unlike prices, this cost-benefit analysis system would ensure that production and consumption reflects social and ecological costs, awareness and priorities. Moreover, this analysis would be a **guide** to decision making and not a replacement of human decision making and evaluation. As Lewis Mumford argues:

*"it is plan that in the decision as to whether to build a bridge or a tunnel there is a human*

*question that should outweigh the question of cheapness or mechanical feasibility: namely the number of lives that will be lost in the actual building or the advisability of condemning a certain number of men [and women] to spend their entire working days underground supervising tunnel traffic. As soon as our thought ceases to be automatically conditioned by the mine, such questions become important. Similarly the social choice between silk and rayon is not one that can be made simply on the different costs of production, or the difference in quality between the fibres themselves: there also remains, to be integrated in the decision, the question as to difference in working-pleasure between tending silkworms and assisting in rayon production. What the product contributes to the labourer is just as important as what the worker contributes to the product. A well-managed society might alter the process of motor car assemblage, at some loss of speed and cheapness, in order to produce a more interesting routine for the worker: similarly, it would either go to the expense of equipping dry-process cement making plants with dust removers -- or replace the product itself with a less noxious substitute. When none of these alternatives was available, it would drastically reduce the demand itself to the lowest possible level." [The Future of Technics and Civilisation, pp. 160-1]*

Obviously, today, we would include ecological issues as well as human ones. However Mumford's argument is correct. Any decision making process which disregards the quality of work or the effect on the human and natural environment is a deranged process. However, this is how capitalism operates, with the market rewarding capitalists and managers who introduce de-humanising and ecologically harmful practices. Indeed, so biased against labour and the environment is capitalism that economists and pro-capitalists argue that reducing "efficiency" by such social concerns is actually **harmful** to an economy, which is a total reversal of common sense and human feelings (after all, surely the economy should satisfy human needs and not sacrifice those needs to the economy?). The argument is that consumption would suffer as resources (human and material) would be diverted from more "efficient" productive activities and so reduce, over all, our economic well-being. What this argument ignores is that consumption does not exist in isolation from the rest of the economy. What we what to consume is conditioned, in part, by the sort of person we are and that is influenced by the kind of work we do, the kinds of social relationships we have, whether we are happy with our work and life, and so on. If our work is alienating and of low quality, then so will our consumption decisions. If our work is subject to hierarchical control and servile in nature then we cannot expect our consumption decisions of totally rational -- indeed they may become an attempt to find happiness via shopping, a self-defeating activity as consumption cannot solve a problem created in production. Thus rampant consumerism may be the result of capitalist "efficiency" and so the objection against socially aware production is question begging.

Of course, as well as absolute scarcity, prices under capitalism also reflect relative scarcity (while in the long term, market prices tend towards their production price plus a mark-up based on the degree of monopoly in a market, in the short term prices can change as a result of changes in supply and demand). How a communist society could take into account such short term changes and communicate them through out the economy is discussed in section I.4.5 ( "[What about 'supply and demand'?](#)"). Needless to say, production and investment decisions based upon such cost-benefit analysis would take into account



the current production situation and so the relative scarcity of specific goods.

Therefore, a communist-anarchist society would be based around a network of syndicates who communicate information between each other. Instead of the "*price*" being communicated between workplaces as in capitalism, actual physical data will be sent. This data is a summary of the use values of the good (for example labour time and energy used to produce it, pollution details, relative scarcity and so forth). With this information a cost-benefit analysis will be conducted to determine which good will be best to use in a given situation based upon mutually agreed common values. The data for a given workplace could be compared to the industry as a whole (as confederations of syndicates would gather and produce such information -- see [section I.3.5](#)) in order to determine whether a specific workplace will efficiently produce the required goods (this system has the additional advantage of indicating which workplaces require investment to bring them in line, or improve upon, the industrial average in terms of working conditions, hours worked and so on). In addition, common rules of thumb would possibly be agreed, such as agreements not to use scarce materials unless there is no alternative (either ones that use a lot of labour, energy and time to produce or those whose demand is currently exceeding supply capacity).

Similarly, when ordering goods, the syndicate, commune or individual involved will have to inform the syndicate why it is required in order to allow the syndicate to determine if they desire to produce the good and to enable them to prioritise the orders they receive. In this way, resource use can be guided by social considerations and "*unreasonable*" requests ignored (for example, if an individual "*needs*" a ship-builders syndicate to build a ship for his personal use, the ship-builders may not "*need*" to build it and instead builds ships for the transportation of freight). However, in almost all cases of individual consumption, no such information will be needed as communal stores would order consumer goods in bulk as they do now. Hence the economy would be a vast network of co-operating individuals and workplaces and the dispersed knowledge which exists within any society can be put to good effect (**better** effect than under capitalism because it does not hide social and ecological costs in the way market prices do and co-operation will eliminate the business cycle and its resulting social problems).

Therefore, production units in a social anarchist society, by virtue of their autonomy within association, are aware of what is socially useful for them to produce and, by virtue of their links with communes, also aware of the social (human and ecological) cost of the resources they need to produce it. They can combine this knowledge, reflecting overall social priorities, with their local knowledge of the detailed circumstances of their workplaces and communities to decide how they can best use their productive capacity. In this way the division of knowledge within society can be used by the syndicates effectively as well as overcoming the restrictions within knowledge communication imposed by the price mechanism.

Moreover, production units, by their association within confederations (or Guilds) ensure that there is effective communication between them. This results in a process of negotiated co-ordination between equals (i.e. horizontal links and agreements) for major investment decisions, thus bringing together supply and demand and allowing the plans of the various units to be co-ordinated. By this process of co-

operation, production units can reduce duplicating effort and so reduce the waste associated with over-investment (and so the irrationalities of booms and slumps associated with the price mechanism, which does not provide sufficient information to allow workplaces to efficiently co-ordinate their plans - see [section C.7.2](#)).

Needless to say, this issue is related to the "*socialist calculation*" issue we discussed in [section I.1.2](#). To clarify our ideas, we shall present an example.

Consider two production processes. Method A requires 70 tons of steel and 60 tons of concrete while Method B requires 60 tons of steel and 70 tons of concrete. Which method should be preferred? One of the methods will be more economical in terms of leaving more resources available for other uses than the other but in order to establish which we need to compare the relevant quantities.

Supporters of capitalism argue that only prices can supply the necessary information as they are heterogeneous quantities. Both steel and concrete have a price (say \$10 per ton for steel and \$5 per ton for concrete). The method to choose is clearly B as it has a lower price than A (\$950 for B compared to \$1000 for A). However, this does not actually tell us whether B is the more economical method of production in terms of minimising waste and resource use, it just tells us which costs less in terms of money.

Why is this? Simply because, as we argued in [section I.1.2](#), prices do not totally reflect social, economic and ecological costs. They are influenced by market power, for example, and produce externalities, environmental and health costs which are not reflected in the price. Indeed, passing on costs in the form of externalities and inhuman working conditions actually are rewarded in the market as it allows the company so doing to cut their prices. As far as market power goes, this has a massive influence on prices, directly in terms of prices charged and indirectly in terms of wages and conditions of workers. Due to natural barriers to entry (see [section C.4](#)), prices are maintained artificially high by the market power of big business. For example, steel could, in fact cost \$5 per ton to produce but market power allows the company to charge \$10 per ton,

Wage costs are, again, determined by the bargaining power of labour and so do not reflect the real costs in terms of health, personality and alienation the workers experience. They may be working in unhealthy conditions simply to get by, with unemployment or job insecurity hindering their attempts to improve their conditions or find a new job. Nor are the social and individual costs of hierarchy and alienation factored into the price, quite the reverse. It seems ironic that an economy which its defenders claim meets human needs (as expressed by money, of course) totally ignores individuals in the workplace, the place they spend most of their waking hours in adult life.

So the relative costs of each production method have to be evaluated but price does not, indeed cannot, provide a real indication of whether a method is economical in the sense of actually minimising resource use. Prices do reflect some of these costs, of course, but filtered through the effects of market power, hierarchy and externalities they become less and less accurate. Unless you take the term

*"economical"* to simply mean *"has the least cost in price"* rather than the sensible *"has the least cost in resource use, ecological impact and human pain"* you have to accept that the price mechanism is not a great indicator of economic use.

What is the alternative? Obviously the exact details will be worked out in practice by the members of a free society, but we can suggest a few ideas based on our comments above.

When evaluating production methods we need to take into account as many social and ecological costs as possible and these have to be evaluated. Which costs will be taken into account, of course, be decided by those involved, as will how important they are relative to each other (i.e. how they are weighted). Moreover, it is likely that they will factor in the desirability of the work performed to indicate the potential waste in human time involved in production (see [section I.4.13](#) for a discussion of how the desirability of productive activity could be indicated in an anarchist society). The logic behind this is simple, a resource which people **like** to produce will be a better use of the scarce resource of an individual's time than one people hate producing.

So, for example, steel may take 3 person hours to produce one ton, produce 200 cubic metres of waste gas, 2000 kilo-joules of energy, and has excellent working conditions. Concrete, on the other hand, may take 4 person hours to produce one ton, produce 300 cubic metres of waste gas, uses 1000 kilo-joules of energy and has dangerous working conditions due to dust. What would be the best method? Assuming that each factor is weighted the same, then obviously Method A is the better method as it produces the least ecological impact and has the safest working environment -- the higher energy cost is offset by the other, more important, factors.

What factors to take into account and how to weigh them in the decision making process will be evaluated constantly and reviewed so to ensure that it reflects real costs and social concerns. Moreover, simply accounting tools can be created (as a spreadsheet or computer programme) that takes the decided factors as inputs and returns a cost benefit analysis of the choices available.

Therefore, the claim that communism cannot evaluate different production methods due to lack of prices is inaccurate. Indeed, a look at the actual capitalist market -- marked as it is by differences in bargaining and market power, externalities and wage labour -- soon shows that the claims that prices accurately reflect costs is simply not accurate.

One final point on this subject. As social anarchists consider it important to encourage all to participate in the decisions that affect their lives, it would be the role of communal confederations to determine the relative points value of given inputs and outputs. In this way, **all** individuals in a community determine how their society develops, so ensuring that economic activity is responsible to social needs and takes into account the desires of everyone affected by production. In this way the problems associated with the *"Isolation Paradox"* (see [section B.6](#)) can be over come and so consumption and production can be harmonised with the needs of individuals as members of society and the environment they live in.

## I.4.5 What about "*supply and demand*"?

Anarchists do not ignore the facts of life, namely that at a given moment there is so much a certain good produced and so much of it is desired to be consumed or used. Neither do we deny that different individuals have different interests and tastes. However, this is not what is usually meant by "*supply and demand*." Often in general economic debate, this formula is given a certain mythical quality which ignores the underlying realities which it reflects as well as some unwholesome implications of the theory. So, before discussing "*supply and demand*" in an anarchist society, it is worthwhile to make a few points about the "*law of supply and demand*" in general.

Firstly, as E.P. Thompson argues, "*supply and demand*" promotes "*the notion that high prices were a (painful) remedy for dearth, in drawing supplies to the afflicted region of scarcity. But what draws supply are not high prices but sufficient money in their purses to pay high prices. A characteristic phenomenon in times of dearth is that it generates unemployment and empty purses; in purchasing necessities at inflated prices people cease to be able to buy inessentials [causing unemployment] . . . Hence the number of those able to pay the inflated prices declines in the afflicted regions, and food may be exported to neighbouring, less afflicted, regions where employment is holding up and consumers still have money with which to pay. In this sequence, high prices can actually withdraw supply from the most afflicted area.*" [**Customs in Common**, pp. 283-4]

Therefore "*the law of supply and demand*" may not be the "*most efficient*" means of distribution in a society based on inequality. This is clearly reflected in the "*rationing*" by purse which this system is based on. While in the economics books, price is the means by which scarce resources are "*rationed*" in reality this creates many errors. Adam Smith argued that high prices discourage consumption, putting "*everybody more or less, but particularly the inferior ranks of people, upon thrift and good management.*" [cited by Thompson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 284] However, as Thompson notes, "*[h]owever persuasive the metaphor, there is an elision of the real relationships assigned by price, which suggests. . . ideological sleight-of-mind. Rationing by price does not allocate resources equally among those in need; it reserves the supply to those who can pay the price and excludes those who can't. . . The raising of prices during dearth could 'ration' them [the poor] out of the market altogether.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 285]

In other words, the market cannot be isolated and abstracted from the network of political, social and legal relations within which it is situated. This means that all that "*supply and demand*" tells us is that those with money can demand more, and be supplied with more, than those without. Whether this is the "*most efficient*" result for society cannot be determined (unless, of course, you assume that rich people are more valuable than working class ones **because** they are rich). This has an obvious effect on production, with "*effective demand*" twisting economic activity. As Chomsky notes, "*[t]hose who have more money tend to consume more, for obvious reasons. So consumption is skewed towards luxuries for the rich, rather than necessities for the poor.*" George Barrett brings home of the evil of such a "*skewed*" form of production:

*"To-day the scramble is to compete for the greatest profits. If there is more profit to be made in satisfying my lady's passing whim than there is in feeding hungry children, then competition brings us in feverish haste to supply the former, whilst cold charity or the poor law can supply the latter, or leave it unsupplied, just as it feels disposed. That is how it works out."* [**Objections to Anarchism**]

Therefore, as far as *"supply and demand"* is concerned, anarchists are well aware of the need to create and distribute necessary goods to those who require them. This, however, cannot be achieved under capitalism. In effect, supply and demand under capitalism results in those with most money determining what is an *"efficient"* allocation of resources for if financial profit is the sole consideration for resource allocation, then the wealthy can outbid the poor and ensure the highest returns. The less wealthy can do without.

However, the question remains of how, in an anarchist society, do you know that valuable labour and materials might be better employed elsewhere? How do workers judge which tools are most appropriate? How do they decide among different materials if they all meet the technical specifications? How important are some goods than others? How important is cellophane compared to vacuum-cleaner bags?

It is answers like this that the supporters of the market claim that their system answers. However, as indicated, it does answer them in irrational and dehumanising ways under capitalism but the question is: can anarchism answer them? Yes, although the manner in which this is done varies between anarchist threads. In a mutualist economy, based on independent and co-operative labour, differences in wealth would be vastly reduced, so ensuring that irrational aspects of the market that exist within capitalism would be minimised. The workings of supply and demand would provide a more just result than under the current system.

However, collectivist, syndicalist and communist anarchists reject the market. This rejection often implies, to some, central planning. As the market socialist David Schweickart puts it, *"[i]f profit considerations do not dictate resource usage and production techniques, then central direction must do so. If profit is not the goal of a productive organisation, then physical output (use values) must be."* [**Against Capitalism**, p. 86]

However, Schweickart is wrong. Horizontal links need not be market based and co-operation between individuals and groups need not be hierarchical. What is implied in this comment is that there is just two ways to relate to others -- namely, by bribery or by authority. In other words, either by prostitution (purely by cash) or by hierarchy (the way of the state, the army or capitalist workplace). But people relate to each other in other ways, such as friendship, love, solidarity, mutual aid and so on. Thus you can help or associate with others without having to be ordered to do so or by being paid cash to do so -- we do so all the time. You can work together because by so doing you benefit yourself and the other person. This is the **real** communist way, that of mutual aid and free agreement.

So Schweickart is ignoring the vast majority of relations in any society. For example, love/attraction is a horizontal link between two autonomous individuals and profit considerations do not enter into the relationship. Thus anarchists argue that Schweickart's argument is flawed as it fails to recognise that resource usage and production techniques can be organised in terms of human need and free agreement between economic actors, without profits or central command. This system does not mean that we all have to love each other (an impossible wish). Rather, it means that we recognise that by voluntarily co-operating as equals we ensure that we remain free individuals and that we can gain the advantages of sharing resources and work (for example, a reduced working day and week, self-managed work in safe and hygienic working conditions and a free selection of the product of a whole society). In other words, a self-interest which exceeds the narrow and impoverished "egotism" of capitalist society. In the words of John O'Neil:

*"[F]or it is the institutions themselves that define what counts as one's interests. In particular, the market encourages egoism, not primarily because it encourages an individual to be 'self-interested' -- it would be unrealistic not to expect individuals to act for the greater part in a 'self-interested' manner -- but rather because it defines an individual's interests in a particularly narrow fashion, most notably in terms of possession of certain material goods. In consequence, where market mechanism enter a particular sphere of life, the pursuit of goods outside this narrow range of market goods is institutionally defined as an act of altruism."* [**The Market**, p. 158]

Thus free agreement and horizontal links are not limited to market transactions -- they develop for numerous reasons and anarchists recognise this. As George Barret argues:

*"Let us imagine now that the great revolt of the workers has taken place, that their direct action has made them masters of the situation. It is not easy to see that some man in a street that grew hungry would soon draw a list of the loaves that were needed, and take it to the bakery where the strikers were in possession? Is there any difficulty in supposing that the necessary amount would then be baked according to this list? By this time the bakers would know what carts and delivery vans were needed to send the bread out to the people, and if they let the carters and vanmen know of this, would these not do their utmost to supply the vehicles. . . If . . . [the bakers needed] more benches [to make bread] . . . the carpenters would supply them [and so on] . . . So the endless continuity goes on -- a well-balanced interdependence of parts guaranteed, because **need** is the motive force behind it all. . . In the same way that each free individual has associated with his brothers [and sisters] to produce bread, machinery, and all that is necessary for life, driven by no other force than his desire for the full enjoyment of life, so each institution is free and self-contained, and co-operates and enters into agreements with other because by so doing it extends its own possibilities. There is no centralised State exploiting or dictating, but the complete structure is supported because each part is dependent on the whole . . . It will be a society responsive to the wants of the people; it will supply their everyday needs as quickly as it will respond to their highest aspirations. Its changing forms will be the passing expressions of humanity."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, pp. 17-

To make productive decisions we need to know what others need and information in order to evaluate the alternative options available to us to satisfy that need. Therefore, it is a question of distributing information between producers and consumers, information which the market often hides (or actively blocks) or distorts due to inequalities in resources (i.e. need does not count in the market, "*effective demand*" does and this skews the market in favour of the wealthy). This information network has partly been discussed in the [last section](#) where a method of comparison between different materials, techniques and resources based upon use value was discussed. However, the need to indicate the current fluctuations in production and consumption needs to be indicated which complements that method.

In a non-Mutualist anarchist system it is assumed that confederations of syndicates will wish to adjust their capacity if they are aware of the need to do so. Hence, price changes in response to changes in demand would not be necessary to provide the information that such changes are required. This is because a "*change in demand first becomes apparent as a change in the quantity being sold at existing prices [or being consumed in a moneyless system] and is therefore reflected in changes in stocks or orders. Such changes are perfectly good indicators or signals that an imbalance between demand and current output has developed. If a change in demand for its products proved to be permanent, a production unit would find its stocks being run down and its order book lengthening, or its stocks increasing and orders falling . . . Price changes in response to changes in demand are therefore not necessary for the purpose of providing information about the need to adjust capacity.*" [Pat Devine, **Democracy and Economic Planning**, p. 242]

To indicate the relative changes in scarcity of a given good it will be necessary to calculate a "*scarcity index.*" This would inform potential users of this good whether its demand is outstripping its supply so that they may effectively adjust their decisions in light of the decisions of others. This index could be, for example, a percentage figure which indicates the relation of orders placed for a commodity to the amount actually produced. For example, a good which has a demand higher than its supply would have an index value of 101% or higher. This value would inform potential users to start looking for substitutes for it or to economise on its use. Such a scarcity figure would exist for each collective as well as (possibly) a generalised figure for the industry as a whole on a regional, "national," etc. level.

In this way, a specific good could be seen to be in high demand and so only those producers who **really** required it would place orders for it (so ensuring effective use of resources). Needless to say, stock levels and other basic book-keeping techniques would be utilised in order to ensure a suitable buffer level of a specific good existed. This may result in some excess supply of goods being produced and used as stock to buffer out unexpected changes in the aggregate demand for a good.

Such a buffer system would work on an individual workplace level and at a communal level. Syndicates would obviously have their inventories, stores of raw materials and finished goods "*on the shelf,*" which can be used to meet excesses in demand. Communal stores, hospitals and so on would have their stores of supplies in case of unexpected disruptions in supply. This is a common practice even in capitalism,

although it would (perhaps) be extended in a free society to ensure changes in supply and demand do not have disruptive effects.

Communes and confederations of communes may also create buffer stocks of goods to handle unforeseen changes in demand and supply. This sort of inventory has been used by capitalist countries like the USA to prevent changes in market conditions for agricultural products and other strategic raw materials producing wild spot-price movements and inflation. Post-Keynesian economist Paul Davidson argued that the stability of commodity prices this produced "*was an essential aspect of the unprecedented prosperous economic growth of the world's economy*" between 1945 and 1972. US President Nixon dismantled these buffer zone programmes, resulting in "*violent commodity price fluctuations*" which had serious economic effects. [**Controversies in Post-Keynesian Economics**, p. 114 and p. 115]

Again, an anarchist society is likely to utilise this sort of buffer system to iron out short-term changes in supply and demand. By reducing short-term fluctuations of the supply of commodities, bad investment decisions would be reduced as syndicates would not be misled, as is the case under capitalism, by market prices being too high or too low at the time when the decisions were being made. Indeed, if market prices are not at their equilibrium level then they do not (and cannot) provide adequate knowledge for rational calculation. The misinformation conveyed by dis-equilibrium prices can cause very substantial macroeconomic distortions as profit-maximising capitalists response to unsustainable prices for, say, tin, and over-invest in a given branch of industry. Such mal-invest could spread through the economy, causing chaos and recession.

This, combined with cost-benefit analysis described in [section I.4.4](#), would allow information about changes within the "*economy*" to rapidly spread throughout the whole system and influence all decision makers without the great majority knowing anything about the original causes of these changes (which rest in the decisions of those directly affected). The relevant information is communicated to all involved, without having to be ordered by an "*all-knowing*" central body as in a Leninist centrally planned economy. As argued in [section I.1.2](#), anarchists have long realised that no centralised body could possibly be able to possess all the information dispersed throughout the economy and if such a body attempted to do so, the resulting bureaucracy would effectively reduce the amount of information available to society and so cause shortages and inefficiencies.

To get an idea how this system could work, let us take the example of a change in the copper industry. Let us assume that a source of copper unexpectedly dries up or, what amounts to the same thing, that the demand for copper increases. What would happen?

First, the initial difference would be a diminishing of stocks of copper which each syndicate maintains to take into account unexpected changes in requests for copper. This would help "*buffer out*" expected, and short lived, changes in supply or requests. Second, naturally, there is an increase in demand for copper for those syndicates which are producing it. This immediately increases the "*scarcity index*" of those firms, and so the "*scarcity index*" for the copper they produce and for the industry as a whole. For



example, the index may rise from 95% (indicating a slight over-production in respect to current demand) to 115% (indicating that the demand for copper has risen in respect to the current level of production).

This change in the "*scarcity index*" (combined with difficulties in finding copper producing syndicates which can supply their orders) enters into the decision making algorithms of other syndicates. This, in turn, results in changes in their plans (for example, substitutes for copper may be used as they have become a more efficient resource to use).

This would aid a syndicate when it determined which method of production to use when creating a consumer good. The cost-benefit analysis out-lined in the [last section](#) would allow a syndicate to determine the costs involved between competing productive techniques (i.e. to ascertain which used up least resources and therefore left the most over for other uses). Producers would already have an idea of the absolute costs involved in any good they are planning to use, so relative changes between them would be a deciding factor.

In this way, requests for copper products fall and soon only reflects those requests that need copper and do not have realistic substitutes available for it. This would result in the demand falling with respect to the current supply (as indicated by requests from other syndicates and to maintain buffer stock levels). Thus a general message has been sent across the "*economy*" that copper has become (relatively) scarce and syndicates plans have changed in light of this information. No central planner made these decisions nor was money required to facilitate them. We have a decentralised, non-market system based on the free exchange of products between self-governing associations.

Looking at the wider picture, the question of how to response to this change in supply/requests for copper presents itself. The copper syndicate federation and cross-industry syndicate federations have regular meetings and the question of the changes in the copper situation present themselves. The copper syndicates, and their federation, must consider how to response to these changes. Part of this is to determine whether this change is likely to be short term or long term. A short term change (say caused by a mine accident, for example) would not need new investments to be planned. However, long term changes (say the new requests are due to a new product being created by another syndicate or an existing mine becoming exhausted) may need co-ordinated investment (we can expect syndicates to make their own plans in light of changes, for example, by investing in new machinery to produce copper more efficiently or to increase efficiency). If the expected changes of these plans approximately equal the predicted long term changes, then the federation need not act. However, if they do then investment in new copper mines or large scale new investment across the industry may be required. The federation would propose such plans.

Needless to say, the future can be guessed, it cannot be accurately predicted. Thus there may be over-investment in certain industries as expected changes do not materialise. However, unlike capitalism, this would not result in an economic crisis as production would continue (with over investment within capitalism, workplaces close due to lack of profits, regardless of social need). All that would happen is that the syndicates would rationalise production, close down relatively inefficient plant and concentrate

production in the more efficient ones. The sweeping economic crises of capitalism would be a thing of the past.

Therefore, each syndicate receives its own orders and supplies and sends its own produce out. Similarly, communal distribution centres would order required goods from syndicates it determines. In this way consumers can change to syndicates which respond to their needs and so production units are aware of what it is socially useful for them to produce as well as the social cost of the resources they need to produce it. In this way a network of horizontal relations spread across society, with co-ordination achieved by equality of association and not the hierarchy of the corporate structure. This system ensures a co-operative response to changes in supply and demand and so reduces the communication problems associated with the market which help causes periods of unemployment and economic downturn (see [section C.7.2](#)).

While anarchists are aware of the "*isolation paradox*" (see [section B.6](#)) this does not mean that they think the commune should make decisions **for** people on what they were to consume. This would be a prison. No, all anarchists agree that is up to the individual to determine their own needs and for the collectives they join to determine social requirements like parks, infrastructure improvements and so on. However, social anarchists think that it would be beneficial to discuss the framework around which these decisions would be made. This would mean, for example, that communes would agree to produce eco-friendly products, reduce waste and generally make decisions enriched by social interaction. Individuals would still decide which sort goods they desire, based on what the collectives produce but these goods would be based on a socially agreed agenda. In this way waste, pollution and other "*externalities*" of atomised consumption could be reduced. For example, while it is rational for individuals to drive a car to work, collectively this results in massive **irrationality** (for example, traffic jams, pollution, illness, unpleasant social infrastructures). A sane society would discuss the problems associated with car use and would agree to produce a fully integrated public transport network which would reduce pollution, stress, illness, and so on.

Therefore, while anarchists recognise individual tastes and desires, they are also aware of the social impact of them and so try to create a social environment where individuals can enrich their personal decisions with the input of other people's ideas.

On a related subject, it is obvious that different collectives would produce slightly different goods, so ensuring that people have a choice. It is doubtful that the current waste implied in multiple products from different companies (sometimes the same company) all doing the same job would be continued in an anarchist society. However, production will be "*variations on a theme*" in order to ensure consumer choice and to allow the producers to know what features consumers prefer. It would be impossible to sit down beforehand and make a list of what features a good should have -- that assumes perfect knowledge and that technology is fairly constant. Both these assumptions are of limited use in real life. Therefore, co-operatives would produce goods with different features and production would change to meet the demand these differences suggest (for example, factory A produces a new CD player, and consumption patterns indicate that this is popular and so the rest of the factories convert). This is in addition to R&D

experiments and test populations. In this way consumer choice would be maintained, and enhanced as consumers would be able to influence the decisions of the syndicates as producers (in some cases) and through syndicate/commune dialogue.

Therefore, anarchists do not ignore *"supply and demand."* Instead, they recognise the limitations of the capitalist version of this truism and point out that capitalism is based on **effective** demand which has no necessary basis with efficient use of resources. Instead of the market, social anarchists advocate a system based on horizontal links between producers which effectively communicates information across society about the relative changes in supply and demand which reflect actual needs of society and not bank balances. The response to changes in supply and demand will be discussed in section I.4.8 ([What about investment decisions?](#)) and section I.4.13 ([Who will do the dirty or unpleasant work?](#)) will discuss the allocation of work tasks.

## I.4.6 Surely anarchist-communism would just lead to demand exceeding supply?

Its a common objection that communism would lead to people wasting resources by taking more than they need. Kropotkin stated that *"free communism . . . places the product reaped or manufactured at the disposal of all, leaving to each the liberty to consume them as he pleases in his own home."* [**The Place of Anarchism in the Evolution of Socialist Thought**, p. 7]

But, some argue, what if an individual says they *"need"* a luxury house or a personal yacht? Simply put, workers may not *"need"* to produce for that need. As Tom Brown puts it, *"such things are the product of social labour. . . Under syndicalism. . . it is improbable that any greedy, selfish person would be able to kid a shipyard full of workers to build him a ship all for his own hoggish self. There would be steam luxury yachts, but they would be enjoyed in common"* [**Syndicalism**, p. 51]

Therefore, communist-anarchists are not blind to the fact that free access to products is based upon the actual work of real individuals -- *"society"* provides nothing, individuals working together do. This is reflected in the classic statement of communism -- *"From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs."* Therefore, the needs of both consumer **and** producer are taken into account. This means that if no syndicate or individual desires to produce a specific order an order then this order can be classed as an *"unreasonable"* demand - *"unreasonable"* in this context meaning that no one freely agrees to produce it. Of course, individuals may agree to barter services in order to get what they want produced if they **really** want something but such acts in no way undermines a communist society.

Communist-anarchists recognise that production, like consumption, must be based on freedom. However, it has been argued that free access would lead to waste as people take more than they would under capitalism. This objection is not as serious as it first appears. There are plenty of examples within current society to indicate that free access will not lead to abuses. Let us take three examples, public libraries, water and pavements. In public libraries people are free to sit and read books all day. However,

few if any actually do so. Neither do people always take the maximum number of books out at a time. No, they use the library as they need to and feel no need to maximise their use of the institution. Some people never use the library, although it is free. In the case of water supplies, its clear that people do not leave taps on all day because water is often supplied freely or for a fixed charge. Similarly with pavements, people do not walk everywhere because to do so is free. In such cases individuals use the resource as and when they need to.

We can expect a similar results as other resources become freely available. In effect, this argument makes as much sense as arguing that individuals will travel to stops **beyond** their destination if public transport is based on a fixed charge! And only an idiot would travel further than required in order to get "*value for money.*" However, for many the world seems to be made up of such idiots. Perhaps it would be advisable for such critics to hand out political leaflets in the street. Even though the leaflets are free, crowds rarely form around the person handing them out demanding as many copies of the leaflet as possible. Rather, those interested in what the leaflets have to say take them, the rest ignore them. If free access automatically resulted in people taking more than they need then critics of free communism would be puzzled by the lack of demand for what they were handing out!

Part of the problem is that capitalist economics have invented a fictional type of person, **Homo Economicus**, whose wants are limitless: an individual who always wants more and more of everything and so whose needs could only satisfied if resources were limitless too. Needless to say, such an individual has never existed. In reality, wants are not limitless -- people have diverse tastes and rarely want everything available nor want more of a good than that which satisfies their need.

Communist Anarchists also argue that we cannot judge people's buying habits under capitalism with their actions in a free society. After all, advertising does not exist to meet people's needs but rather to create needs by making people insecure about themselves. Simply put, advertising does not amplify existing needs or sell the goods and services that people already wanted. Advertising would not need to stoop to the level of manipulative ads that create false personalities for products and provide solutions for problems that the advertisers themselves create if this was the case.

Crude it may be, but advertising is based on the creation of insecurities, preying on fears and obscuring rational thought. In an alienated society in which people are subject to hierarchical controls, feelings of insecurity and lack of control and influence would be natural. It is these fears that advertising multiples -- if you cannot have real freedom, then at least you can buy something new. Advertising is the key means of making people unhappy with what they have (and who they are). It is naive to claim that advertising has no effect on the psyche of the receiver or that the market merely responds to the populace and makes no attempt to shape their thoughts. Advertising creates insecurities about such matter-of-course things and so generates irrational urges to buy which would not exist in a libertarian communist society.

However, there is a deeper point to be made here about consumerism. Capitalism is based on hierarchy and not liberty. This leads to a weakening of individuality and a lose of self-identity and sense of

community. Both these senses are a deep human need and consumerism is often a means by which people overcome their alienation from their selves and others (religion, ideology and drugs are other means of escape). Therefore the consumption within capitalism reflects **its** values, not some abstract "*human nature*." As Bob Black argues:

*"what we want, what we are capable of wanting is relative to the forms of social organisation. People 'want' fast food because they have to hurry back to work, because processed supermarket food doesn't taste much better anyway, because the nuclear family (for the dwindling minority who have even that to go home to) is too small and too stressed to sustain much festivity in cooking and eating -- and so forth. It is only people who ccan't get what they want who resign themselves to want more of what they can get. Since we cannot be friends and lovers, we wail for more candy."* [Smokestack Lightning]

Therefore, most anarchists think that consumerism is a product of a hierarchical society within which people are alienated from themselves and the means by which they can make themselves **really** happy (i. e. meaningful relationships, liberty, work, and experiences). Consumerism is a means of filling the spiritual hole capitalism creates within us by denying our freedom.

This means that capitalism produces individuals who define themselves by what they have, not who they are. This leads to consumption for the sake of consumption, as people try to make themselves happy by consuming more commodities. But, as Erich Fromm points out, this cannot work for and only leads to even more insecurity (and so even more consumption):

*"If I am what I have and if what I have is lost, who then am I? Nobody but a defeated, deflated, pathetic testimony to a wrong way of living. Because I **can** lose what I have, I am necessarily constantly worried that I **shall** lose what I have."* [To Have Or To Be, p. 111]

Such insecurity easily makes consumerism seem a "*natural*" way of life and so make communism seem impossible. However, rampant consumerism is far more a product of lack of meaningful freedom within an alienated society than a "*natural law*" of human existence. In a society that encouraged and protected individuality by non-hierarchical social relationships and organisations, individuals would have a strong sense of self and so be less inclined to mindlessly consume. As Fromm puts it: "*If I am what I am and not what I have, nobody can deprive me of or threaten my security and my sense of identity. My centre is within myself.*" [Op. Cit., p. 112] Such self-centred individuals do not have to consume endlessly to build a sense of security or happiness within themselves (a sense which can never actually be created by those means).

In other words, the well-developed individuality that an anarchist society would develop would have less need to consume than the average person in a capitalist one. This is not to suggest that life will be bare and without luxuries in an anarchist society, far from it. A society based on the free expression of individuality could be nothing but rich in wealth and diverse in goods and experiences. What we are arguing here is that an anarchist-communist society would not have to fear rampant consumerism

making demand outstrip supply constantly and always precisely because freedom will result in a non-alienated society of well developed individuals.

Of course, this may sound totally utopian. Possibly it is. However, as Oscar Wilde said, a map of the world without Utopia on it is not worth having. One thing is sure, if the developments we have outlined above fail to appear and attempts at communism fail due to waste and demand exceeding supply then a free society would make the necessary decisions and introduce some means of limiting supply (such as, for example, labour notes, equal wages, and so on). Whether or not full communism **can** be introduced instantly is a moot point amongst anarchists, although most would like to see society develop towards a communist goal eventually.

## I.4.7 What will stop producers ignoring consumers?

It is often claimed that with a market producers would ignore the needs of consumers. Without the threat (and fear) of unemployment and destitution and the promise of higher profits, producers would turn out shoddy goods. The holders of this argument point to the example of the Soviet Union which was notorious for terrible goods and a lack of consumer goods.

Capitalism, in comparison to the old Soviet block, does, to some degree make the producers accountable to the consumers. If the producer ignores the desires of the producer then they will loose business to those who do not and be forced, perhaps, out of business (large companies, of course, due to their resources can hold out far longer than smaller ones). Thus we have the carrot (profits) and the stick (fear of poverty) -- although, of course, the carrot can be used as a stick against the consumer (no profit, no sale, no matter how much the consumer may need it). Ignoring the obvious objection to this analogy (namely we are human beings, **not** donkeys!) it does have contain an important point. What will ensure that consumer needs are meet in an anarchist society?

In an Individualist-Mutualist anarchist system, as it is based on a market, producers would be subject to market forces and so have to meet consumers needs. Of course, there are three problems with this system. Firstly, those without money have no access to the goods produced and so the ill, the handicapped, the old and the young may go without. Secondly, inequalities may become more pronounced as successful producers drive others out of business. Such inequality would skew consumption as it does in capitalism, so ensuring that a minority get all the good things in life (Individualist anarchists would claim that this is unlikely, as non-labour income would be impossible). Lastly, there is the danger that the system would revert back to capitalism. This is because unsuccessful co-operatives may fail and cast their members into unemployment. This creates a pool of unemployed workers, which (in turn) creates a danger of wage-labour being re-created as successful firms hire the unemployed but do not allow them to join the co-operative. This would effectively end self-management and anarchy. Moreover, the successful could hire "*protection agencies*" (i.e. thugs) to enforce capitalist ideas of property rights.

This problem was recognised by Proudhon, who argued for an agro-industrial federation to protect self-

management from the effects of market forces, as well as the collectivist-anarchists. In both these schemes, self-management would be protected by agreements between co-operative workplaces to share their resources with others in the confederation, so ensuring that new workers would gain access to the means of life on the same terms as those who already use it. In this way wage-labour would be abolished. In addition, the confederation of workplaces would practice mutual aid and provide resources and credit at cost to their members, so protecting firms from failure while they adjust their production to meet consumer needs.

In both these systems producers would be accountable to consumers by the process of buying and selling between co-operatives. As James Guillaume put it, the workers' associations would "*deposit their unconsumed commodities in the facilities provided by the [communal] Bank of Exchange . . . The Bank of Exchange would remit to the producers negotiable **vouchers** representing the value of their products*" (this value "*having been established in advance by a contractual agreement between the regional co-operative federations and the various communes*"). [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 366] If the goods are not in demand then the producer associations would not be able to sell the product of their labour to the Bank of Exchange and so they would adjust their output accordingly. Overtime Guillaume hopes that this system would evolve into free communism as production develops and continually meets demand [**Op. Cit.**, p. 368].

While mutualist and collectivist anarchists can argue that producers would respond to consumer needs otherwise they would not get an income, communist-anarchists (as they seek a moneyless society) cannot argue their system would reward producers in this way. So what mechanism exists to ensure that "*the wants of all*" are, in fact, met? How does anarcho-communism ensure that production becomes "*the mere servant of consumption*" and "*mould itself on the wants of the consumer, not dictate to him conditions*"? [Peter Kropotkin, **Act for Yourselves**, p. 57]

Libertarian communists argue that in a **free** communist society consumers' needs would be met. This is because of the decentralised and federal nature of a communist-anarchist society.

So what is the mechanism which makes producers accountable to consumers in a libertarian communist society? Firstly, communes would practice their power of "*exit*" in the distributive network. If a syndicate was producing sub-standard goods or refusing to change their output in the face of changing consumer needs, then the communal stores would turn to those syndicates which **were** producing the goods desired. The original syndicates would then be producing for their own stocks, a pointless task and one few, if any, would do. After all, people generally desire their work to have meaning, to be useful. To just work, producing something no-one wanted would be such a demoralising task that few, if any, sane people would do it (under capitalism people put up with spirit destroying work as some income is better than none, such an "*incentive*" would not exist in a free society).

As can be seen, "*exit*" would still exist in libertarian communism. However, it could be argued that unresponsive or inefficient syndicates would still exist, exploiting the rest of society by producing rubbish (or goods which are of less than average quality) and consuming the products of other people's

labour, confident that without the fear of poverty and unemployment they can continue to do this indefinitely. Without the market, it is argued, some form of bureaucracy would be required (or develop) which would have the power to punish such syndicates. Thus the state would continue in "*libertarian*" communism, with the "*higher*" bodies using coercion against the lower ones to ensure they meet consumer needs or produced enough.

While, at first glance, this appears to be a possible problem on closer inspection it is flawed. This is because anarchism is based not only on "*exit*" but also "*voice*." Unlike capitalism, libertarian communism is based on association and communication. Each syndicate and commune is in free agreement and confederation with all the others. Thus, if a specific syndicate was producing bad goods or not pulling its weight, then those in contact with them would soon realise this. First, those unhappy with a syndicate's work would appeal to them directly to get their act together. If this did not work, then they would notify their disapproval by refusing to "*contract*" with them in the future (i.e. they would use their power of "*exit*" as well as refusing to provide the syndicate with any goods it requires). They would also let society as a whole know (via the media) as well as contacting consumer groups and co-operatives and the relevant producer and communal confederations which they and the other syndicate are members of, who would, in turn, inform their members of the problems (the relevant confederations could include local and regional communal confederations, the general cross-industry confederation, its own industrial/communal confederation and the confederation of the syndicate not pulling its weight). In today's society, a similar process of "*word of mouth*" warnings and recommendations goes on, along with consumer groups and programmes. Our suggestions here are an extension of this common practice (that this process exists suggests that the price mechanism does not, in fact, provide consumers with all the relevant information they need to make decisions, but this is an aside).

If the syndicate in question, after a certain number of complaints had been lodged against it, still did not change its ways, then it would suffer non-violent direct action. This would involve the boycotting of the syndicate and (perhaps) its local commune with products and investment, so resulting in the syndicate being excluded from the benefits of association. The syndicate would face the fact that no one else wanted to associate with it and suffer a drop in the goods coming its way, including consumption products for its members. In effect, a similar process would occur to that of a firm under capitalism that loses its customers and so its income. However, we doubt that a free society would subject any person to the evils of destitution or starvation (as capitalism does). Rather, it would provide a bare minimum of goods required for survival would still be available.

In the unlikely event this general boycott did not result in a change of heart, then two options are left available. These are either the break-up of the syndicate and the finding of its members new work places or the giving/selling of the syndicate to its current users (i.e. to exclude them from the society they obviously do not want to be part of). The decision of which option to go for would depend on the importance of the workplace in question and the desires of the syndicates' members. If the syndicate refused to disband, then option two would be the most logical choice (unless the syndicate controlled a scarce resource). The second option would, perhaps, be best as this would drive home the benefits of association as the expelled syndicate would have to survive on its own, subject to survival by selling the product of its labour and would soon return to the fold.



Kropotkin argued in these terms over 100 years ago. It is worthwhile to quote him at length:

*"First of all, is it not evident that if a society, founded on the principle of free work, were really menaced by loafers, it could protect itself without the authoritarian organisation we have nowadays, and without having recourse to wagedom [or payment by results]?"*

*"Let us take a group of volunteers, combining for some particular enterprise. Having its success at heart, they all work with a will, save one of the associates, who is frequently absent from his post. . . . some day the comrade who imperils their enterprise will be told: 'Friend, we should like to work with you; but as you are often absent from your post, and you do your work negligently, we must part. Go and find other comrades who will put up with your indifference!'"*

*"This is so natural that it is practised everywhere, even nowadays, in all industries . . . [I]f [a worker] does his work badly, if he hinders his comrades by his laziness or other defects, if he is quarrelsome, there is an end of it; he is compelled to leave the workshop.*

*"Authoritarian pretend that it is the almighty employer and his overseers who maintain regularity and quality of work in factories. In reality . . . it is the factory itself, the workmen [and women] who see to the good quality of the work . . ."*

*"Not only in industrial workshops do things go in this way; it happens everywhere, every day, on a scale that only bookworms have as yet no notion of. When a railway company, federated with other companies, fails to fulfil its engagements, when its trains are late and goods lie neglected at the stations, the other companies threaten to cancel the contract, and that threat usually suffices.*

*"It is generally believed . . . that commerce only keeps to its engagements from fear of lawsuits. Nothing of the sort; nine times in ten the trader who has not kept his word will not appear before a judge. . . the sole fact of having driven a creditor to bring a lawsuit suffices for the vast majority of merchants to refuse for good to have any dealings with a man who has compelled one of them to go to law.*

*"This being so, why should means that are used today among workers in the workshop, traders in the trade, and railway companies in the organisation of transport, not be made use of in a society based on voluntary work?" [The Conquest of Bread, pp. 152-3]*

Thus, to ensure producer accountability of production to consumption, no bureaucratic body is required in libertarian communism (or any other form of anarchism). Rather, communication and direct action by those affected by unresponsive producers would be an effective and efficient means of ensuring the accountability of production to consumption.

## I.4.8 What about investment decisions?

Obviously, a given society needs to take into account changes in consumption and so invest in new means of production. An anarchist society is no different. As G.D.H Cole points out, *"it is essential at all times, and in accordance with considerations which vary from time to time, for a community to preserve a balance between production for ultimate use and production for use in further production. And this balance is a matter which ought to be determined by and on behalf of the whole community."* [**Guild Socialism Restated**, p. 144]

How this balance is determined varies according to the school of anarchist thought considered. All agree, however, that such an important task should be under effective community control.

The mutualists see the solution to the problems of investment as creating a system of mutual banks, which reduce interest rates to zero. This would be achieved *"[b]y the organisation of credit, on the principle of reciprocity or mutualism. . .In such an organisation credit is raised to the dignity of a social function, managed by the community; and, as society never speculates upon its members, it will lend its credit . . . at the actual cost of transaction."* [Charles A. Dana, **Proudhon and his "Bank of the People"**, p. 36] This would allow money to be made available to those who needed it and so break the back of the capitalist business cycle (i.e. credit would be available as required, not when it was profitable for bankers to supply it) as well as capitalist property relations.

So under a mutualist regime, credit for investment would be available from two sources. Firstly, an individual's or co-operative's own saved funds and, secondly, as zero interest loans from mutual banks, credit unions and other forms of credit associations. Loans would be allocated to projects which the mutual banks considered likely to succeed and repay the original loan.

Collectivist and communist anarchists recognise that credit is based on human activity, which is represented as money. As the Guild Socialist G.D.H. Cole pointed out, the *"understanding of this point [on investment] depends on a clear appreciation of the fact that all real additions to capital take the form of directing a part of the productive power of labour and using certain materials not for the manufacture of products and the rendering of services incidental to such manufacture for purposes of purposes of further production."* [**Guild Socialism Restated**, p. 143] So collectivist and communist anarchists agree with their Mutualist cousins when they state that *"[a]ll credit presupposes labour, and, if labour were to cease, credit would be impossible"* and that the *"legitimate source of credit"* was *"the labouring classes"* who *"ought to control it"* and *"whose benefit [it should] be used"* [Charles A. Dana, **Op. Cit.**, p. 35]

Therefore, in collectivism, investment funds would exist for syndicates, communes and their in community ("*People's*") "*banks*." These would be used to store depreciation funds and as well as other funds agreed to by the collectives for investment projects (for example, collectives may agree to allocate a certain percentage of their labour notes to a common account in order to have the necessary funds

available for major investment projects). Similarly, individual syndicates and communes would also create a store of funds for their own investment projects. In this, collectivist anarchism is like mutualism, with communal credit banks being used to facilitate investment by organising credit and savings on a non-exploitative basis (i.e. issuing credit at zero interest).

However, the confederations of syndicates to which these "*People's Banks*" would be linked would have a defined planning function as well -- i.e. taking a role in investment decisions to ensure that production meets demand (see below). This would be one factor in deciding which investment plans should be given funding (this, we stress, is hardly "*central planning*" as capitalist firms also plan future investments to meet expected demand).

In a communist-anarchist society, things would be slightly different as this would not have the labour notes used in mutualism and collectivism. This means that the collectives would agree that a certain part of their output and activity will be directed to investment projects. In effect, each collective is able to draw upon the sums approved of by the Commune in the form of an agreed claim on the labour power of all the collectives (investment "*is essentially an allocation of material and labour, and fundamentally, an allocation of human productive power.*" [Cole, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 144-5]). In this way, mutual aid ensures a suitable pool of resources for the future from which all benefit.

How would this work? Obviously investment decisions have implications for society as a whole. The implementation of these decisions require the use of **existing** capacity and so must be the responsibility of the appropriate level of the confederation in question. Investment decisions taken at levels above the production unit become effective in the form of demand for the current output of the syndicates which have the capacity to produce the goods required. This would require each syndicate to "*prepare a budget, showing its estimate of requirements both of goods or services for immediate use, and of extensions and improvements.*" [Cole, **Op. Cit.**, p. 145] These budgets and investment projects would be discussed at the appropriate level of the confederation (in this, communist-anarchism would be similar to collectivist anarchism).

The confederation of syndicates/communes would be the ideal forum to discuss (communicate) the various investment plans required -- and to allocate scarce resources between competing ends. This would involve, possibly, dividing investment into two groups -- necessary and optional -- and using statistical techniques to consider the impact of an investment decision (for example, the use of input-output tables could be used to see if a given investment decision in, say, the steel industry would require investment in energy production). In this way social needs **and** social costs would be taken into account and ensure that investment decisions are not taken in isolation from one another, so causing bottle-necks and insufficient production due to lack of inputs from other industries.

Necessary investments are those which have been agreed upon by the appropriate confederation. It means that resources and productive capacity are prioritised towards them, as indicated in the agreed investment project. It will not be required to determine precisely **who** will provide the necessary goods for a given investment project, just that it has priority over other requests. When a bank gives a company

credit, it rarely asks exactly where that money will be built. Rather, it gives the company the power to command the labour of other workers by supplying them with credit. Similarly in an anarcho-communist society, except that the other workers have agreed to supply their labour for the project in question by designating it a "*necessary investment*." This means when a request arrives at a syndicate for a "*necessary investment*" a syndicate must try and meet it (i.e. it must place the request into its production schedule before "*optional*" requests, assuming that it has the capacity to meet it). A list of necessary investment projects, including what they require and if they have been ordered, will be available to all syndicates to ensure such a request is a real one.

Optional investment is simply investment projects which have not been agreed to by a confederation. This means that when a syndicate or commune places orders with a syndicate they may not be met or take longer to arrive. The project may go ahead, but it depends on whether the syndicate or commune can find workers willing to do that work. This would be applicable for small scale investment decisions or those which other communes/syndicates do not think of as essential.

This we have two inter-related investment strategies. A communist-anarchist society would prioritise certain forms of investment by the use of "*necessary*" and "*optional*" investment projects. This socialisation of investment will allow a free society to ensure that social needs are met while maintaining a decentralised and dynamic "economy." Major projects to meet social needs will be organised effectively, but with diversity for minor projects. In addition, it will also allow such a society to keep track of what actual percentage of resources are being used for investment, so ensuring that current needs are not sacrificed for future ones and vice-versa.

As for when investment is needed, it is clear that this will be based on the changes in demand for goods in both collectivist and communist anarchism. As Guillaime puts it, "*[b]y means of statistics gathered from all the communes in a region, it will be possible to scientifically balance production and consumption. In line with these statistics, it will also be possible to add more help in industries where production is insufficient and reduce the number of men where there is a surplus of production.*" [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 370] Obviously, investment in branches of production with a high demand would be essential and this would be easily seen from the statistics generated by the collectives and communes. Tom Brown states this obvious point:

*"Goods, as now, will be produced in greater variety, for workers like producing different kinds, and new models, of goods. Now if some goods are unpopular, they will be left on the shelves. . . Of other goods more popular, the shops will be emptied. Surely it is obvious that the assistant will decrease his order of the unpopular line and increase his order of the popular."* [Syndicalism, p. 55]

As a rule of thumb, syndicates that produce investment goods would be inclined to supply other syndicates who are experiencing excess demand before others, all other things being equal. Because of such guidelines and communication between producers, investment would go to those industries that actually required them. In other words, customer choice (as indicated by individuals choosing between

the output of different syndicates) would generate information that is relevant to investment decisions.

As production would be decentralised as far as it is sensible and rationale to do so, each locality/region would be able to understand its own requirements and apply them as it sees fit. This means that large-scale planning would not be conducted (assuming that it could work in practice, of course) simply because it would not be needed.

This, combined with an extensive communications network, would ensure that investment not only did not duplicate unused plant within the economy but that investments take into account the specific problems and opportunities each locality has. Of course, collectives would experiment with new lines and technology as well as existing lines and so invest in new technologies and products. As occurs under capitalism, extensive consumer testing would occur before dedicating major investment decisions to new products.

In addition, investment decisions would also require information which showed the different outcomes of different options. By this we simply mean an analysis of how different investment projects relate to each other in terms of inputs and outputs, compared to the existing techniques. This would be in the form of cost-benefit analysis (as outlined in [section I.4.4](#)) and would show when it would make economic, social and ecological sense to switch industrial techniques to more efficient and/or more empowering and/or more ecologically sound methods. Such an evaluation would indicate levels of inputs and compare them to the likely outputs. For example, if a new production technique reduced the number of hours worked in total (comparing the hours worked to produce the machinery with that reduced in using it) as well as reducing waste products for a similar output, then such a technique would be implemented.

Similarly with communities. A commune will obviously have to decide upon and plan civic investment (e.g. new parks, housing and so forth). They will also have the deciding say in industrial developments in their area as it would be unfair for syndicate to just decide to build a cement factory next to a housing co-operative if they did not want it. There is a case for arguing that the local commune will decide on investment decisions for syndicates in its area (for example, a syndicate may produce X plans which will be discussed in the local commune and 1 plan finalised from the debate). For regional decisions (for example, a new hospital) would be decided at the appropriate level, with information fed from the health syndicate and consumer co-operatives. The actual location for investment decisions will be worked out by those involved. However, local syndicates must be the focal point for developing new products and investment plans in order to encourage innovation.

Therefore, under social anarchism no capital market is required to determine whether investment is required and what form it would take. The work that apologists for capitalism claim currently is done by the stock market can be replaced by co-operation and communication between workplaces in a decentralised, confederated network. The relative needs of different consumers of a product can be evaluated by the producers and an informed decision reached on where it would best be used.

Without a capital market, housing, workplaces and so on will no longer be cramped into the smallest space possible. Instead, housing, schools, hospitals, workplaces and so on will be built within a "green" environment. This means that human constructions will be placed within a natural setting and no longer stand apart from nature. In this way human life can be enriched and the evils of cramping as many humans and things into a small a space as is "*economical*" can be overcome.

In addition, the stock market is hardly the means by which capital is actually raised within capitalism. As Engler points out, "*[s]upporters of the system . . . claim that stock exchanges mobilise funds for business. Do they? When people buy and sell shares, 'no investment goes into company treasuries . . . Shares simply change hands for cash in endless repetition.'* Company treasuries get funds only from new equity issues. These accounted for an average of a mere 0.5 per cent of shares trading in the US during the 1980s." [Apostles of Greed, pp. 157-158] Indeed, Doug Henwood argues that "*the signals emitted by the stock market are either irrelevant or harmful to real economic activity, and that the stock market itself counts little or nothing as a source of finance. Shareholders . . . have no useful role.*" [Wall Street, p. 292]

Moreover, the existence of a stock market has serious (negative) effects on investment. As Henwood notes, there "*are serious communication problems between managers and shareholders.*" This is because "*[e]ven if participants are aware of an upward bias to earnings estimates [of companies], and even if they correct for it, managers would still have an incentive to try to fool the market. If you tell the truth, your accurate estimate will be marked down by a sceptical market. So, it's entirely rational for managers to boost profits in the short term, either through accounting gimmickry or by making only investments with quick paybacks.*" So, managers "*facing a market [the stock market] that is famous for its preference for quick profits today rather than patient long-term growth have little choice but to do its bidding. Otherwise, their stock will be marked down, and the firm ripe for takeover.*" While "*[f]irms and economies can't get richer by starving themselves*" stock market investors "*can get richer when the companies they own go hungry -- at least in the short term. As for the long term, well, that's someone else's problem the week after next.*" [Op. Cit., p. 171]

Ironically, this situation has a parallel with Stalinist central planning. Under that system manager of State workplaces had an incentive to lie about their capacity to the planning bureaucracy. The planner would, in turn, assume higher capacity, so harming honest managers and encouraging them to lie. This, of course, had a seriously bad impact on the economy. Unsurprisingly, the similar effects caused by capital markets on economies subject to them as just as bad, downplaying long term issues and investment.

And it hardly needs to be repeated that capitalism results in production being skewed away from the working class and that the "*efficiency*" of market allocation is highly suspect.

Only by taking investment decisions away from "*experts*" and placing it in the hands of ordinary people will current generations be able to invest according to their, and future generations', self-interest. It is hardly in our interest to have a institution whose aim is to make the wealthy even wealthier and on

whose whims are dependent the lives of millions of people.

## I.4.9 Should technological advance be seen as anti-anarchistic?

Not necessarily. This is because technology can allow us to *"do more with less,"* technological progress can improve standards of living for all people, and technologies can be used to increase personal freedom: medical technology, for instance, can free people from the scourges of pain, illness, and a *"naturally"* short life span; technology can be used to free labour from mundane chores associated with production; advanced communications technology can enhance our ability to freely associate. The list goes on and on. Therefore, most anarchists agree with Kropotkin when he pointed out that the *"development of [the industrial] technique at last gives man [sic!] the opportunity to free himself from slavish toil."* [Ethics, p. 2]

For example, increased productivity under capitalism usually leads to further exploitation and domination, displaced workers, economic crisis, etc. But it does not have to in an anarchist world. By way of example, consider a commune in which all resources are distributed equally amongst the members. Let us say that this commune has 5 people who desire to be bakers (or 5 people are needed to work the communal bakery) and, for the sake of argument, 20 hours of production per person, per week is spent on baking bread for the local commune. Now, what happens if the introduction of automation, **as desired, planned and organised by the workers themselves**, reduces the amount of labour required for bread production to 15 person-hours per week, including the labour cost spent in creating and maintaining the new machinery? Clearly, no one stands to lose -- even if someone's work is *"displaced"*, that person will continue to receive the same resource income as before -- and they might even gain. This last is due to the fact that 5 person-hours have been freed up from the task of bread production, and those person-hours may now be used elsewhere or converted to leisure, either way increasing each person's standard of living.

Obviously, this happy outcome derives not only from the technology used, but also (and critically) from its use in an equitable economic and social system. Certainly, a wide variety of outcomes would be possible under alternative social systems. Yet, we have managed to prove our point: in the end, there is no reason why the use of technology cannot be used to empower people and increase their freedom!

Of course technology can be used for oppressive ends. Human knowledge, like all things, can be used to increase freedom or to decrease it, to promote inequality or reduce it, to aid the worker or to subjugate them, and so on. Technology, as we argued in [section D.10](#), cannot be considered in isolation from the society it is created and used in. In a hierarchical society, technology will be introduced that serves the interests of the powerful and helps marginalise and disempower the majority (*"technology is political,"* to use David Noble's expression), it does not evolve in isolation from human beings and the social relationships and power structures between them. *"Capitalism has created,"* Cornelius Castoriadis correctly argued, *"a capitalist technology, for its own ends, which are by no means neutral. The real essence of capitalist technology is not to develop production for production's sake: it is to subordinate and dominate the producers."* This means that in an anarchist society, technology would have to be

transformed and/or developed which empowered those who used it, so reducing any oppressive aspects of it. In the words of Cornelius Castoriadis, the "*conscious transformation of technology will . . . be a central task of a society of free workers.*" [**Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society**, p. 13]

However, as Kropotkin argued, we are (potentially) in a good position, because "*[f]or the first time in the history of civilisation, mankind has reached a point where the means of satisfying its needs are in excess of the needs themselves. To impose, therefore, as hitherto been done, the curse of misery and degradation upon vast divisions of mankind, in order to secure well-being and further development for the few, is needed no more: well-being can be secured for all, without placing on anyone the burden of oppressive, degrading toil and humanity can at last build its entire social life on the basis of justice.*" [**Ethics**, p. 2] The question is, for most anarchists, how can we humanise and modify this technology and make it socially and individually liberatory, rather than destroying it (where applicable, of course, certain forms of technology will probably be eliminated due to their inherently destructive nature).

For Kropotkin, like most anarchists, the way to humanise technology and industry was for "*the workers [to] lay hands on factories, houses and banks*" and so "*present production would be completely revolutionised by this simple fact.*" This would be the start of a process which would **integrate** industry and agriculture, as it was "*essential that work-shops, foundries and factories develop within the reach of the fields.*" [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 190] Such a process would obviously involve the transformation of both the structure and technology of capitalism rather than its simple and unthinking application.

There is another reason for anarchists seeking to transform rather than eliminate current technology. As Bakunin pointed out, "*to destroy. . . all the instruments of labour [i.e. technology and industry] . . . would be to condemn all humanity -- which is infinity too numerous today to exist. . . on the simple gifts of nature . . . -- to . . . death by starvation.*" His solution to the question of technology was, like Kropotkin's, to place it at the service of those who use it, to create "*the intimate and complete union of capital and labour*" so that it would "*not . . . remain concentrated in the hands of a separate, exploiting class.*" Only this could "*smash the tyranny of capital.*" [**The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 90-1]

Thus, most anarchists seek to transform technology and industry rather than get rid of it totally.

Most anarchists are aware that "*Capital invested in machines that would re-enforce the system of domination [within the capitalist workplace], and this decision to invest, which might in the long run render the chosen technology economical, was not itself an economical decision but a political one, with cultural sanction.*" [David Noble, **Progress Without People**, p. 6] But this does not change the fact that we need to be in possession of the means of production before we can decide what to keep, what to change and what to throw away as inhuman. In other words, it is not enough to get rid of the boss, although this is a necessary first step!



It is for these reasons that anarchists have held a wide range of opinions concerning the relationship between human knowledge and anarchism. Some, such as Peter Kropotkin, were themselves scientists and saw great potential for the use of advanced technology to expand human freedom. Others have held technology at arm's length, concerned about its oppressive uses, and a few have rejected science and technology completely. All of these are, of course, possible anarchist positions. But most anarchists support Kropotkin's viewpoint, but with a healthy dose of practical Luddism when viewing how technology is (ab)used in capitalism (*"The worker will only respect machinery **in the day** when it becomes his friend, shortening his work, rather than as **today**, his enemy, taking away jobs, killing workers."* [Emile Pouget quoted by David Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 15]).

Anarchists of all types recognise the importance of critically evaluating technology, industry and so on. The first step of any revolution will be the seizing of the means of production. The second **immediate** step will be the start of their radical transformation by those who use them and are affected by them (i.e. communities, those who use the products they produce and so on). Few, if any, anarchists seek to maintain the current industrial set-up or apply, unchanged, capitalist technology. We doubt that many of the workers who use that technology and work in industry will leave either unchanged. Rather, they will seek to liberate the technology they use from the influences of capitalism, just as they liberated themselves. In Kropotkin's words *"if most of the workshops we know are foul and unhealthy, it is because the workers are of no account in the organisation of factories"* and *"[s]laves can submit to them, but free men will create new conditions, and their will be pleasant and infinitely more productive."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 121 and p. 123]

This will, of course, involve the shutting down (perhaps instantly or over a period of time) of many branches of industry and the abandonment of such technology which cannot be transformed into something more suitable for use by free individuals. And, of course, many workplaces will be transformed to produce new goods required to meet the needs of the revolutionary people or close due to necessity as a social revolution will disrupt the market for their goods -- such as producers of luxury export goods or suppliers of repressive equipment for state security forces. Altogether, a social revolution implies the transformation of technology and industry, just as it implies the transformation of society.

This process of transforming work can be seen from the Spanish Revolution. Immediately after taking over the means of production, the Spanish workers started to transform it. They eliminated unsafe and unhygienic working conditions and workplaces and created new workplaces based on safe and hygienic working conditions. Working practices were transformed as those who did the work (and so understood it) managed it. Many workplaces were transformed to create products required by the war effort (such as weapons, ammunition, tanks and so on) and to produce consumer goods to meet the needs of the local population as the normal sources of such goods, as Kropotkin predicted, were unavailable due to economic disruption and isolation. Needless to say, these were only the beginnings of the process but they clearly point the way any libertarian social revolution would progress, namely the total transformation of work, industry and technology. Technological change would develop along new lines, ones which will take into account human and ecological needs rather the power and profits of a minority.

Explicit in anarchism is the belief that capitalist and statist methods cannot be used for socialist and libertarian ends. In our struggle for workers' and community self-management is the awareness that workplaces are not merely sites of production -- they are also sites of reproduction, the reproduction of certain social relationships based on specific relations of authority between those who give orders and those who take them. The battle to democratise the workplace, to place the collective initiative of the direct producers at the centre of any productive activity, is clearly a battle to transform the workplace, the nature of work and, by necessity, technology as well.

As Kropotkin argued, a *"revolution is more than a mere change of the prevailing political system. It implies the awakening of human intelligence, the increasing of the inventive spirit tenfold, a hundredfold; it is the dawn of a new science . . . It is a revolution in the minds of men, as deep, and deeper still, than in their institutions . . . the sole fact of having laid hands on middle-class property will imply the necessity of completely re-organising the whole of economic life in the workplaces, the dockyards, the factories."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 192] And some think that industry and technology will remain unchanged by such a process and that workers will continue doing the same sort of work, in the same way, using the same methods!

For Kropotkin *"all production has taken a wrong direction, as it is not carried on with a view to securing well-being for all"* under capitalism. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 101] Well-being for all obviously includes those who do the producing and so covers the structure of industry and the technological processes used. Similarly, well-being also includes a person's environment and surroundings and so technology and industry must be evaluated on an ecological basis. Thus Kropotkin supported the integration of agriculture and industry, with *"the factory and workshop at the gates of your fields and gardens."* These factories would be *"airy and hygienic, and consequently economical, factories in which human life is of more account than machinery and the making of extra profits."* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 197]

Technological progress in an anarchist society, needless to say, will have to take into account these factors as well as others people think are relevant, otherwise the ideal of *"well-being for all"* is rejected.

Capitalism has developed many technologies, some of them harmful or dangerous, but those technologies do not develop by themselves. The technology of cheap solar power, for example, has scarcely moved at all because the capitalists have not chosen to invest in it. Chainsaws do not cut down rain forests, people do; and they do so because they have irresistible economic incentives to do so (whether they be capitalists who stand to make profits or workers who have no other way to survive). Until the economic system is abolished, these incentives will continue to drive technological progress and change.

So, technology always partakes of and expresses the basic values of the social system in which it is embedded. If you have a system (capitalism) that alienates everything, it will naturally produce alienated forms of technology and it will orient those technologies so as to reinforce itself. As we argued in

[section D.10](#), capitalists will select technology which re-enforces their power and profits and skew technological change in that direction rather than in those which empower individuals and make the workplace more egalitarian.

This does not mean that we have to reject all technology and industry because it has been shaped by, or developed within, class society. Certain technologies are, of course, so insanely dangerous that they will no doubt be brought to a prompt halt in any sane society. Similarly, certain forms of technology and industrial process will be impossible to transform as they are inherently designed for oppressive ends. Many other industries which produce absurd, obsolete or superfluous commodities will, of course, cease automatically with the disappearance of their commercial or social rationales. But many technologies, however they may presently be misused, have few if any inherent drawbacks. They could be easily adapted to other uses. When people free themselves from domination, they will have no trouble rejecting those technologies that are harmful while adapting others to beneficial uses.

So if it is true that technology reflects the society which creates it, then technology cannot be inherently bad. A liberated, non-exploitative society will naturally create liberating, non-exploitative technologies, just as the present alienated social system naturally produces alienated forms (or uses) of technology.

Does this argument mean that most anarchists are against the "*abolition of work*"? No, unless you confuse all kinds of productive activity with work. It always takes some "*work*" to create a product (even only if it is food) but that work does not necessarily have to be wage labour or otherwise alienated or subject to domination and hierarchy. A life without dead time does not mean a life where you never have to move a muscle or use your head.

And, of course, different communities and different regions would choose different priorities and different lifestyles. As the CNT's Zaragoza resolution on libertarian communism made clear, "*those communes which reject industrialisation . . . may agree upon a different model of co-existence.*" Using the example of "*naturists and nudists*," it argues that they "*will be entitled to an autonomous administration released from the general commitments*" agreed by the communes and their federations and "*their delegates to congresses of the . . . Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes will be empowered to enter into economic contacts with other agricultural and industrial Communes.*" [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 106]

(See Ken Knabb's **The Poverty of Primitivism** for more details -- we have extracted some of the above arguments from this excellent text).

All this means, of course, that technological progress is not neutral but dependent on who makes the decisions. As David Noble argues, "*[t]echnological determinism, the view that machines make history rather than people, is not correct . . . If social changes now upon us seem necessary, it is because they follow not from any disembodied technological logic, but form a social logic.*" Technology conforms to "*the interests of power*" but as "*technological process is a social process*" then "*it is, like all social processes, marked by conflict and struggle, and the outcome, therefore, is always ultimately*

*indeterminate." Viewing technological development "as a social process rather than as an autonomous, transcendent, and deterministic force can be liberating . . . because it opens up a realm of freedom too long denied. It restores people once again to their proper role as subjects of the story, rather than mere pawns of technology . . . And technological development itself, now seen as a social construct, becomes a new variable rather than a first cause, consisting of a range of possibilities and promising a multiplicity of futures." [Forces of Production, pp. 324-5]*

Change society and the technology introduced and utilised will likewise change. By viewing technological progress as a new variable, dependent on those who make the decisions and the type of society they live in, allows us to see that technological development is not inherently anti-anarchist. A non-oppressive, non-exploitative, ecological society will develop non-oppressive, non-exploitative, ecological technology just as capitalism has developed technology which facilitates exploitation, oppression and environmental destruction. Thus an anarchist questions technology: The best technology? Best for whom? Best for what? Best according to what criteria, what visions, according to whose criteria and whose visions?

For most anarchists, technological advancement is important in a free society in order to maximise the free time available for everyone and replace mindless toil with meaningful work. The means of doing so is the use of **appropriate** technology (and **not** the worship of technology as such). Only by critically evaluating technology and introducing such forms which empower, are understandable and are controllable by individuals and communities as well as minimising ecological distribution (in other words, what is termed appropriate technology) can this be achieved. Only this critical approach to technology can do justice to the power of the human mind and reflect the creative powers which developed the technology in the first place. Unquestioning acceptance of technological progress is just as bad as being unquestioningly anti-technology.

Whether technological advance is a good thing or sustainable depends on the choices we make, and on the social, political, and economic systems we use. We live in a universe that contains effectively infinite resources of matter and energy, yet at the moment we are stuck on a planet whose resources can only be stretched so far. Anarchists (and others) differ as to their assessments of how much development the earth can take, and of the best course for future development, but there's no reason to believe that advanced technological societies per se cannot be sustained into the foreseeable future if they are structured and used properly.

## **I.4.10 What would be the advantage of a wide basis of surplus distribution?**

We noted earlier that competition between syndicates can lead to "*petty-bourgeois co-operativism*," and that to eliminate this problem, the basis of collectivisation needs to be widened so that surpluses are distributed industry-wide or even society-wide. We also pointed out another advantage of a wide surplus distribution: that it allows for the consolidation of enterprises that would otherwise compete, leading to a more efficient allocation of resources and technical improvements. Here we will back up this claim with

illustrations from the Spanish Revolution.

Collectivisation in Catalonia embraced not only major industries like municipal transportation and utilities, but smaller establishments as well: small factories, artisan workshops, service and repair shops, etc. Augustin Souchy describes the process as follows:

*"The artisans and small workshop owners, together with their employees and apprentices, often joined the union of their trade. By consolidating their efforts and pooling their resources on a fraternal basis, the shops were able to undertake very big projects and provide services on a much wider scale . . . The collectivisation of the hairdressing shops provides an excellent example of how the transition of a small-scale manufacturing and service industry from capitalism to socialism was achieved."*

*"Before July 19th, 1936 [the date of the Revolution], there were 1,100 hairdressing parlours in Barcelona, most of them owned by poor wretches living from hand to mouth. The shops were often dirty and ill-maintained. The 5,000 hairdressing assistants were among the most poorly paid workers. . . Both owners and assistants therefore voluntarily decided to socialise all their shops."*

*"How was this done? All the shops simply joined the union. At a general meeting they decided to shut down all the unprofitable shops. The 1,100 shops were reduced to 235 establishments, a saving of 135,000 pesetas per month in rent, lighting, and taxes. The remaining 235 shops were modernised and elegantly outfitted. From the money saved, wages were increased by 40%. Everyone having the right to work and everyone received the same wages. The former owners were not adversely affected by socialisation. They were employed at a steady income. All worked together under equal conditions and equal pay. The distinction between employers and employees was obliterated and they were transformed into a working community of equals -- socialism from the bottom up." ["Collectivisations in Catalonia," in Sam Dolgoff, **The Anarchist Collectives**, pp. 93-94]*

Therefore, co-operation ensures that resources are efficiently allocated and waste is minimised by cutting down needless competition. As consumers have choices in which syndicate to consume from as well as having direct communication between consumer co-operatives and productive units, there is little danger that rationalisation in production will hurt the interests of the consumer.

Another way in which wide distribution of surplus can be advantageous is in investment and research and development. By creating a fund for research and development which is independent of the fortunes of individual syndicates, society as a whole can be improved by access to useful new technologies and processes.

Therefore, in a libertarian-socialist society, people (both within the workplace and in communities) are

likely to decide to allocate significant amounts of resources for basic research from the available social output. This is because the results of this research would be freely available to all enterprises and so would aid everyone in the long term. In addition, because workers directly control their workplace and the local community effectively "owns" it, all affected would have an interest in exploring research which would reduce labour, pollution, raw materials and so on or increase output with little or no social impact.

This means that research and innovation would be in the direct interests of everyone involved. Under capitalism, this is not the case. Most research is conducted in order to get an edge in the market by increasing productivity or expanding production into new (previously unwanted) areas. Any increased productivity often leads to unemployment, deskilling and other negative effects for those involved. Libertarian socialism will not face this problem.

It should also be mentioned here that research would be pursued more and more as people take an increased interest in both their own work and education. As people become liberated from the grind of everyday life, they will explore possibilities as their interests take them and so research will take place on many levels within society - in the workplace, in the community, in education and so on.

In addition, it should be noted that basic research is not something which capitalism does well. The rise of the Pentagon system in the USA indicates that basic research often needs state support in order to be successful. As Kenneth Arrow noted over thirty years ago that market forces are insufficient to promote basic research:

*"Thus basic research, the output of which is only used as an informational input into other inventive activities, is especially unlikely to be rewarded. In fact, it is likely to be of commercial value to the firm undertaking it only if other firms are prevented from using the information. But such restriction reduces the efficiency of inventive activity in general, and will therefore reduce its quantity also."* ["Economic Welfare and the Allocation of Resources for Inventiveness," in National Bureau of Economic Research, **The Rate and Direction of Inventive Activity**, p. 618]

Would modern society have produced so many innovations if it had not been for the Pentagon system, the space race and so on? Take the Internet, for example -- it is unlikely that this would have got off the ground if it had not been for the state. Needless to say, of course, much of this technology has been developed for evil reasons and purposes and would be in need of drastic change (and, in many cases, abolition) before it could be used in a libertarian society. However, the fact remains that it is unlikely that a pure market based system could have generated most of the technology we take for granted. As Noam Chomsky argues:

*"[Alan] Greenspan [head of the US Federal Reserve] gave a talk to newspaper editors in the US. He spoke passionately about the miracles of the market, the wonders brought by consumer choice, and so on. He also gave examples: the Internet, computers, information*

*processing, lasers, satellites, transistors. It's an interesting list: these are textbook examples of creativity and production in the public sector. In the case of the Internet, for 30 years it was designed, developed and funded primarily in the public sector, mostly the Pentagon, then the National Science Foundation -- that's most of the hardware, the software, new ideas, technology, and so on. In just the last couple of years it has been handed over to people like Bill Gates . . . In the case of the Internet, consumer choice was close to zero, and during the crucial development stages that same was true of computers, information processing, and all the rest . . .*

*"In fact, of all the examples that Greenspan gives, the only one that maybe rises above the level of a joke is transistors, and they are an interesting case. Transistors, in fact, were developed in a private laboratory -- Bell Telephone Laboratories of AT&T -- which also made major contributions to solar cells, radio astronomy, information theory, and lots of other important things. But what is the role of markets and consumer choice in that? Well, again, it turns out, zero. AT&T was a government supported monopoly, so there was no consumer choice, and as a monopoly they could charge high prices: in effect a tax on the public which they could use for institutions like Bell Laboratories . . . So again, it's publicly subsidised. As if to demonstrate the point, as soon as the industry was deregulated, Bell Labs went out of existence, because the public wasn't paying for it any more . . . But that's only the beginning of the story. True, Bell invented transistors, but they used wartime technology, which, again, was publicly subsidised and state-initiated. Furthermore, there was nobody to but transistors at that time, because they were very expensive to produce. So, for ten years the government was the major procurer . . . Government procurement provided entrepreneurial initiatives and guided the development of the technology, which could then be disseminated to industry." [Rogue States, pp. 192-3]*

As well as technological developments, a wide basis of surplus generation would help improve the skills and knowledge of the members of a community. As Keynesian economist Michael Stewart points out, *"[t]here are both theoretical and empirical reasons to suppose that market forces under-provide research and development expenditures, as well as both education and training."* [Keynes in the 1990s, p. 77]

If we look at vocational training and education, a wide basis of surplus distribution would aid this no end. Under free market capitalism, vocational training suffers due to the nature of the market. The argument is simple. Under free market capitalism, if companies stood to gain, in terms of higher profits, from training more workers, they would train them. If they did not, that just proves that training was not required. Unfortunately, this piece of reasoning overlooks the fact that profit maximising firms will not incur costs that will be enjoyed by others. This means that firms will be reluctant to spend money on training if they fear that the trained workers will soon be poached by other firms which can offer more money because they had not incurred the cost of providing training. This means that few firms will provide the required training as they could not be sure that the trained workers will not leave for their competitors (and, of course, a trained work force also, due to their skill, have more workplace power and

are less replaceable).

By socialising training via confederations of workplaces, syndicates could increase productivity via increasing the skill levels of their members. Higher skill levels will also tend to increase innovation and enjoyment at "work" when combined with workers' self-management. This is because an educated workforce in control of their own time will be unlikely to tolerate mundane, boring, machine-like work and seek ways to eliminate it, improve the working environment and increase productivity to give them more free time.

The free market can also have a negative impact on innovation. This is because, in order to please shareholders with higher share prices, companies may reduce funds available for real investment and R&D, which would also depress growth and employment in the long term. What shareholders might condemn as "uneconomic" (investment projects and R&D) can, and does, make society as a whole better off. However, these gains are over the long term and, within capitalism, it is short-term gains which count. Higher share prices in the here and now are essential in order to survive and so see the long-run.

In a more socialised economy, wide-scale collectivisation could aid in allocating resources for Research and Development, long term investment, innovation and so on. Via the use of mutual banks or confederations of syndicates and communes, resources could be allocated which take into account the importance of long-term priorities, as well as social costs, which are not taken into account (indeed, are beneficial to ignore) under capitalism. Rather than penalise long term investment and research and development, a socialised economy would ensure that adequate funds are available, something which would benefit everyone in society in some way.

In addition to work conducted by syndicates, education establishments, communes and so on, it would be essential to provide resources for individuals and small groups to pursue "pet projects." Of course, syndicates and confederations will have their own research institutions but the innovatory role of the interested "amateur" cannot be over-rated. As Kropotkin argued:

*"What is needed to promote the spirit of innovation is . . . the awakening of thought, the boldness of conception, which our entire education causes to languish; it is the spreading of a scientific education, which would increase the numbers of inquirers a hundred-fold; it is faith that humanity is going to take a step forward, because it is enthusiasm, the hope of doing good, that has inspired all the great inventors. The Social Revolution alone can give this impulse to thought, this boldness, this knowledge, this conviction of working for all.*

*"Then we shall have vast institutes . . . immense industrial laboratories open to all inquirers, where men will be able to work out their dreams, after having acquitted themselves of their duty towards society; . . . where they will make their experiments; where they will find other comrades, experts in other branches of industry, likewise coming to study some difficult problem, and therefore able to help and enlighten each other -- the encounter of their ideas and experiences causing the longed-for solution to be*



*found.*" [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 117]

In addition, unlike under capitalism, where inventors often "*carefully hide their inventions from each other, as they are hampered by patents and Capitalism -- that bane of present society, that stumbling-block in the path of intellectual and moral progress,*" inventors within a free society will be able to build upon the knowledge of everyone and past generations. Rather than hide knowledge from others, in case they get a competitive advantage, knowledge would be shared, enriching all involved as well as the rest of society [**Ibid.**]. As John O'Neil argues:

*"There is, in a competitive market economy, a disincentive to communicate information. The market encourages secrecy, which is inimical to openness in science. It presupposes a view of property in which the owner has rights to exclude others. In the sphere of science, such rights of exclusion place limits on the communication of information and theories which are incompatible with the growth of knowledge . . . science tends to grow when communication is open. . . [In addition a] necessary condition for the acceptability of a theory or experimental result is that it pass the public, critical scrutiny of competent scientific judges. A private theory or result is one that is shielded from the criteria of scientific acceptability."* [**The Market**, p. 153]

Thus socialisation would aid innovation and scientific development. This is two fold, by providing the necessary resources for such work and by providing the community spirit required to push the boundaries of science forward.

Lastly, there is the issue of those who cannot work and general provision of public goods. With a wide distribution to surplus, communal hospitals, schools, universities and so on can be created. This simple fact is that any society has members who cannot (indeed, should not) work. For example, the young, the old and the sick. In a mutualist society, particularly an Individualist Anarchists mutualist society, there is no real provision for these individuals unless someone (a family member or friend) provides them with the money required for hospital fees and so on. However, with a communal basis for distribution every member of the commune can receive an education, health care and so on as a right -- and so live a fully human life as a right, rather than a privilege. Moreover, the experience of capitalist countries suggests that socialising, say, health care, leads to a service with lower costs than one which is predominately privatised. For example, the administrative costs of the British National Health Service are a fraction of the U.S. or Chilean systems (where a sizeable percentage of income ends up as profit rather than as health care).

This tendency for the use of surplus for communal services (such as hospitals and education) can be seen from the Spanish Revolution. Many collectives funded new hospitals and colleges for their members, providing hundreds of thousands with services they could never have afforded by their own labour. This is a classic example of co-operation helping the co-operators achieve far more than they could by their own isolated activities.

## I.4.11 If libertarian socialism eliminates the profit motive, won't creativity and performance suffer?

Firstly, just to be totally clear, by the profit motive we mean money profit. As anarchists consider co-operation to be in our self-interest -- i.e. we will "*profit*" from it in the widest sense possible -- we are **not** dismissing the fact people usually act to improve their situation. However, money profit is a **very** narrow form of "*self-interest*," indeed so narrow as to be positively harmful to the individual in many ways (in terms of personal development, interpersonal relationships, economic and social well-being, and so on). In other words, do not take our discussion in this section of the FAQ on the "*profit motive*" to imply a denial of self-interest, quite the reverse. Anarchists simply reject the "*narrow concept of life which consist[s] in thinking that **profits** are the only leading motive of human society.*" [Peter Kropotkin, **Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 25]

Secondly, we cannot hope to deal fully with the harmful effects of competition and the profit motive. For more information, we recommend Alfie Kohn's **No Contest: The Case Against Competition and Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise and Other Bribes**. He documents the extensive evidence accumulated that disproves the "*common sense*" of capitalism that competition and profits are the best way to organise a society.

According to Alfie Kohn, a growing body of psychological research suggests that rewards can lower performance levels, especially when the performance involves creativity. [*"Studies Find Reward Often No Motivator," Boston Globe*, Monday 19 January 1987] Kohn notes that "*a related series of studies shows that intrinsic interest in a task -- the sense that something is worth doing for its own sake -- typically declines when someone is rewarded for doing it.*"

Much of the research on creativity and motivation has been performed by Theresa Amabile, associate professor of psychology at Brandeis University. One of her recent experiments involved asking elementary school and college students to make "*silly*" collages. The young children were also asked to invent stories. Teachers who rated the projects found that those students who had contracted for rewards did the least creative work. "*It may be that commissioned work will, in general, be less creative than work that is done out of pure interest,*" Amabile says. In 1985, she asked 72 creative writers at Brandeis and at Boston University to write poetry:

*"Some students then were given a list of extrinsic (external) reasons for writing, such as impressing teachers, making money and getting into graduate school, and were asked to think about their own writing with respect to these reasons. Others were given a list of intrinsic reasons: the enjoyment of playing with words, satisfaction from self-expression, and so forth. A third group was not given any list. All were then asked to do more writing.*

*"The results were clear. Students given the extrinsic reasons not only wrote less creatively than the others, as judged by 12 independent poets, but the quality of their work dropped significantly. Rewards, Amabile says, have this destructive effect primarily with creative*

*tasks, including higher-level problem-solving. 'The more complex the activity, the more it's hurt by extrinsic reward, she said.'*" [Ibid.]

In another study, by James Gabarino of Chicago's Erikson Institute for Advanced Studies in Child Development, it was found that girls in the fifth and sixth grades tutored younger children much less effectively if they were promised free movie tickets for teaching well. *"The study, showed that tutors working for the reward took longer to communicate ideas, got frustrated more easily, and did a poorer job in the end than those who were not rewarded"* [Ibid.]

Such studies cast doubt on the claim that financial reward is the only effective way -- or even the best way -- to motivate people. As Kohn notes, *"[t]hey also challenge the behaviourist assumption that any activity is more likely to occur if it is rewarded."* Amabile concludes that her research *"definitely refutes the notion that creativity can be operantly conditioned."*

These findings re-enforce the findings of other scientific fields. Biology, social psychology, ethnology and anthropology all present evidence that support co-operation as the natural basis for human interaction. For example, ethnological studies indicate that virtually all indigenous cultures operate on the basis of highly co-operative relationships and anthropologists have presented evidence to show that the predominant force driving early human evolution was co-operative social interaction, leading to the capacity of hominids to develop culture. This is even sinking into capitalism, with industrial psychology now promoting *"worker participation"* and team functioning because it is decisively more productive than hierarchical management. More importantly, the evidence shows that co-operative workplaces are more productive than those organised on other principles. All other things equal, producers' co-operatives will be more efficient than capitalist or state enterprises, on average. Co-operatives can often achieve higher productivity even when their equipment and conditions are worse. Furthermore, the better the organisation approximates the co-operative ideal, the better the productivity.

All this is unsurprising to social anarchists (and it should make individualist anarchists reconsider their position). Peter Kropotkin argued that, *"[i]f we . . . ask Nature: 'Who are the fittest: those who are continually at war with each other, or those who support one another?' we at once see that those animals which acquire habits of mutual aid are undoubtedly the fittest. They have more chances to survive, and they attain, in their respective classes, the highest development of intelligence and bodily organisation."* [Mutual Aid, p. 24] From his observation that mutual aid gives evolutionary advantage to those who practice it, he derived his political philosophy -- a philosophy which stressed community and co-operative endeavour.

Modern research has reinforced his argument. For example, as noted, Alfie Kohn is also the author of **No Contest: The Case Against Competition** and he spent seven years reviewing more than 400 research studies dealing with competition and co-operation. Prior to his investigation, he believed that *"competition can be natural and appropriate and healthy."* After reviewing research findings, he radically revised this opinion, concluding that, the *"ideal amount of competition . . . in any environment, the classroom, the workplace, the family, the playing field, is none . . . [Competition] is always*

*destructive.*" [Noetic Sciences Review, Spring 1990]

Here we present a very short summary of his findings. According to Kohn, there are three principle consequences of competition:

Firstly, it has a negative effect on productivity and excellence. This is due to increased anxiety, inefficiency (as compared to co-operative sharing of resources and knowledge), and the undermining of inner motivation. Competition shifts the focus to victory over others, and away from intrinsic motivators such as curiosity, interest, excellence, and social interaction. Studies show that co-operative behaviour, by contrast, consistently predicts good performance--a finding which holds true under a wide range of subject variables. Interestingly, the positive benefits of co-operation become more significant as tasks become more complex, or where greater creativity and problem-solving ability is required (as indicated above).

Secondly, competition lowers self-esteem and hampers the development of sound, self-directed individuals. A strong sense of self is difficult to attain when self-evaluation is dependent on seeing how we measure up to others. On the other hand, those whose identity is formed in relation to how they contribute to group efforts generally possess greater self-confidence and higher self-esteem.

Finally, competition undermines human relationships. Humans are social beings; we best express our humanness in interaction with others. By creating winners and losers, competition is destructive to human unity and prevents close social feeling.

Social Anarchists have long argued these points. In the competitive mode, people work at cross purposes, or purely for (material) personal gain. This leads to an impoverishment of society and hierarchy, with a lack of communal relations that result in an impoverishment of all the individuals involved (mentally, spiritually, ethically and, ultimately, materially). This not only leads to a weakening of individuality and social disruption, but also to economic inefficiency as energy is wasted in class conflict and invested in building bigger and better cages to protect the haves from the have-nots. Instead of creating useful things, human activity is spent in useless toil reproducing an injustice and authoritarian system.

All in all, the results of competition (as documented by a host of scientific disciplines) shows its poverty as well as indicating that co-operation is the means by which the fittest survive.

Moreover, as Kohn discusses in **Punished by Rewards**, the notion that material rewards result in better work is simply not true. Basing itself on simple behaviourist psychology, such arguments fail to meet the test of long-term success (and, indeed, can be counter-productive). Indeed, it means treating human beings as little better than pets or other animals (he argues that it is "*not an accident that the theory behind 'Do this and you'll get that' derives from work with other species, or that behaviour management is frequently described in words better suited to animals.*") In other words, it "*is by its very nature dehumanising.*" [**Punished by Rewards**, p. 24 and p. 25]

Rather than simply being motivated by outside stimuli like mindless robots, people are not passive. We are *"beings who possess natural curiosity about ourselves and our environment, who search for and overcome challenges, who try and master skills and attain competence, and who seek new levels of complexity in what we learn and do . . . in general we act on the environment as much as we are acted on by it, and we do not do so simply in order to receive a reward."* [Op. Cit., p. 25]

Kohn presents extensive evidence to back upon his case that rewards harm activity and individuals. We cannot do justice to it here. We will present a few examples. One study with college students showed that those paid to work on a puzzle *"spent less time on it than those who hadn't been paid"* when they were given a choice of whether to work on it or not. *"It appeared that working for a reward made people less interested in the task."* Another study with children showed that *"extrinsic rewards reduce intrinsic motivation."* Scores of other studies confirmed this. This is because a reward is effectively saying that a given activity is not worth doing for its own sake -- and why would anyone wish to do something they have to be bribed to do? [Op. Cit., p. 70 and p. 71]

In the workplace, a similar process goes on. Kohn presents extensive evidence to show that extrinsic motivation also does not work in the workplace. Indeed, he argues that *"economists have it wrong if they think of work as a 'disutility' -- something unpleasant we must do in order to be able to buy what we need, merely a means to an end."* Kohn stresses that *"to assume that money is what drives people is to adopt an impoverished understanding of human motivation."* Moreover, *"the risk of **any** incentive or pay-for-performance system is that it will make people less interested in their work and therefore less likely to approach it with enthusiasm and a commitment to excellence. Furthermore, **the more closely we tie compensation (or other rewards) to performance, the most damage we do.**"* [Op. Cit., p. 131, p. 134 and p. 140]

Kohn argues that the idea that human's will only work for profit or rewards *"can be fairly described as dehumanising"* if *"the capacity for responsible action, the natural love of learning, and the desire to do good work are already part of who we are."* Also, it is *"a way of trying to control people"* and so to *"anyone who is troubled by a model of human relationships founded principally on the idea of one person controlling another must ponder whether rewards are as innocuous as they are sometimes made out to be."* He uses the example of a workplace, where *"there is no getting around the fact that 'the basic purpose of merit pay is manipulative.' One observer more bluntly characterises incentives as 'demeaning' since the message they really convey is, 'Please big daddy boss and you will receive the rewards that the boss deems appropriate.'"* [Op. Cit., p. 26]

Given that much work is controlled by others and can be a hateful experience under capitalism does not mean that it has to be that way. Clearly, even under wage slavery most workers can and do find work interesting and seek to do it well -- not because of possible rewards or punishment but because we seek meaning in our activities and try and do them well. Given that research shows that reward orientated work structures harm productivity and excellence, social anarchists have more than just hope to base their ideas. Such research confirms Kropotkin's comments:

*"Wage-work is serf-work; it cannot, it must not, produce all it could produce. And it is high time to disbelieve the legend which presents wagedom as the best incentive to productive work. If industry nowadays brings in a hundred times more than it did in the days of our grandfathers, it is due to the sudden awakening of physical and chemical sciences towards the end of the [18th] century; not to the capitalist organisation of wagedom, but **in spite** of that organisation."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 150]

For these reasons, social anarchists are confident that the elimination of the profit motive within the context of self-management will not harm productivity and creativity, but rather **enhance** them (within an authoritarian system in which workers enhance the power and income of bureaucrats, we can expect different results). With the control of their own work and workplaces ensured, all working people can express their abilities to the full. This will see an explosion of creativity and initiative, not a reduction.

## **I.4.12 Won't there be a tendency for capitalist enterprise to reappear in any socialist society?**

This is a common right-libertarian objection. Robert Nozick, for example, imagines the following scenario:

*"[S]mall factories would spring up in a socialist society, unless forbidden. I melt some of my personal possessions and build a machine out of the material. I offer you and others a philosophy lecture once a week in exchange for yet other things, and so on . . . some persons might even want to leave their jobs in socialist industry and work full time in this private sector. . . [This is] how private property even in means of production would occur in a socialist society."*

Hence Nozick claims that *"the socialist society will have to forbid capitalist acts between consenting adults."* [**Anarchy, State and Utopia**, pp. 162-3]

As Jeff Stein points out, however, *"the only reason workers want to be employed by capitalists is because they have no other means for making a living, no access to the means of production other than by selling themselves. For a capitalist sector to exist there must be some form of private ownership of productive resources, and a scarcity of alternatives. The workers must be in a condition of economic desperation for them to be willing to give up an equal voice in the management of their daily affairs and accept a boss."* ["Market Anarchism? Caveat Emptor!", a review of **A Structured Anarchism : An Overview of Libertarian Theory and Practice** by John Griffin, **Libertarian Labour Review** #13, Winter 1992-93, pp. 33-39]

In an anarchist society, there is no need for anyone to *"forbid"* capitalist acts. All people have to do is **refrain** from helping would-be capitalists set up monopolies of productive assets. This is because, as we have noted in [section B.3.2](#), capitalism cannot exist without some form of state to protect such

monopolies. In a libertarian-socialist society, of course, there would be no state to begin with, and so there would be no question of it "*refraining*" from doing anything, including protecting would-be capitalists' monopolies of the means of production. In other words, would-be capitalists would face stiff competition for workers in an anarchist society. This is because self-managed workplaces would be able to offer workers more benefits (such as self-government, better working conditions, etc.) than the would-be capitalist ones. The would-be capitalists would have to offer not only excellent wages and conditions but also, in all likelihood, workers' control and hire-purchase on capital used. The chances of making a profit once the various monopolies associated with capitalism are abolished are slim.

It should be noted that Nozick makes a serious error in his case. He assumes that the "*use rights*" associated with an anarchist (i.e. socialist) society are identical to the "*property rights*" of a capitalist one. This is **not** the case, and so his argument is weakened and loses its force. Simply put, there is no such thing as an absolute or "*natural*" law of property. As John Stuart Mill pointed out, "*powers of exclusive use and control are very various, and differ greatly in different countries and in different states of society.*" ["*Chapters on Socialism,*" **Principles of Political Economy**, p. 432] Therefore, Nozick slips an ideological ringer into his example by erroneously interpreting socialism (or any other society for that matter) as specifying a distribution of private property rights (like those he, and other supporters of capitalism, believes in) along with the wealth. As Mill argued, "*[o]ne of the mistakes oftenest committed, and which are the sources of the greatest practical errors in human affairs, is that of supposing that the same name always stands for the same aggregation of ideas. No word has been subject of more of this kind of misunderstanding than the word property.*" [**Ibid.**] Unfortunately, this error seems particularly common with right-wing libertarians, who assume any use of the word "*property*" means what they mean by the word (this error reaches ridiculous levels when it comes to their co-option of the Individualist Anarchists based on this error!).

In other words, Nozick assumes that in **all** societies property rights must replace use rights in both consumption **and** production (an assumption that is ahistorical in the extreme). As Cheyney C. Ryan comments, "*[d]ifferent conceptions of justice differ not only in how they would apportion society's holdings but in what rights individuals have over their holdings once they have been apportioned.*" ["*Property Rights and Individual Liberty*", in **Reading Nozick**, p. 331]

In effect, what possessions someone holds within a libertarian socialist society will not be his or her property (in the capitalist sense) any more than a company car is the property of the employee under capitalism. This means that as long as an individual remained a member of a commune and abided by the rules they helped create in that commune then they would have full use of the resources of that commune and could use their possessions as they saw fit (even "*melt them down*" to create a new machine, or whatever). Such lack of **absolute** "*ownership*" does not reduce liberty any more than the employee and the company car he or she uses (bar destruction and selling it, the employee can use it as they see fit).

This point highlights another flaw in Nozick's argument. If his argument is true, then it applies equally to capitalist society. For 40 hours plus a week, workers are employed by a boss. In that time they are given resources to use, under instructions of their boss. They are most definitely **not** allowed to melt

down these resources to create a machine or use the resources they have been given access to further their own plans. In other words, "*capitalist society will have to forbid capitalist acts between consenting adults.*" This can apply equally to rented accommodation as well, for example when landlords ban working from home or selling off the furniture that is provided. Thus, ironically, capitalism forbids capitalist acts between consenting adults all the time.

Of course, Nozick's reply to this point would be that the individual's involved have "*consented*" to these rules when they signed their contract. But the same can be said of an anarchist society -- it is freely joined and freely left. To join a communist-anarchist society it would simply be a case of agreeing to "*exchange*" the product of one's labour freely with the other members of that society. Thus you could smelt down personal possessions and create a machine, exchange your time with others and so on. However, if wage labour becomes involved then the individuals involved have ceased being members of "*the socialist society*" by their actions. They have violated their agreements with their fellows and so it is not a case of "*forbidding*" certain acts. Rather it is a case of individuals meeting their self-created obligations. If this is "*authoritarian*" then so is capitalism -- and we must stress that at least anarchist associations are based on self-management and so the individuals involved have an equal say in the obligations they live under.

Notice also that Nozick confuses exchange with capitalism ("*I offer you a lecture once a week in exchange for other things*"). This is a telling mistake by someone who claims to be an expert on capitalism, because the defining feature of capitalism is not exchange (which obviously took place long before capitalism existed) but labour contracts involving capitalist middlemen who appropriate a portion of the value produced by workers -- in other words, wage labour. Nozick's example is merely a direct labour contract between the producer and the consumer. It does not involve any capitalist intermediary taking a percentage of the value created by the producer. Nor does it involve exploitative wage labour, what makes capitalism capitalism. It is only this latter type of transaction that libertarian socialism prevents -- and not by "*forbidding*" it but simply by refusing to maintain the conditions necessary for it to occur, i.e. protection of capitalist property.

In addition, we must note that Nozick also confuses "*private property in the means of production*" with capitalism. Liberation socialism can be easily compatible with "*private property in the means of production*" when that "*private property*" is based on **possession** rather than capitalistic property. This can be seen from Kropotkin's arguments that peasant and artisan workers, those who "*exploit nobody,*" would **not** be expropriated in an anarchist revolution. [Act for Yourselves, pp. 104-5] Nozick, in other words, confuses private property with possession and confuses pre-capitalist forms of production with capitalist ones. Thus possession of the means of production by people outside of the free commune is perfectly acceptable to social anarchists (see also [section I.6.2](#)).

Lastly, we must also note that Nozick also ignores the fact that acquisition **must** come before transfer, meaning that before "*consenting*" capitalist acts occur, individual ones must precede it. As argued above, for this to happen the would-be capitalist must steal communally owned resources by barring others from using them. This obviously would restrict the liberty of those who currently used them and so be



hotly opposed by members of a community. If an individual did desire to use resources to employ wage labour then they would have effectively removed themselves from "*socialist society*" and so that society would bar them from using **its** resources (i.e. they would have to buy access to all the resources they currently took for granted).

Thus an anarchist society would have a flexible approach to Nozick's (flawed) argument. Individuals, in their free time, could "*exchange*" their time and possessions as they saw fit. These, however, are not "*capitalist acts*" regardless of Nozick's claims. However, the moment an individual employs wage labour then, by this act, they have broken their agreements with their fellows and, therefore, no longer part of "*socialist society*." This would involve them no longer having access to the benefits of communal life and to communal possessions. They have, in effect, placed themselves outside of their community and must fair for themselves. After all, if they desire to create "*private property*" (in the capitalist sense) then they have no right of access to communal possessions without paying for that right. For those who become wage slaves, a socialist society would, probably, be less strict. As Bakunin argued:

*"Since the freedom of every individual is inalienable, society shall never allow any individual whatsoever legally to alienate his [or her] freedom or engage upon any contract with another on any footing but the utmost equality and reciprocity. It shall not, however, have the power to disbar a man or woman so devoid of any sense of personal dignity as to contract a relationship of voluntary servitude with another individual, but it will consider them as living off private charity and therefore unfit to enjoy political rights throughout the duration of that servitude."* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, pp. 68-9]

It should also be noted here that Nozick's theory does not provide any support for such appropriation of commonly held resources, meaning that his (right) libertarianism is totally without foundations (see [section B.3.4](#) for details). His argument in favour of such appropriations recognises that certain liberties are very definitely restricted by private property (and it should be kept in mind that the destruction of commonly held resources, such as village commons, were enforced by the state -- see [section F.8.3](#)). As Cheyney C. Ryan points out, Nozick "*invoke[s] personal liberty as the decisive ground for rejecting patterned principles of justice [such as socialism] and restrictions on the ownership of capital. . . [b]ut where the rights of private property admittedly restrict the liberties of the average person, he seems perfectly happy to trade off such liberties against material gain for society as a whole.*" ["Property Rights and Individual Liberty", in **Reading Nozack**, p. 339]

Again, as pointed out in section F.2 ("[What do 'anarcho'-capitalists mean by 'freedom?'](#)") right-libertarians would better be termed "*Propertarians*." Why is liberty accorded a primary importance when arguing against socialism but not when private property restricts liberty? Obviously, Nozick considers the liberties associated with private property as more important than liberty **in general**. Likewise, capitalism must forbid corresponding socialist acts by individuals (for example, squatting unused property or trespassing on private property) and often socialist acts between consenting individuals (for example, the formation of unions against the wishes of the property owner who is, of

course, sovereign over their property and those who use it, or the use of workplace resources to meet the needs of the producer rather than the owner).

So, to conclude, this question involves some strange logic (and many question begging assumptions) and ultimately fails in its attempt to prove libertarian socialism must "ban" "*capitalistic acts between individuals*." In addition, the objection undermines capitalism because it cannot support the creation of private property out of communal property in the first place.

### **I.4.13 Who will do the "*dirty*" or unpleasant work?**

This problem affects every society, including capitalism of course. Under capitalism, this problem is "*solved*" by ensuring that such jobs are done by those at the bottom of the social pile. In other words, it does not really solve the problem at all -- it just ensures that some people are subject to this work the bulk of their working lives. However, most anarchists reject this flawed solution in favour of something better, one that shares the good with the bad and so ensure everyone's life is better.

How this would be done depends on the kind of libertarian community you are a member of. Obviously, few would argue against the idea that individuals will voluntarily work at things they enjoyed doing. However there are some jobs that few, if any, would enjoy (for example, collecting rubbish, processing sewage, dangerous work, etc.). So how would an anarchist society deal with it?

It will be clear what is considered unpleasant work in any society -- few people (if any) will volunteer to do it. As in any advanced society, communities and syndicates who required extra help would inform others of their need by the various form of media that existed. In addition, it would be likely that each community would have a "*division of activity*" syndicate whose work would be to distribute information about these posts and to which members of a community would go to discover what placements existed for the line of "work" they were interested in. So we have a means by which syndicates and communes can ask for new hands and the means by which individuals can discover these placements. Obviously, some work will still require qualifications and that will be taken into account when syndicates and communes "advertise" for help.

For "work" placements in which supply exceeded demand, it would be easy to arrange a work share scheme to ensure that most people get a chance to do that kind of work (see below for a discussion of what could happen if the numbers applying for a certain form of work were too high for this to work). When such placements are marked by an excess of demand by supply, its obvious that the activity in question is not viewed as pleasant or desirable. Until such time as it can be automated away, a free society will have to encourage people to volunteer for "work" placements they do not particularly want to do.

So, it is obvious that not all "jobs" are equal in interest or enjoyment. It is sometimes argued that people would start to join or form syndicates which are involved in more fun activities. By this process excess workers would be found in the more enjoyable "jobs" while the boring and dangerous ones would suffer

from a scarcity of willing workers. Hence, so the argument goes, a socialist society would have to force people to do certain jobs and so that requires a state. Obviously, this argument ignores the fact that under capitalism usually it is the boring, dangerous work which is the least well paid with the worse working conditions. In addition, this argument ignores the fact that under workers self-management boring, dangerous work would be minimised and transformed as much as possible. Only under capitalist hierarchy are people in no position to improve the quality of their work and working environment. As George Barrett argues:

*"Now things are so strangely organised at present that it is just the dirty and disagreeable work that men will do cheaply, and consequently there is no great rush to invent machines to take their place. In a free society, on the other hand, it is clear that the disagreeable work will be one of the first things that machinery will be called upon to eliminate. It is quite fair to argue, therefore, that the disagreeable work will, to a large extent, disappear in a state of anarchism."* [**Objections to Anarchism**]

Moreover, most anarchists would think that the argument that there would be a flood of workers taking up "easy" work placements is abstract and ignores the dynamics of a real society. While many individuals would try to create new productive syndicates in order to express themselves in innovative work outwith the existing research and development going on within existing syndicates, the idea that the majority of individuals would leave their current work at a drop of a hat is crazy. A workplace is a community and part of a community and people would value the links they have with their fellow workers. As such they would be aware of the impacts of their decisions on both themselves and society as a whole. So, while we would expect a turnover of workers between syndicates, the mass transfers claimed in this argument are unlikely. Most workers who did want to try their hand at new work would apply for work places at syndicates that required new people, not create their own ones. Because of this, work transfers would be moderate and easily handled.

However, the possibility of mass desertions does exist and so must be addressed. So how would a libertarian socialist society deal with a majority of its workers deciding to all do interesting work, leaving the boring and/or dangerous work undone? It, of course, depends on the type of anarchism in question and is directly related to the question of who will do the "dirty work" in an anarchist society. So, how will an anarchist society ensure that individual preferences for certain types of work matches the requirements of social demand for labour?

Under mutualism, those who desired a certain form of work done would reach an agreement with a workers or a co-operative and pay them to do the work in question. Individuals would form co-operatives with each co-operative would have to find its place on the market and so this would ensure that work was spread across society as required. Individuals desiring to form a new co-operative would either provide their own start up credit or arrange a interest free loan from a mutual bank. However, this could lead to some people doing unpleasant work all the time and so is hardly a solution. As in capitalism, we may see some people doing terrible work because it is better than no work at all. This is a solution few anarchists would support.

In a collectivist or communist anarchist society, such an outcome would be avoided by sharing such tasks as fairly as possible between a community's members. For example, by allocating a few days a month to all fit members of a community to do work which no one volunteers to do, it would soon be done. In this way, every one shares in the unpleasant as well as pleasant tasks (and, of course, minimises the time any one individual has to spend on it). Or, for tasks which are very popular, individuals would also have to do unpleasant tasks as well. In this way, popular and unpopular tasks would balance each other out.

Another possible solution could be to follow the ideas of Josiah Warren and take into account the undesirability of the work when considering the level of labour notes received or communal hours worked. In other words, in a collectivist society the individuals who do unpleasant work may be "rewarded" (along with social esteem) with a slightly higher pay -- the number of labour notes, for example, for such work would be a multiple of the standard amount, the actual figure being related to how much supply exceeds demand (in a communist society, a similar solution could be possible, with the number of necessary hours required by an individual being reduced by an amount that corresponds to the undesirability of the work involved). The actual levels of "reward" would be determined by agreements between the syndicates.

To be more precise, in a collectivist society, individuals would either use their own savings and/or arrange loans of community labour banks for credit in order to start up a new syndicate. This will obviously restrict the number of new syndicates being formed. In the case of individuals joining existing syndicates, the labour value of the work done would be related to the number of people interested in doing that work. For example, if a given type of work has 50% more people wanting to do it than actually required, then the labour value for one hours work in this industry would correspondingly be less than one hour. If fewer people applied than required, then the labour value would increase, as would holiday time, etc.

In this way, "*supply and demand*" for workers would soon approximate each other. In addition, a collectivist society would be better placed than the current system to ensure work-sharing and other methods to spread unpleasant and pleasant tasks equally around society due to its organs of self-management and the rising social awareness via participation and debate within those organs.

A communist-anarchist society's solution would be similar to the collectivist one. There would still be basic agreements between its members for work done and so for work placements with excess supply of workers the amount of hours necessary to meet the confederations agreed minimum would correspondingly increase. For example, an industry with 100% excess supply of volunteers would see its minimum requirement increase from (say) 20 hours a week to 30 hours. An industry with less applicants than required would see the number of required hours of "*work*" decrease, plus increases in holiday time and so on. As G.D.H. Cole argues in respect of this point:

*"Let us first by the fullest application of machinery and scientific methods eliminate or reduce . . . 'dirty work' that admit to such treatment. This has never been tried. . . under*

*capitalism. . . It is cheaper to exploit and ruin human beings. . . Secondly, let us see what forms of 'dirty work' we can do without . . . [and] if any form of work is not only unpleasant but degrading, we will do without it, whatever the cost. No human being ought to be allowed or compelled to do work that degrades. Thirdly, for what dull or unpleasant work remains, let us offer whatever special conditions are required to attract the necessary workers, not in higher pay, but in shorter hours, holidays extending over six months in the year, conditions attractive enough to men who have other uses for their time or attention to being the requisite number to undertake it voluntarily."* [**Guild Socialism Restated**, p. 76]

By these methods a balance between industrial sectors would be achieved as individuals would balance their desire for interesting work with their desires for free time. Over time, by using the power of appropriate technology, even such time keeping would be minimised or even got eliminated as society developed freely.

And it is important to remember that the means of production required by new syndicates do not fall from the sky. Other members of society will have to work to produce the required goods. Therefore it is likely that the syndicates and communes would agree that only a certain (maximum) percentage of production would be allocated to start-up syndicates (as opposed to increasing the resources of existing confederations). Such a figure would obviously be revised periodically in order to take into account changing circumstances. Members of the community who decide to form syndicates for new productive tasks or syndicates which do the same work but are independent of existing confederations would have to get the agreement of other workers to supply them with the necessary means of production (just as today they have to get the agreement of a bank to receive the necessary credit to start a new business). By budgeting the amounts available, a free society can ensure that individual desires for specific kinds of work can be matched with the requirements of society for useful production.

And we must point out (just to make sure we are not misunderstood) that there will be no group of "*planners*" deciding which applications for resources get accepted. Instead, individuals and associations would apply to different production units for resources, whose workers in turn decide whether to produce the goods requested. If it is within the syndicate's agreed budget then it is likely that they will produce the required materials. In this way, a communist-anarchist society will ensure the maximum amount of economic freedom to start new syndicates and join existing ones plus ensure that social production does not suffer in the process.

Of course, no system is perfect -- we are sure that not everyone will be able to do the work they enjoy the most (this is also the case under capitalism, we may add). In an anarchist society every method of ensuring that individuals pursue the work they are interested in would be investigated. If a possible solution can be found, we are sure that it will. What a free society would make sure of was that neither the capitalist market redeveloped (which ensures that the majority are marginalised into wage slavery) or a state socialist "*labour army*" type allocation process developed (which would ensure that free socialism did not remain free or socialist for long).

In this manner, anarchism will be able to ensure the principle of voluntary labour and free association as well as making sure that unpleasant and unwanted "work" is done. Moreover, most anarchists are sure that in a free society such requirements to encourage people to volunteer for unpleasant work will disappear over time as feelings of mutual aid and solidarity become more and more common place. Indeed, it is likely that people will gain respect for doing jobs that others might find unpleasant and so it might become "glamorous" to do such activity. Showing off to friends can be a powerful stimulus in doing any activity. So anarchists would agree with Albert and Hahnel when they say that:

*"In a society that makes every effort to depreciate the esteem that derives from anything other than conspicuous consumption, it is not surprising that great income differentials are seen as necessary to induce effort. But to assume that only conspicuous consumption can motivate people because under capitalism we have strained to make it so is unwarranted. There is plenty of evidence that people can be moved to great sacrifices for reasons other than a desire for personal wealth...there is good reason to believe that for nonpathological people wealth is generally coveted only as a **means** of attaining other ends such as economic security, comfort, social esteem, respect, status, or power."* [**The Political Economy of Participatory Economics**, p. 52]

We should note here that the education syndicates would obviously take into account the trends in "work" placement requirements when deciding upon the structure of their classes. In this way, education would respond to the needs of society as well as the needs of the individual (as would any productive syndicate).

## I.4.14 What about the person who will not work?

Anarchism is based on voluntary labour. If people do not desire to work then they cannot (must not) be forced to. The question arises of what to do with those (a small minority, to be sure) who refuse to work.

On this question there is some disagreement. Some anarchists, particularly communist-anarchists, argue that the lazy should not be deprived of the means of life. Social pressure, they argue, would force those who take, but do not contribute to the community, to listen to their conscience and start producing for the community that supports them. Other anarchists are less optimistic and agree with Camillo Berneri when he argues that anarchism should be based upon *"no compulsion to work, but no duty towards those who do not want to work."* [*The Problem of Work*", in **Why Work?**, Vernon Richards (ed.), p. 74] This means that an anarchist society will not continue to feed, clothe, house someone who can produce but refuses to. Most anarchists have had enough of the wealthy under capitalism consuming but not producing and do not see why they should support a new group of parasites after the revolution.

Obviously, there is a difference between not wanting to work and being unable to work. The sick, children, the old, pregnant women and so on will be looked after by their friends and family (or by the commune, as desired by those involved). As child rearing would be considered "work" along with other more obviously economic tasks, mothers and fathers will not have to leave their children unattended and

work to make ends meet. Instead, consideration will be given to the needs of both parents and children as well as the creation of community nurseries and child care centres.

We have to stress here that an anarchist society will not deny anyone the means of life. This would violate the voluntary labour which is at the heart of all schools of anarchism. Unlike capitalism, the means of life will not be monopolised by any group -- including the commune. This means that someone who does not wish to join a commune or who does not pull their weight within a commune and are expelled will have access to the means of making a living outside the commune.

We stated that we stress this fact as many supporters of capitalism seem to be unable to understand this point (or prefer to ignore it and so misrepresent the anarchist position). In an anarchist society, no one will be forced to join a commune simply because they do not have access to the means of production and/or land required to work alone. Unlike capitalism, where access to these essentials of life is dependent on buying access to them from the capitalist class (and so, effectively, denied to the vast majority), an anarchist society will ensure that all have access and have a real choice between living in a commune and working independently. This access is based on the fundamental difference between possession and property -- the commune possesses as much land as it needs, as do non-members. The resources used by them are subject to the usual possession rationale -- they possess it only as long as they use it and cannot bar others using it if they do not (i.e., it is not property).

Thus an anarchist commune remains a voluntary association and ensures the end of all forms of wage slavery (see also [section I.1.4](#)). The member of the commune has the choice of working as part of a community, giving according to their abilities and taking according to their needs (or some other means of organising production and consumption such as equal income or receiving labour notes, and so on), or working independently and so free of communal benefits as well as any commitments (bar those associated with using communal resources such as roads and so on).

So, in most, if not all, anarchist communities, individuals have two options, either they can join a commune and work together as equals, or they can work as an individual or independent co-operative and exchange the product of their labour with others. If an individual joins a commune and does not carry their weight, even after their fellow workers ask them to, then that person will possibly be expelled and given enough land, tools or means of production to work alone. Of course, if a person is depressed, run down or otherwise finding it hard to join in communal responsibilities then their friends and fellow workers would do everything in their power to help and be flexible in their approach to the problem.

Some anarchist communities may introduce what Lewis Mumford termed "*basic communism*." This means that everyone would get a basic amount of "*purchasing power*," regardless of productive activity. If some people were happy with this minimum of resources then they need not work. If they want access to the full benefits of the commune, then they could take part in the communal labour process. This could be a means of eliminating all forces, even communal ones, which drive a person to work and so ensure that all labour is fully voluntary (i.e. not even forced by circumstances). What method a community would use would depend on what people in that community thought was best.

It seems likely, however, that in most anarchist communities people will have to work, but how they do so will be voluntary. If people did not work then some would live off the labour of those who do work and would be a reversion to capitalism. However, most social anarchists think that the problem of people trying not to work would be a very minor one in an anarchist society. This is because work is part of human life and an essential way to express oneself. With work being voluntary and self-managed, it will become like current day hobbies and many people work harder at their hobbies than they do at "real" work (this FAQ can be considered as an example of this!). It is the nature of employment under capitalism that makes it "work" instead of pleasure. Work need not be a part of the day that we wish would end. As Kropotkin argued (and has been subsequently supported by empirical evidence), it is **not** work that people hate. Rather it is overwork, in unpleasant circumstances and under the control of others that people hate. Reduce the hours of labour, improve the working conditions and place the work under self-management and work will stop being a hated thing. In his own words:

*"Repugnant tasks will disappear, because it is evident that these unhealthy conditions are harmful to society as a whole. Slaves can submit to them, but free men create new conditions, and their work will be pleasant and infinitely more productive. The exceptions of today will be the rule of tomorrow."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 123]

This, combined with the workday being shortened, will help ensure that only an idiot would desire to work alone. As Malatesta argued, the *"individual who wished to supply his own material needs by working alone would be the slave of his labours."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 15]

So, enlightened self-interest would secure the voluntary labour and egalitarian distribution anarchists favour in the vast majority of the population. The parasitism associated with capitalism would be a thing of the past. Thus the problem of the "lazy" person fails to understand the nature of humanity nor the revolutionising effects of freedom and a free society on the nature and content of work.

## I.4.15 What will the workplace of tomorrow look like?

Given the anarchist desire to liberate the artist in all of us, we can easily imagine that a free society would transform totally the working environment. No longer would workers be indifferent to their workplaces, but they would express themselves in transforming them into pleasant places, integrated into both the life of the local community and into the local environment. After all, *"no movement that raises the demand for workers' councils can be regarded as revolutionary unless it tries to promote sweeping transformations in the environment of the work place."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 146]

A glimpse of the future workplace can be seen from the actual class struggle. In the 40 day sit-down strike at Fisher Body plant #1 in Flint, Michigan in 1936, *"there was a community of two thousand strikers . . . Committees organised recreation, information, classes, a postal service, sanitation . . . There were classes in parliamentary procedure, public speaking, history of the labour movement."*



*Graduate students at the University of Michigan gave courses in journalism and creative writing.*" [Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, p. 391] In the same year, during the Spanish Revolution, collectivised workplaces also created libraries and education facilities as well as funding schools, health care and other social necessities (a practice, we must note, that had started before the revolution when C.N.T. unions had funded schools, social centres, libraries and so on).

Therefore the workplace would be expanded to include education and classes in individual development (and so following Proudhon's comment that we should "*[o]rganise association, and by the same token, every workshop becoming a school, every worker becomes a master, every student an apprentice.*" [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, pp. 62-3]). This would allow work to become part of a wider community, drawing in people from different areas to share their knowledge and learn new insights and ideas. In addition, children would have part of their school studies with workplaces, getting them aware of the practicalities of many different forms of work and so allowing them to make informed decisions in what sort of activity they would be interested in pursuing when they were older.

Obviously, a workplace managed by its workers would also take care to make the working environment as pleasant as possible. No more "*sick building syndrome*" or unhealthy and stressful work areas. Buildings would be designed to maximise space and allow individual expression within them. Outside the workplace, we can imagine it surrounded by gardens and allotments which were tended by workers themselves, giving a pleasant surrounding to the workplace. There would, in effect, be a break down of the city/rural divide -- workplaces would be placed next to fields and integrated into the surroundings:

*"Have the factory and the workshop at the gates of your fields and gardens, and work in them. Not those large establishments, of course, in which huge masses of metals have to be dealt with and which are better placed at certain spots indicated by Nature, but the countless variety of workshops and factories which are required to satisfy the infinite diversity of tastes among civilised men [and women] . . . factories and workshops which men, women and children will not be driven by hunger, but will be attracted by the desire of finding an activity suited to their tastes, and where, aided by the motor and the machine, they will choose the branch of activity which best suits their inclinations."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 197]

This vision of rural and urban integration is just part of the future anarchists see for the workplace. As Kropotkin argued, "*[w]e proclaim **integration**. . . a society of integrated, combined labour. A society where each individual is a producer of both manual and intellectual work; where each able-bodied human being is a worker, and where each worker works both in the field and the industrial workshop; where every aggregation of individuals, large enough to dispose of a certain variety of natural resources -- it may be a nation, or rather a region -- produces and itself consumes most of its own agricultural and manufactured produce.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 26]

The future workplace would be an expression of the desires of those who worked there. It would be based around a pleasant working environment, within gardens and with extensive library, resources for

education classes and other leisure activities. All this, and more, will be possible in a society based upon self-realisation and self-expression and one in which individuality is not crushed by authority and capitalism. To re-quote Kropotkin, *"if most of the workshops we know are foul and unhealthy, it is because the workers are of no account in the organisation of factories"* and *"[s]laves can submit to them, but free men will create new conditions, and their will be pleasant and infinitely more productive."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 121 and p. 123]

*"So in brief,"* argued William Morris, *"our buildings will be beautiful with their own beauty of simplicity as workshops . . . [and] besides the mere workshops, our factory will have other buildings which may carry ornament further than that, for it will need dinning-hall, library, school, places for study of different kinds, and other such structures."* Such a vision is possible and is only held back by capitalism which denounces such visions of freedom as *"uneconomic."* However, as William Morris points out:

*"Impossible I hear an anti-Socialist say. My friend, please to remember that most factories sustain today large and handsome gardens, and not seldom parks . . . **only** the said gardens, etc. are twenty miles away from the factory, **out of the smoke**, and are kept up for **one member of the factory only**, the sleeping partner to wit"* [**A Factory as It Might Be**, p. 9 and pp. 7-8]

Pleasant working conditions based upon the self-management of work can produce a workplace within which economic *"efficiency"* can be achieved without disrupting and destroying individuality and the environment (also see [section I.4.9](#) for a fuller discussion of anarchism and technology).

## I.4.16 Won't a libertarian communist society be inefficient?

It is often argued that anarcho-communism and other forms of non-market libertarian-socialism would promote inefficiency and unproductive work. The basis of this argument is that without market forces to discipline workers and the profit motive to reward them, workers would have no incentive to work in a way which minimises time or resources. The net effect of this would be inefficient use of resources, particularly individual's time.

This is a valid point in some ways; for example, a society can (potentially) benefit from increasing productivity as the less time it takes to produce a certain good, the more time it gains for other activities (although, of course, in a class society the benefits of increased productivity generally accrue to, first and foremost, to those at the top). Indeed, for an individual, a decent society depends on people having time available for them to do what they want, to develop themselves in whatever way they want, to enjoy themselves. In addition, doing more with less can have a positive environment impact as well. And it is for these reasons that an anarchist society would be interested in promoting efficiency and productiveness during production.

While capitalism has turned improvements in productivity as a means of increasing work, enriching the few and generally proletarianising the working class, a free society would take a different approach to

the problem. As argued in [section I.4.3](#), a communist-anarchist society would be based upon this principle:

*"for some much per day (in money today, in labour tomorrow) you are entitled to satisfy -- luxury excepted -- this or the other of your wants."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Small Communal Experiments and why they fail**, p. 8]

Building upon this, we can imagine a situation where the average output for a given industry in a given amount of time is used to encourage efficiency and productivity. If a given syndicate can produce this average output with at least average quality in less time than the agreed average/minimum (and without causing ecological or social externalities, of course) then the members of that syndicate can and should have that time off.

This would be a powerful incentive to innovate, improve productivity, introduce new machinery and processes as well as work efficiently without reintroducing the profit motive and material inequality. With the possibility of having more time available for themselves and their own projects, people involved in productive activities would have a strong interest in being efficient. Of course, if the work in question is something they enjoy then any increases in efficiency would **enhance** what makes their work enjoyable and not eliminate it.

Rewarding efficiency with free time would also be an important means to ensure efficient use of resources as well as a means of reducing time spent in productive activity which was considered as boring or otherwise undesirable. The incentive of getting unpleasant tasks over with as quickly as possible would ensure that the tasks were done efficiently and that innovation was directed towards them.

Moreover, when it came to major investment decisions, a syndicate would be more likely to get others to agree to its plans if the syndicate had a reputation of excellence. This, again, would encourage efficiency as people would know that they could gain resources for their communities and workplaces (i.e. themselves) more easily if their work is efficient and reliable. This would be a key means of encouraging efficient and effective use of resources.

Similarly, an inefficient or wasteful syndicate would have negative reactions from their fellow workers. As we argued in section I.4.7 (["What will stop producers ignoring consumers?"](#)), a libertarian communist economy would be based on free association. If a syndicate or community got a reputation for being inefficient with resources then others would not associate with them (i.e. they would not supply them with materials, or place them at the end of the queue when deciding which production requests to supply, and so on). As with a syndicate which produced shoddy goods, the inefficient syndicate would also face the judgement of its peers. This will produce an environment which will encourage efficient use of resources and time.

All these factors, the possibility of increased free time, the respect and resources gained for an efficient

and excellent work and the possibility of a lack of co-operation with others for inefficient use of resources, would ensure that an anarchist-communist or anarchist-collectivist society would have no need to fear inefficiency. Indeed, by placing the benefits of increased efficiency into the hands of those who do the work, efficiency will no doubt increase.

With self-management, we can soon see human time being used efficiently and productively simply because those doing the work would have a direct and real interest in it. Rather than alienate their liberty, as under capitalism, they would apply their creativity and minds to transforming their productive activity in such a way as to make it enjoyable and not a waste of their time.

Little wonder Kropotkin argued, modern knowledge could be applied to a society in which people, *"with the work of their own hands and intelligence, and by the aid of the machinery already invented and to be invented, should themselves create all imaginable riches. Technics and science will not be lagging behind if production takes such a direction. Guided by observation, analysis and experiment, they will answer all possible demands. They will reduce the time required for producing wealth to any desired amount, so as to leave to everyone as much leisure as he or she may ask for. . . they guarantee . . . the happiness that can be found in the full and varied exercise of the different capacities of the human being, in work that need not be overwork."* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, pp. 198-9]

One last point. A free society will undoubtedly create new criteria for what counts as an efficient use of resources and time. What passes for *"efficient"* use capitalism often means what is efficient in increasing the power and profits of the few, without regard to the wasteful use of individual time, energy and potential as well as environmental and social costs. Such a narrow criteria for decision making or evaluating efficient production will not exist in an anarchist society (see our discussion of the irrational nature of the price mechanism in [section I.1.2](#), for example). While we use the term efficiency we mean the dictionary definition of efficiency (i.e. reducing waste, maximising use of resources) rather than what the capitalist market distorts this into (i.e. what creates most profits for the boss).

## H.2 What parts of anarchism do Marxists particularly misrepresent?

Many people involved in politics will soon discover that Marxist groups (particularly Leninist and Trotskyist ones) organise "debates" about anarchism. These meetings are usually entitled "*Marxism and Anarchism*" and are usually organised after anarchists have been active in the area or have made the headlines somewhere.

These meetings, contrary to common sense, are usually not a debate as (almost always) no anarchists are invited to argue the anarchist viewpoint and, therefore, they present a one-sided account of "*Marxism and Anarchism*" in a manner which benefits the organisers. Usually, the format is a speaker distorting anarchist ideas and history for a long period of time (both absolutely in terms of the length of the meeting and relatively in terms of the boredom inflicted on the unfortunate attendees). It will soon become obvious to those attending that any such meeting is little more than an unprincipled attack on anarchism with little or no relationship to what anarchism is actually about. Those anarchists who attend such meetings usually spend most of their allotted (usually short) speaking time refuting the nonsense that is undoubtedly presented. Rather than a **real** discussion between the differences between anarchism and "Marxism" (i.e. Leninism), the meeting simply becomes one where anarchists correct the distortions and misrepresentations of the speaker in order to create the basis of a real debate. If the reader does not believe this summary we would encourage them to attend such a meeting and see for themselves.

Needless to say, we cannot hope to reproduce the many distortions produced in such meetings. However, when anarchists do hit the headlines (such as in the 1990 poll tax riot in London and the in current anti-globalisation movement), various Marxist papers will produce articles on "Anarchism" as well. Like the meetings, the articles are full of so many elementary errors that it takes a lot of effort to think they are the product of ignorance rather than a conscious desire to lie (the appendix "[Anarchism and Marxism](#)" contains a few replies to such articles and other Marxist diatribes on anarchism). In addition, many of the founding fathers of Marxism (and Leninism) also decided to attack anarchism in similar ways, so this activity does have a long tradition in Marxist circles (particularly in Leninist and Trotskyist ones). Sadly, Max Nettlau's comments on Marx and Engels are applicable to many of their followers today. He argued that they "*acted with that shocking lack of honesty which was characteristic of **all** their polemics. They worked with inadequate documentation, which, according to their custom, they supplemented with arbitrary declarations and conclusions -- accepted as truth by their followers although they were exposed as deplorable misrepresentations, errors and unscrupulous perversions of the truth.*" [A Short History of Anarchism, p. 132] As the reader will discover, this summary has not lost its relevance today. If they read Marxist "critiques" of anarchism they will soon discover the same repetition of "accepted" truths, the same inadequate documentation, the same arbitrary declarations and conclusions as well as an apparent total lack of familiarity with the source material they claim to be analysing.

This section of the FAQ lists and refutes many of the most common distortions Marxists make with regards to anarchism. As will become clear, many of the most common Marxist attacks on anarchism have little or no basis in fact but have simply been repeated so often by Marxists that they have entered the ideology (the idea that anarchists think the capitalist class will just disappear being, probably, the most famous one, closely followed by anarchism being in favour of "*small-scale*" production). We will not bother to refute the more silly Marxist assertions (such as anarchists are against organisation or are not "socialists"). Instead, we will concentrate on the more substantial and most commonly repeated ones. Of course, many of these distortions and misrepresentations coincide and flow into each other, but there are many which can be considered distinct issues and will be discussed in turn.

Moreover, Marxists make many major and minor distortions of anarchist theory in passing. For example, Engels asserted in his infamous diatribe "*The Bakuninists at work*" that Bakunin "[a]s early as September 1870 (in his *Lettres a un francais* [Letters to a Frenchman]) . . . had declared that the only way to drive the Prussians out of France by a revolutionary struggle was to do away with all forms of centralised leadership and leave each town, each village, each parish to wage war on its own." [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 141] In fact, the truth is totally different.

Bakunin does, of course, reject "*centralised leadership*" as it would be "*necessarily very circumscribed, very short-sighted, and its limited perception cannot, therefore, penetrate the depth and encompass the whole complex range of popular life.*" However, it is a falsehood to state that he denies the need for co-ordination of struggles and federal organisations from the bottom up. As he puts it, the revolution must "*foster the self-organisation of the masses into autonomous bodies, federated from the bottom upwards.*" With regards to the peasants, he thinks they will "*come to an understanding, and form some kind of organisation . . . to further their mutual interests . . . the necessity to defend their homes, their families, and their own lives against unforeseen attack . . . will undoubtedly soon compel them to contract new and mutually suitable arrangements.*" The peasants would be "*freely organised from the bottom up.*" ["*Letters to a Frenchman on the present crisis*", **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 196, p. 206 and p. 207] In this he repeated his earlier arguments concerning social revolution -- arguments that Engels was well aware of. In other words, Engels deliberately misrepresented Bakunin's political ideas.

Similarly, we find Trotsky asserting in 1937 that anarchists are "*willing to replace Bakunin's patriarchal 'federation of free communes' by the more modern federation of free soviets.*" [**Stalinism and Bolshevism**] It is hard to know where to start in this incredulous rewriting of history. Firstly, Bakunin's federation of free communes was, in fact, based on workers' councils ("soviets"). As he put it, "*the federative Alliance of all working men's associations . . . will constitute the Commune*" and "*revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations . . . organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation.*" [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 170 and p. 172] The similarities with workers councils are clear. Little wonder historian Paul Avrich summarised as follows:

*"As early as the 1860's and 1870's, the followers of Proudhon and Bakunin in the First International were proposing the formation of workers' councils designed both as a*

*weapon of class struggle against capitalists and as the structural basis of the future libertarian society.*" [**The Russian Anarchists**, p. 73]

As for the charge of supporting "*patriarchal*" communes, nothing could be further from the truth. In his discussion of the Russian peasant commune (the mir) Bakunin argued that "*patriarchalism*" was one of its "*three dark features*," indeed "*the main historical evil . . . against which we are obliged to struggle with all our might.*" [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 206 and pp. 209-10]

As can be seen Trotsky's summary of Bakunin's ideas is totally wrong. Not only did his ideas on the organisation of the free commune as a federation of workers' associations predate the soviets by decades (and so much more "*modern*" than Marxist conceptions), he also argued against patriarchal relationships and urged their destruction in the Russian peasant commune (and elsewhere). Indeed, if any one fits Trotsky's invention it is Marx, not Bakunin. After all, Marx came round (eventually) to Bakunin's position that the peasant commune could be the basis for Russia to jump straight to socialism (and so bypassing capitalism) but without Bakunin's critical analysis of that institution and its patriarchal and other "*dark*" features. Similarly, Marx never argued that the future socialist society would be based on workers' associations and their federation (i.e. workers' councils). His vision of revolution was formulated in typically bourgeois structures such as the Paris Commune's municipal council.

We could go on, but space precludes discussing every example. Suffice to say, it is not wise to take any Marxist assertion of anarchist thought or history at face value. A common technique is to quote anarchist writers out of context or before they become anarchists. For example, Marxist Paul Thomas argues that Bakunin favoured "*blind destructiveness*" and yet quotes more from Bakunin's pre-anarchist works (as well as Russian nihilists) than Bakunin's anarchist works to prove his claim. [**Karl Marx and the Anarchists**, pp. 288-90] Similarly, he claims that Bakunin "*defended the federes of the Paris Commune of 1871 on the grounds that they were strong enough to dispense with theory altogether,*" yet his supporting quote does not, in fact say this. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 285] What Bakunin was, in fact, arguing was simply that theory must progress from experience and that any attempt to impose a theory on society would be doomed to create a "*Procrustean bed*" as no government could "*embrace the infinite multiplicity and diversity of the real aspirations, wishes and needs whose sum total constitutes the collective will of a people.*" He explicitly contrasted the Marxist system of "*want[ing] to impose science upon the people*" with the anarchist desire "*to diffuse science and knowledge among the people, so that the various groups of human society, when convinced by propaganda, may organise and spontaneously combine into federations, in accordance with their natural tendencies and their real interests, but never according to a plan traced in advance and imposed upon the ignorant masses by a few 'superior' minds.*" [**The Political Theory of Bakunin**, p. 300] A clear misreading of Bakunin's argument but one which fits nicely into Marxist preconceptions of Bakunin and anarchism in general.

This tendency to quote out of context or from periods when anarchists were not anarchists probably explains why so many of these Marxist accounts of anarchism are completely lacking in references. Take, for example, the British SWP's Pat Stack who wrote one of the most inaccurate diatribes against anarchism the world has had the misfortune to see (namely "*Anarchy in the UK?*" which was published in issue no. 246 of **Socialist Review**). There is not a single reference in the whole article,

which is just as well, given the inaccuracies contained in it. Without references, the reader would not be able to discover for themselves the distortions and simple errors contained in it. For example, Stack asserts that Bakunin "*claimed a purely 'instinctive socialism.'*" However, the truth is different and this quote from Bakunin is one by him comparing himself and Marx in the 1840s!

In fact, the **anarchist** Bakunin argued that "*instinct as a weapon is not sufficient to safeguard the proletariat against the reactionary machinations of the privileged classes,*" as instinct "*left to itself, and inasmuch as it has not been transformed into consciously reflected, clearly determined thought, lends itself easily to falsification, distortion and deceit.*" [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 215] Bakunin saw the process of class struggle as the means of transforming instinct into conscious thought. As he put it, the "*goal, then, is to make the worker fully aware of what he [or she] wants, to unjam within him [or her] a steam of thought corresponding to his [or her] instinct.*" This is done by "*a single path, that of **emancipation through practical action**,*" by "*workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses,*" of "*collective struggle of the workers against the bosses.*" This would be complemented by socialist organisations "*propagandis[ing] its principles.*" [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 102, p. 103 and p. 109] Clearly, Stack is totally distorting Bakunin's ideas on the subject.

This technique of quoting Bakunin when he spoke about (or when wrote in) his pre-anarchist days in the 1840s, i.e. nearly 20 years **before** he became an anarchist, or from Proudhon's posthumously published work on property (in which Proudhon saw small-scale property as a bulwark against state tyranny) to attack anarchism is commonplace. As such, it is always wise to check the source material and any references (assuming that they are provided). Only by doing this can it be discovered whether a quote reflects the opinions of individuals when they were anarchists or whether they are referring to periods when they were no longer, or had not yet become, anarchists.

Ultimately, though, these kinds of articles by Marxists simply show the ideological nature of their own politics and say far more about Marxism than anarchism. After all, if their politics were so strong they would not need to distort anarchist ideas! In addition, these essays are usually marked by a lot of (usually inaccurate) attacks on the ideas (or personal failings) of individual anarchists (usually Proudhon and Bakunin and sometimes Kropotkin). No modern anarchist theorist is usually mentioned, never mind discussed. Obviously, for most Marxists, anarchists must repeat parrot-like the ideas of these "great men." However, while Marxists may do this, anarchists have always rejected this approach. We deliberately call ourselves **anarchists** rather than Proudhonists, Bakuninists, Kropotkinists, or after any other person. As Malatesta argued in 1876 (the year of Bakunin's death) "*[w]e follow ideas and not men, and rebel against this habit of embodying a principle in a man.*" [**Life and Ideas**, p. 198]

Therefore, anarchists, unlike many (most?) Marxists do not believe that some prophet wrote down the scriptures in past centuries and if only we could reach a correct understanding of these writings today we would see the way forward. Chomsky put it extremely well when he argued that:

*"The whole concept of Marxist or Freudian or anything like that is very odd. These concepts belong to the history of organised religion. Any living person, no matter how*



*gifted, will make some contributions intermingled with error and partial understanding. We try to understand and improve on their contributions and eliminate the errors. But how can you identify yourself as a Marxist, or a Freudian, or an X-ist, whoever X may be? That would be to treat the person as a God to be revered, not a human being whose contributions are to be assimilated and transcended. It's a crazy idea, a kind of idolatry."* [The Chomsky Reader, pp. 29-30]

This means that anarchists recognise that any person, no matter how great or influential, are just human. They make mistakes, they fail to live up to all the ideals they express, they are shaped by the society they live in, and so on. Anarchists recognise this fact and extract the positive aspects of past anarchist thinkers, reject the rest and develop what we consider the living core of their ideas. We develop the ideas and analyses of these pioneers of the anarchist ideal, reject the rubbish and embrace the good, learn from history and constantly try to bring anarchist ideas up-to-date (after all, a lot has changed since the days of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin and this has to be taken into account). As Max Nettlau put it with regards to Proudhon, *"we have to extract from his work useful teachings that would be of great service to our modern libertarians, who nevertheless have to find their own way from theory to practice and to the critique of our present-day conditions, as Proudhon did in his time. This does not call for a slavish imitation; it implies using his work to inspire us and enable us to profit by his experience."* [A Short History of Anarchism, pp. 46-7] Similarly for other anarchists -- we see them as a source of inspiration upon which to build rather than a template which to copy. This means to attack anarchism by, say, attacking Bakunin's or Proudhon's personal failings is to totally miss the point. While anarchists may be inspired by the ideas of, say, Bakunin or Proudhon it does not mean we blindly follow all of their ideas. Far from it! We critically analysis their ideas and keep what is living and reject what is useless or dead. Sadly, such common sense is lacking in many who critique anarchism.

However, the typical Marxist approach does have its benefits from a political perspective. As Albert Meltzer pointed out, *"[i]t is very difficult for Marxist-Leninists to make an objective criticism of Anarchism, as such, because by its nature it undermines all the suppositions basic to Marxism. If Marxism is held out to be indeed **the** basic working class philosophy, and the proletariat cannot owe its emancipation to anyone but itself, it is hard to go back on it and say that the working class is not yet ready to dispense with authority placed over it. Marxism therefore normally tries to refrain from criticising anarchism as such -- unless driven to doing so, when it exposes its own authoritarian . . . and concentrates its attacks not on **anarchism**, but on **anarchists**."* [Anarchism: Arguments for and Against, p. 37] Needless to say, this technique is the one usually applied by Marxists (although, we must stress that often their account of the ideas of Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin are so distorted that they fail even to do this!).

So anarchist theory has developed since Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin. At each period in history anarchism advanced in its understanding of the world, the anarchism of Bakunin was a development of that of Proudhon, these ideas were again developed by the anarcho-communists of the 1880s and by the syndicalists of the 1890's, by the Italian Malatesta, the Russian Kropotkin, the Mexican Flores Magon and many other individuals and movements. Today we stand on their shoulders, not at their feet.

As such, to concentrate on the ideas of a few "*leaders*" misses the point totally. Ideas change and develop and anarchism has changed as well. While it contains many of the core insights of, say, Bakunin, it has also developed them and added to them. It has, concretely, taken into account, say, the lessons of the Russian and Spanish revolutions and so on. As such, even assuming that Marxist accounts of certain aspects of the ideas of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin were correct, they would have to be shown to be relevant to modern anarchism to be of any but historical interest. Sadly, Marxists generally fail to do this and, instead, we are subject to a (usually inaccurate) history lesson.

In order to understand, learn from and transcend previous theorists we must honestly present their ideas. Unfortunately many Marxists do not do this and so this section of the FAQ involves correcting the many mistakes, distortions, errors and lies that Marxists have subjected anarchism to. Hopefully, with this done, a real dialogue can develop between Marxists and anarchists. Indeed, this has happened between libertarian Marxists (such as council communists and Situationists) and anarchists and both tendencies have benefited from it. Perhaps this dialogue between libertarian Marxists and anarchists is to be expected, as the mainstream Marxists have often misrepresented the ideas of libertarian Marxists as well!

## H.2.1 Do anarchists reject defending a revolution?

According to many Marxists anarchists either reject the idea of defending a revolution or think that it is not necessary.

The Trotskyists of **Workers' Power** present a typical Marxist account of what **they** consider as anarchist ideas on this subject:

*"the anarchist conclusion is not to build any sort of state in the first place -- not even a democratic workers' state. But how could we stop the capitalists trying to get their property back, something they will definitely try and do?"*

*"Should the people organise to stop the capitalists raising private armies and resisting the will of the majority? If the answer is yes, then that organisation - whatever you prefer to call it -- is a state: an apparatus designed to enable one class to rule over another."*

*"The anarchists are rejecting something which is necessary if we are to beat the capitalists and have a chance of developing a classless society." ["What's wrong with anarchism?", **World Revolution: PragueS26 2000**, pp. 12-13, p. 13]*

It would be simple to quote Malatesta on this issue and leave it at that. As he argued in 1891, some people "*seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of respect for the **freedom** of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas.*" [**Anarchy**, p. 41] Pretty much common sense, so you would think! Sadly, this appears to not be the case. As Malatesta

pointed out 30 years later, the followers of Bolshevism *"are incapable of conceiving freedom and of respecting for all human beings the dignity they expect, or should expect, from others. If one speaks of freedom they immediately accuse one of wanting to respect, or at least tolerate, the freedom to oppress and exploit one's fellow beings."* [**Life and Ideas**, p. 145] As such, we have to explain anarchist ideas on the defence of a revolution and why this necessity need not imply a state and, if it does, then it signifies the end of the revolution.

The argument by **Workers' Power** is very common with the Leninist left and contains numerous fallacies and so we shall base our discussion on it. This discussion, of necessity, implies three issues. Firstly, we have to show that anarchists have always seen the necessity of defending a revolution. This shows that the anarchist opposition to the *"democratic workers' state"* (or *"dictatorship of the proletariat"*) has nothing to do with beating the ruling class and stopping them regaining their positions of power. Secondly, we have to discuss the anarchist and Marxist definitions of what constitutes a *"state"* and show what they have in common and how they differ. Thirdly, we must summarise why anarchists oppose the idea of a *"workers' state"* in order for the **real** reasons why anarchists oppose it to be understood. Each issue will be discussed in turn.

For revolutionary anarchists, it is a truism that a revolution will need to defend itself against counter-revolutionary threats. Bakunin, for example, while strenuously objecting to the idea of a *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* (see [section H.1.1](#) for details) also thought a revolution would need to defend itself. In his words:

*"Immediately after established governments have been overthrown, communes will have to reorganise themselves along revolutionary lines . . . In order to defend the revolution, their volunteers will at the same time form a communal militia. But no commune can defend itself in isolation. So it will be necessary to radiate revolution outward, to raise all of its neighbouring communes in revolt . . . and to federate with them for common defence."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 142]

And:

*"the Alliance of all labour associations . . . will constitute the Commune . . . there will be a standing federation of the barricades and a Revolutionary Communal Council . . . [made up of] delegates . . . invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times . . . all provinces, communes and associations . . . [will] delegate deputies to an agreed place of assembly (all . . . invested with binding mandated and accountable and subject to recall), in order to found the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces . . . and to organise a revolutionary force with the capacity of defeating the reaction . . . it is through the very act of extrapolation and organisation of the Revolution with an eye to the mutual defences of insurgent areas that the universality of the Revolution . . . will emerge triumphant."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 1, pp. 155-6]

Malatesta agreed, arguing for the *"creation of voluntary militia, without powers to interfere as militia in the life of the community, but only to deal with any armed attacks by the forces of reaction to re-establish themselves, or to resist outside intervention."* The workers must *"take possession of the factories"* and *"federate amongst themselves"* and only *"the people in arms, in possession of the land, the factories and all the natural wealth"* could defend a revolution [**Life and Ideas**, p. 166, p. 165 and p. 170] Alexander Berkman concurred: *"The armed workers and peasants are the only effective defence of the revolution. By means of their unions and syndicates they must always be on guard against counter-revolutionary attack."* [**ABC of Anarchism**, p. 82] Emma Goldman clearly and unambiguously stated that she had *"always insisted that an armed attack on the Revolution must be met with armed force"* and that *"an armed counter-revolutionary and fascist attack can be met in no way except by an armed defence."* [**Vision on Fire**, p. 222 and p. 217]

Clearly, anarchism has always recognised the necessity of defending a revolution and proposed ideas to ensure it (ideas applied with great success by, for example, the Makhnovists in the Ukrainian Revolution and the C.N.T militias during the Spanish). As such, any assertion that anarchism rejects the necessity of defending a revolution are simply false.

Which, of course, brings us to the second assertion, namely that any attempt to defend a revolution means that a state has been created (regardless of what it may be called). For anarchists, such an argument simply shows that Marxists do not really understand what a state is. While the Trotskyist definition of a *"state"* is *"an apparatus designed to enable one class to rule another,"* the anarchist definition is somewhat different. Anarchists, of course, do not deny that the modern state is (to use Malatesta's excellent expression) *"the bourgeoisie's servant and gendarme."* [**Anarchy**, p. 20] Every state that has ever existed has defended the power of a minority class and, unsurprisingly, has developed certain features to facilitate this. The key one is centralisation of power. This ensures that the working people are excluded from the decision making process and power remains a tool of the ruling class. As such, the centralisation of power (while it may take many forms) is the key means by which a class system is maintained and, therefore, a key aspect of a state. As Kropotkin put, the *"state idea . . . includes the existence of a power situated above society . . . a territorial concentration as well as the concentration of many functions of the life of societies in the hands of a few."* [**Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution**, p. 213] This was the case with representative democracy:

*"To attack the central power, to strip it of its prerogatives, to decentralise, to dissolve authority, would have been to abandon to the people the control of its affairs, to run the risk of a truly popular revolution. That is why the bourgeoisie sought to reinforce the central government even more. . ."* [Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 143]

This meant that the *"representative system was organised by the bourgeoisie to ensure their domination, and it will disappear with them. For the new economic phase that is about to begin we must seek a new form of political organisation, based on a principle quite different from that of representation. The logic of events imposes it."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 125] So while we agree with Marxists that the main function of the state is to defend class society, we also stress the structure of the state has evolved to execute that role.

In the words of Rudolf Rocker:

*"[S]ocial institutions . . . do not arise arbitrarily, but are called into being by special needs to serve definite purposes . . . The newly arisen possessing classes had need of a political instrument of power to maintain their economic and social privileges over the masses of their own people . . . Thus arose the appropriate social conditions for the evolution of the modern state, as the organ of political power of privileged castes and classes for the forcible subjugation and oppression of the non-possessing classes . . . Its external forms have altered in the course of its historical development, but its functions have always been the same . . . And just as the functions of the bodily organs of . . . animals cannot be arbitrarily altered, so that, for example, one cannot at will hear with his eyes and see with his ears, so also one cannot at pleasure transform an organ of social oppression into an instrument for the liberation of the oppressed. The state can only be what it is: the defender of mass-exploitation and social privileges, and creator of privileged classes."* [Anarcho-Syndicalism, p. 20]

As such, a new form of society, one based on the participation of all in the affairs of society (and a classless society can be nothing else) means the end of the state. This is because it has been designed to **exclude** the participation a classless society needs in order to exist. In anarchist eyes, it is an abuse of the language to call the self-managed organisations by which the former working class manage (and defend) a free society a state. If it **was** simply a question of consolidating a revolution and its self-defence then there would be no argument:

*"But perhaps the truth is simply this: . . . [some] take the expression 'dictatorship of the proletariat' to mean simply the revolutionary action of the workers in taking possession of the land and the instruments of labour, and trying to build a society and organise a way of life in which there will be no place for a class that exploits and oppresses the producers.*

*"Thus constructed, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' would be the effective power of all workers trying to bring down capitalist society and would thus turn into Anarchy as soon as resistance from reactionaries would have ceased and no one can any longer seek to compel the masses by violence to obey and work for him. In which case, the discrepancy between us would be nothing more than a question of semantics. Dictatorship of the proletariat would signify the dictatorship of everyone, which is to say, it would be a dictatorship no longer, just as government by everybody is no longer a government in the authoritarian, historical and practical sense of the word.*

*"But the real supporters of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' do not take that line, as they are making quite plain in Russia. Of course, the proletariat has a hand in this, just as the people has a part to play in democratic regimes, that is to say, to conceal the reality of things. In reality, what we have is the dictatorship of one party, or rather, of one' party's leaders: a genuine dictatorship, with its decrees, its penal sanctions, its henchmen and*

*above all its armed forces, which are at present [1919] also deployed in the defence of the revolution against its external enemies, but which will tomorrow be used to impose the dictator's will upon the workers, to apply a break on revolution, to consolidate the new interests in the process of emerging and protect a new privileged class against the masses."* [Malatesta, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, pp. 38-9]

The question is, therefore, one of **who** "seizes power" -- will it be the mass of the population or will it be a party claiming to represent the mass of the population. The difference is vital and it confuses the issue to use the same word "state" to describe two such fundamentally different structures as a "bottom-up" self-managed communal federation and a "top-down" hierarchical centralised organisation (such as has been every state that has existed). This explains why anarchists reject the idea of a "democratic workers' state" as the means by which a revolution defends itself. Rather than signify working class power or management of society, it signifies the opposite -- the seizure of power of a minority (in this case, the leaders of the vanguard party).

Anarchists argue that the state is designed to exclude the mass of the population from the decision making process. This, ironically for Trotskyism, was one of the reasons why leading Bolsheviks (including Lenin and Trotsky) argued for a workers state. The centralisation of power implied by the state was essential so that the vanguard party could ignore the "the will of the majority." This particular perspective was clearly a lesson they learned from their experiences during the Russian Revolution.

As noted in [section H.1.2](#), Lenin was arguing in 1920 that "the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of the class, because in all capitalist countries (and not only over here, in one of the most backward) the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts . . . that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard . . . Such is the basic mechanism of the dictatorship of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the essentials of transitions from capitalism to communism . . . for the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation." [Collected Works, vol. 32, p. 21]

This argument, as can be seen, was considered of general validity and, moreover, was merely stating mainstream Bolshevik ideology. It was repeated in March 1923 by the Central Committee of the Communist Party in a statement issued to mark the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party. This statement summarised the lessons gained from the Russian revolution. It stated that "the party of the Bolsheviks proved able to stand out fearlessly against the vacillations within its own class, vacillations which, with the slightest weakness in the vanguard, could turn into an unprecedented defeat for the proletariat." Vacillations, of course, are expressed by workers' democracy. Little wonder the statement rejects it: "The dictatorship of the working class finds its expression in the dictatorship of the party." ["To the Workers of the USSR" in G. Zinoviev, **History of the Bolshevik Party**, p. 213, p. 214] It should be noted that this Central Committee included Trotsky who, in the same year, was stating that "[i]f there is one question which basically not only does not require revision but does not so much as admit the thought of revision, it is the question of the dictatorship of the Party." [Leon Trotsky Speaks,

p. 158]

Needless to say, **Workers' Power** (like most Trotskyists) blame the degeneration of the Russian revolution on the Civil War and its isolation. However, as these statements make clear, the creation of a party dictatorship was not seen in these terms. Rather, it was considered a necessity to suppress democracy and replace it by party rule. Indeed, as noted in [section H.1.2](#), Trotsky was still arguing in 1937 for the "*objective necessity*" for the "*dictatorship of a party*" due to the "*heterogeneity*" of the working class. [**Writings 1936-37**, pp. 513-4] Moreover, as we discuss in detail in the appendix on "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)", the Bolshevik undermining of working class autonomy and democracy started **well** before the outbreak of civil war, thus confirming anarchist theory. These conclusions of leading Leninists simply justified the actions undertaken by the Bolsheviks from the start.

This is why anarchists reject the idea of a "*democratic workers' state*." Simply put, as far as it is a state, it cannot be democratic and in as far as it is democratic, it cannot be a state. The Leninist idea of a "*workers' state*" means, in fact, the seizure of power by the party. This, we must stress, naturally follows from the idea of the state. It is designed for minority rule and excludes, by its very nature, mass participation. As can be seen, this aspect of the state is one which the leading lights of Bolshevik agreed with. Little wonder, then, that in practice the Bolshevik regime suppressed of any form of democracy which hindered the power of the party (see the appendix on "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)"). Maurice Brinton sums up the issue well when he argued that "*workers' power' cannot be identified or equated with the power of the Party -- as it repeatedly was by the Bolsheviks . . . What 'taking power' really implies is that the vast majority of the working class at last realises its ability to manage both production and society -- and organises to this end.*" [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. xiv]

In summary, therefore, anarchists reject the idea that the defence of a revolution can be conducted by a state. As Bakunin once put it, there is the "*Republic-State*" and there is "*the system of the Republic-Commune, the Republic-Federation, i.e. the system of **Anarchism**. This is the politics of the Social Revolution, which aims at the abolition of the **State** and establishment of the economic, entirely free organisation of the people -- organisation from bottom to top by means of federation.*" [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 314] Indeed, creating a new state will simply destroy the most important gain of any revolution -- working class autonomy -- and its replacement by another form of minority rule (by the party). Anarchists have always argued that the defence of a revolution must not be confused with the state and so argue for the abolition of the state **and** the defence of a revolution (also see [section H.1.3](#) for more discussion). Only when working class people actually run themselves society will a revolution be successful. For anarchists, this means that "*effective emancipation can be achieved only by the **direct, widespread, and independent action . . . of the workers themselves, grouped . . . in their own class organisations . . . on the basis of concrete action and self-government, helped but not governed, by revolutionaries working in the very midst of, and not above the mass and the professional, technical, defence and other branches.***" [Voline, **The Unknown Revolution**, p. 197] This means that anarchists argue that the capitalist state cannot be transformed or adjusted, but has to be smashed by a social

revolution and replaced with organisations and structures created by working class people during their own struggles (see [section H.1.4](#) for details).

For a further discussion of anarchist ideas on defending a revolution, please consult sections [I.5.14](#) and [J.7.6](#).

## H.2.2 Do anarchists reject "*class conflict*" as "*the motor of change*" and "*collective struggle*" as the "*means*"?

Of course not. Anarchists have always taken a keen interest in the class struggle, in the organisation, solidarity and actions of working class people. Indeed, class struggle plays a key role in anarchist theory and to assert otherwise is simply to lie about anarchism. Sadly, Marxists have been known to make such an assertion.

For example, Pat Stack of the British SWP argued that anarchists "*dismiss . . . the importance of the collective nature of change*" and so "*downplays the centrality of the working class*" in the revolutionary process. This, he argues, means that for anarchism the working class "*is not the key to change.*" He stresses that for Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin "*revolutions were not about . . . collective struggle or advance.*" Indeed, that anarchism "*despises the collectivity.*" Amazingly he argues that for Kropotkin, "*far from seeing class conflict as the dynamic for social change as Marx did, saw co-operation being at the root of the social process.*" Therefore, "*[i]t follows that if class conflict is not the motor of change, the working class is not the agent and collective struggle not the means. Therefore everything from riot to bomb, and all that might become between the two, was legitimate when ranged against the state, each with equal merit.*" ["Anarchy in the UK?", **Socialist Review**, no. 246] Needless to say, he makes the usual exception for anarcho-syndicalists, thereby showing his total ignorance of anarchism **and** syndicalism (see [section H.2.8](#)).

Indeed, these assertions are simply incredible. It is hard to believe that anyone who is a leading member of a Leninist party could write such nonsense which suggests that Stack is aware of the truth and simply decides to ignore it. All in all, it is **very** easy to refute these assertions. All we have to do is, unlike Stack, to quote from the works of Bakunin, Kropotkin and other anarchists. Even the briefest familiarity with the writings of revolutionary anarchism would soon convince the reader that Stack really does not know what he is talking about.

Take, for example, Bakunin. Rather than reject class conflict, collective struggle or the key role of the working class, Bakunin based his political ideas on all three. As he put it, there was, "*between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, an irreconcilable antagonism which results inevitably from their respective stations in life.*" He stressed "*war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is unavoidable*" and would only end with the "*abolition of the bourgeoisie as a distinct class.*" In order the worker to "*become strong*" they "*must unite*" with other workers in "*the union of all local and national workers' associations into a world-wide association, the great International Working-Men's Association.*" It



was only *"through practice and collective experience . . . [and] the progressive expansion and development of the economic struggle [that] will bring [the worker] more to recognise his [or her] true enemies: the privileged classes, including the clergy, the bourgeoisie, and the nobility; and the State, which exists only to safeguard all the privileges of those classes."* There was *"but a single path, that of **emancipation through practical action** . . . [which] has only one meaning. It means workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses. It means **trades-unions, organisation, and the federation of resistance funds**."* Then, *"when the revolution -- brought about by the force of circumstances -- breaks out, the International will be a real force and know what it has to do . . . take the revolution into its own hands . . . [and become] an earnest international organisation of workers' associations from all countries [which will be] capable of replacing this departing political world of States and bourgeoisie."* [*"The Policy of the International"*, **The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 97-8, p. 103 and p. 110]

Hardly the words of a man who rejected class conflict, the working class and the collective nature of change! Nor is this an isolated argument from Bakunin, they recur continuously throughout Bakunin's works. For example, he argued that socialists must *"[o]rganise the city proletariat in the name of revolutionary Socialism, and in doing this unite it into one preparatory organisation together with the peasantry."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 378] Similarly, he argued that *"equality"* was the *"aim"* of the International Workers' Association and *"the organisation of the working class its strength, the unification of the proletariat the world over . . . its weapon, its only policy."* He stressed that *"to create a people's force capable of crushing the military and civil force of the State, it is necessary to organise the proletariat."* [quoted by K.J. Kenafick, **Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx**, p. 95 and p. 254]

Strikes played a very important role in Bakunin's ideas (as they do in all revolutionary anarchist thought). He saw the strike as *"the beginnings of the social war of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie . . . Strikes are a valuable instrument from two points of view. Firstly, they electrify the masses . . . awaken in them the feeling of the deep antagonism which exists between their interests and those of the bourgeoisie . . . secondly they help immensely to provoke and establish between the workers of all trades, localities and countries the consciousness and very fact of solidarity: a twofold action, both negative and positive, which tends to constitute directly the new world of the proletariat, opposing it almost in an absolute way to the bourgeois world."* [cited in Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872-1886**, pp. 216-217]

Indeed, for Bakunin, strikes train workers for social revolution as they *"create, organise, and form a workers' army, an army which is bound to break down the power of the bourgeoisie and the State, and lay the ground for a new world."* [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 384-5] Moreover, when *"strikes spread from one place to another, they come close to turning into a general strike. And with the ideas of emancipation that now hold sway over the proletariat, a general strike can result only in a great cataclysm which forces society to shed its old skin."* The very process of strikes, as noted, would create the framework of a socialist society as *"strikes indicate a certain collective strength already"* and *"because each strike becomes the point of departure for the formation of new groups."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 149-50] Thus the revolution would be *"an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upward."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p.

179]

As we argue in sections [H.1.4](#) and [I.2.3](#), the very process of collective class struggle would, for Bakunin and other anarchists, create the basis of a free society. Thus, in Bakunin's eyes, the *"future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* He saw the free society as being based on *"the land, the instruments of work and all other capital [will] become the collective property of the whole of society and be utilised only by the workers, in other words by the agricultural and industrial associations."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 206 and p. 174] In other words, the basic structure created by the revolution would be based on the working classes own combat organisations, as created in their struggles within, but against, oppression and exploitation.

The link between present and future would be labour unions (workers' associations) created by working people in their struggle against exploitation and oppression. These played the key role in Bakunin's politics both as the means to abolish capitalism and the state and as the framework of a socialist society (this support for workers' councils predates Marxist support by five decades, incidentally). When he became an anarchist, Bakunin always stressed that it was essential to *"[o]rganise always more and more the practical militant international solidarity of the toilers of all trades and of all countries, and remember . . . you will find an immense, an irresistible force in this universal collectivity."* [quoted by Kenafick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 291] Quite impressive for someone who was a founding father of a theory which, according to Stack, downplayed the *"centrality of the working class,"* argued that the working class was *"not the key to change,"* dismissed *"the importance of the collective nature of change"* as well as *"collective struggle or advance"* and *"despises the collectivity"*! Clearly, to argue that Bakunin held any of these views simply shows that the person making such statements does not have a clue what they are talking about.

The same, needless to say, applies to all revolutionary anarchists. Kropotkin built upon Bakunin's arguments and, like him, based his politics on collective working class struggle and organisation. He consistently stressed that *"the Anarchists have always advised taking an active part in those workers' organisations which carry on the **direct** struggle of Labour against Capital and its protector -- the State."* Such struggle, *"beetter than any other indirect means, permits the worker to obtain some temporary improvements in the present conditions of work, while it opens his eyes to the evil done by Capitalism and the State that supports it, and wakes up his thoughts concerning the possibility of organising consumption, production, and exchange without the intervention of the capitalist and the State."* [**Evolution and Environment**, pp. 82-3] In his article on "Anarchism" for the **Encyclopaedia Britannica**, he stressed that anarchists *"have endeavoured to promote their ideas directly amongst the labour organisations and to induce those unions to a direct struggle against capital, without placing their faith in parliamentary legislation."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 287]

Far from denying the importance of collective class struggle, he actually stressed it again and again. As he once wrote, *"to make the revolution, the mass of workers will have to organise themselves. Resistance*

*and the strike are excellent means of organisation for doing this."* He argued that it was *"a question of organising societies of resistance for all trades in each town, of creating resistance funds against the exploiters, of giving more solidarity to the workers' organisations of each town and of putting them in contact with those of other towns, of federating them . . . Workers' solidarity must no longer be an empty word by practised each day between all trades and all nations."* [quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 255-6] Kropotkin could not have been clearer.

Clearly, Kropotkin was well aware of the importance of popular, mass, struggles. As he put it, anarchists *"know very well that any popular movement is a step towards the social revolution. It awakens the spirit of revolt, it makes men [and women] accustomed to seeing the established order (or rather the established disorder) as eminently unstable."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 203] As regards the social revolution, he argues that *"a decisive blow will have to be administered to private property: from the beginning, the workers will have to proceed to take over all social wealth so as to put it into common ownership. This revolution can only be carried out by the workers themselves."* In order to do this, the masses have to build their own organisation as the *"great mass of workers will not only have to constitute itself outside the bourgeoisie . . . it will have to take action of its own during the period which will precede the revolution . . . and this sort of action can only be carried out when a strong **workers' organisation** exists."* This meant, of course, it was *"the mass of workers we have to seek to organise. We . . . have to submerge ourselves in the organisation of the people . . . When the mass of workers is organised and we are with it to strengthen its revolutionary idea, to make the spirit of revolt against capital germinate there . . . then it will be the social revolution."* [quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 153-4]

He saw the class struggle in terms of *"a multitude of acts of revolt in all countries, under all possible conditions: first, individual revolt against capital and State; then collective revolt -- strikes and working-class insurrections -- both preparing, in men's minds as in actions, a revolt of the masses, a revolution."* Clearly, the mass, collective nature of social change was not lost on Kropotkin who pointed to a *"multitude of risings of working masses and peasants"* as a positive sign. Strikes, he argued, *"were once 'a war of folded arms'"* but now were *"easily turning to revolt, and sometimes taking the proportions of vast insurrections."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 144]

And Pat Stack argues that Kropotkin did not see *"class conflict as the dynamic for social change,"* nor *"class conflict"* as *"the motor of change"* and the working class *"not the agent and collective struggle not the means"!* Truly incredible and a total and utter distortion of Kropotkin's ideas on the subject.

As for other anarchists, we discover the same concern over class conflict, collective struggle and organisation and the awareness of a mass social revolution by the working class. Emma Goldman, for example, argued that anarchism *"stands for direct action"* and that *"[t]rade unionism, the economic area of the modern gladiator, owes its existence to direct action . . . In France, in Spain, in Italy, in Russian, nay even in England (witness the growing rebellion of English labour unions), direct, revolutionary economic action has become so strong a force in the battle for industrial liberty as to make the world realise the tremendous importance of labour's power. The General Strike [is] the supreme expression of the economic consciousness of the workers . . . Today every great strike, in order to win, must realise the*

*importance of the solidaric general protest.*" [**Anarchism and Other Essays**, pp. 65-6] She places collective class struggle at the centre of her ideas and, crucially, she sees it as the way to create an anarchist society:

*"It is this war of classes that we must concentrate upon, and in that connection the war against false values, against evil institutions, against all social atrocities. Those who appreciate the urgent need of co-operating in great struggles . . . must organise the preparedness of the masses for the overthrow of both capitalism and the state. Industrial and economic preparedness is what the workers need. That alone leads to revolution at the bottom . . . That alone will give the people the means to take their children out of the slums, out of the sweat shops and the cotton mills . . . That alone leads to economic and social freedom, and does away with all wars, all crimes, and all injustice."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, pp. 309-10]

For Malatesta, *"the most powerful force for social transformation is the working class movement . . . Through the organisations established for the defence of their interests, workers acquire an awareness of the oppression under which they live and of the antagonisms which divide them from their employers, and so begin to aspire to a better life, get used to collective struggle and to solidarity."* This meant that anarchists *"must recognise the usefulness and importance of the workers' movement, must favour its development, and make it one of the levers of their action, doing all they can so that it . . . will culminate in a social revolution."* Anarchists must *"deepen the chasm between capitalists and wage-slaves, between rulers and ruled; preach expropriation of private property and the destruction of State."* The new society would be organised *"by means of free association and federations of producers and consumers."* [**Life and Ideas**, p. 113, pp. 250-1 and p. 184] Alexander Berkman, unsurprisingly, argued the same thing. As he put it, only *"the worst victims of present institutions"* could abolish capitalism as *"it is to their own interest to abolish them. . . labour's emancipation means at the same time the redemption of the whole of society."* He stressed that *"only the right organisation of the workers can accomplish what we are striving for . . . Organisation from the bottom up, beginning with the shop and factory, on the foundation of the joint interests of the workers everywhere . . . alone can solve the labour question and serve the true emancipation of man[kind]."* [**The ABC of Anarchism**, p. 44 and p. 60]

As can be seen, the claim that Kropotkin or Bakunin, or anarchists in general, ignored the class struggle and collective working class struggle and organisation is either a lie or indicates ignorance. Clearly, anarchists have placed working class struggle, organisation and collective direct action and solidarity at the core of their politics (and as the means of creating a libertarian socialist society) from the start.

Also see [section H.2.8](#) for a discussion of the relationship of anarchism to syndicalism.

## H.2.3 Does anarchism "yearn for what has gone before"?

Pat Stack states that one of the *"key points of divergence"* between anarchism and Marxism is that the former, *"far from understanding the advances that capitalism represented, tended to take a wistful look*

*back. Anarchism shares with Marxism an abhorrence of the horrors of capitalism, but yearns for what has gone before.*" ["Anarchy in the UK?", **Socialist Review**, no. 246]

Like his other "key point" (namely the rejection of class struggle -- see [last section](#)), Stack is simply wrong. Even the quickest look at the works of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin would convince the reader that this is simply distortion. Rather than look backwards for their ideas of social life, anarchism has always been careful to base its ideas on the current state of society and what anarchist thinkers considered positive current trends within society.

The dual element of progress is important to remember. Capitalism is a class society, marked by exploitation, oppression and various social hierarchies. In such a society progress can hardly be neutral. It will reflect vested interests, the needs of those in power, the rationales of the economic system (e.g. the drive for profits) and those who benefit from it, the differences in power between nations and companies and so on. Equally, it will be shaped by the class struggle, the resistance of the working classes to exploitation and oppression, the objective needs of production, etc. As such, trends in society will reflect the various class conflicts, social hierarchies, power relationships and so on which exist within it.

This is particularly true of the economy. The development of the industrial structure of a capitalist economy will be based on the fundamental need to maximise the profits and power of the capitalists. As such, it will develop (either by market forces or by state intervention) in order to ensure this. This means that various tendencies apparent in capitalist society exist specifically to aid the development of capital. This means that it does not follow that because a society which places profits above people has found a specific way of organising production "*efficient*" it means that a socialist society will do. As such, anarchist opposition to specific tendencies within capitalism (such as the increased concentration and centralisation of companies) does not mean a "*yearning*" for the past. Rather, it shows an awareness that capitalist methods are precisely that and that they need not be suited for a society which replaces the profit system with human and ecological need as the criteria for decision making.

For anarchists, this means questioning the assumptions of capitalist progress. This means that the first task of a revolution after the expropriation of the capitalists and the destruction of the state will be to transform the industrial structure and how it operates, not keep it as it is. Anarchists have long argued that that capitalist methods cannot be used for socialist ends. In our battle to democratise and socialise the workplace, in our awareness of the importance of collective initiatives by the direct producers in transforming their work situation, we show that factories are not merely sites of production, but also of reproduction -- the reproduction of a certain structure of social relations based on the division between those who give orders and those who take them, between those who direct and those who execute. Equally, the structure of industry has developed to maximise profits. Why assume that this structure will be equally as efficient in producing useful products by meaningful work which does not harm the environment?

A further aspect of this is that many of the struggles today, from the Zapatistas in Chiapas to those

against Genetically Modified (GM) food and nuclear power are precisely based on the understanding that capitalist 'progress' can not be uncritically accepted. To resist the expulsion of people from the land in the name of progress or the introduction of terminator seeds is not to look back to "*what had gone*", although this is also precisely what the proponents of capitalist globalisation often accuse us of. It is to put "*people before profit.*"

As such, only a sophist would confuse a critical evaluation of trends within capitalism with a yearning for the past. It means to buy into the whole capitalist notion of "*progress*" which has always been part of justifying the inhumanities of the status quo. Simply put, just because a process is rewarded by the profit driven market it does not mean that it makes sense from a human or ecological perspective. For example, as we argue in [section J.5.11](#), the capitalist market hinders the spread of co-operatives and workers' self-management in spite of their well documented higher efficiency and productivity. From the perspective of the needs of the capitalists, this makes perfect sense. In terms of the workers and efficient allocation of resources, it does not. Would Marxists argue that because co-operatives and workers' self-management of production are marginal aspects of the capitalist economy it means that they will play no part in a sane society or that if a socialist expresses interest in them it means that are "*yearning*" for a past mode of production? We hope not.

This common Marxist failure to understand anarchist investigations of the future is, ironically enough, joined with a total failure to understand the social conditions in which anarchists have put forward their ideas. Ironically, for all his claims that anarchists ignore "*material conditions*," it is Pat Stack (and others like him) who does so in his claims against Proudhon. Stack argues that Proudhon (like all anarchists) was "*yearning for the past*" when he advanced his mutualist ideas. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. This is because the society in which the French anarchist lived was predominately artisan and peasant in nature. This was admitted by Marx and Engels in the **Communist Manifesto** ("*[i]n countries like France*" the peasants "*constitute far more than half of the population.*" [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 493]). As such, for Proudhon to incorporate the aspirations of the majority of the population is not to "*yearn for what has gone before*" but rather an extremely sensible position to take.

Therefore, it is hardly an example of Proudhon "*yearning for the past*" for Stack to mention that Marx dubbed Proudhon ("*the founder of modern anarchism*") as "*the socialist of the small peasant or master craftsman.*" It is simply unsurprising, a simple statement of fact, as the French working classes were, at the time, predominately small peasants or master craftsmen (or artisans). As K. Steven Vincent points out Proudhon's "*social theories may not be reduced to a socialism for only the peasant class, nor was it a socialism only for the petite bourgeois; it was a socialism of and for French workers. And in the mid-nineteenth century . . . most French workers were still artisans.*" Indeed, "*[w]hile Marx was correct in predicting the eventual predominance of the industrial proletariat vis-a-vis skilled workers, such predominance was neither obvious nor a foregone conclusion in France during the nineteenth century. The absolute number of small industries even increased during most of the century.*" [**Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 5 and p. 282] Proudhon himself noted in 1851 that of a population of 36 million, 24 million were peasants and 6 million were artisans. Of the remaining 6 million, these included wage-workers for whom "*workmen's associations*" would be essential as "*a protest against the wage system,*" the "*denial of the rule of capitalists*" and for "*the*

*management of large instruments of labour.*" [The General Idea of the Revolution, pp. 97-8]

To summarise, if the society in which you live is predominately made-up of peasants and artisans then it is hardly an insult to be called "*the socialist of the small peasant or master craftsman.*" Equally, it can hardly represent a desire for "*what has gone before*" to tailor your ideas to the actual conditions in the country in which you live! And Stack accuses **anarchists** of ignoring "*material conditions*"!

Neither can it be said that Proudhon ignored the development of industrialisation in France during his lifetime. Quite the reverse, in fact, as indicated above. Proudhon did **not** ignore the rise of large-scale industry. He argued that such industry should be managed by the workers' themselves via workers associations. As he put it, "*certain industries*" required "*the combined employment of a large number of workers*" and so the producer is "*a collectivity.*" In such industries "*we have no choice*" and so "*it is necessary to form an **association** among the workers*" because "*without that they would remain related as subordinates and superiors, and there would ensue two industrial castes of masters and wage-workers, which is repugnant to a free and democratic society.*" [Op. Cit., pp. 215-6]

All in all, Stack is simply showing his ignorance of both Proudhon's ideas **and** the society (the "*material conditions*") in which they were shaped and were aimed for. As can be seen, Proudhon incorporated the development of large-scale industry within his mutualist ideas and so the need to abolish wage labour by workers' associations and workers' control of production. Perhaps Stack can fault Proudhon for seeking the end of capitalism too soon and for not waiting patiently will it developed further (if he does, he will also have to attack Marx, Lenin and Trotsky as well for the same failing!), but this has little to do with "*yearn[ing] for what has gone before.*"

After distorting Proudhon's ideas on industry, Stack does the same with Bakunin. He asserts the following:

*"Similarly, the Russian anarchist leader Bakunin argued that it was the progress of capitalism that represented the fundamental problem. For him industrialisation was an evil. He believed it had created a decadent western Europe, and therefore had held up the more primitive, less industrialised Slav regions as the hope for change."*

Now, it would be extremely interesting to find out where, exactly, Stack discovered that Bakunin made these claims. After all, they are at such odds with Bakunin's anarchist ideas that it is tempting to conclude that Stack is simply making it up. This, we suggest, explains the total lack of references for such an outrageous claim. Looking at his main source, we discover Paul Avrich writing that "*[i]n 1848*" (i.e. nearly 20 years **before** Bakunin became an anarchist!) Bakunin "*spoke of the decadence of Western Europe and saw hope in the primitive, less industrialised Slavs for the regeneration of the Continent.*" [Op. Cit., p. 8] The plagiarism, again, is obvious, as are the distortions. Given that Bakunin became an anarchist in the mid-1860s, how his pre-anarchist ideas are relevant to an evaluation of anarchism escapes logic. It makes as much sense as quoting Marx to refute fascism as Mussolini was originally the leader of the left-wing of the Italian Socialist Party!

It is, of course, simple to refute Stack's claims. We simply need to do that which he does not, namely quote Bakunin. For someone who thought "*industrialisation was an evil*," a key aspect of Bakunin's ideas on social revolution was the seizing of industry and its placing under social ownership. As he put it, "*capital and all tools of labour belong to the city workers -- to the workers associations. The whole organisation of the future should be nothing but a free federation of workers -- agricultural workers as well as factory workers and associations of craftsmen.*" [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 410] Bakunin argued that "*to destroy . . . all the instruments of labour . . . would be to condemn all humanity -- wvhich is infinity too numerous today to exist. . . on the simple gifts of nature. . . -- to. . . death by starvation. Thus capital cannot and must not be destroyed. It must be preserved.*" Only when workers "*obtain not individual but **collective** property in capital*" and when capital is no longer "*concentrated in the hands of a separate, exploiting class*" will they be able "*to smash the tyranny of capital.*" [**The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 90-1] He stressed that only "*associated labour, this is labour organised upon the principles of reciprocity and co-operation, is adequate to the task of maintaining the existence of a large and somewhat civilised society.*" Moreover, the "*whole secret of the boundless productivity of human labour consists first of all in applying . . . scientifically developed reason . . . and then in the division of that labour.*" [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 341-2] Hardly the thoughts of someone opposed to industrialisation!

Rather than oppose industrialisation and urge the destruction of industry, Bakunin considered one of the first acts of the revolution would be workers' associations taking over the means of production and turning them into collective property managed by the workers themselves. Hence Daniel Guerin's comment:

*"Proudhon and Bakunin were 'collectivists,' which is to say they declared themselves without equivocation in favour of the common exploitation, not by the State but by associated workers of the large-scale means of production and of the public services. Proudhon has been quite wrongly presented as an exclusive enthusiast of private property."* [*"From Proudhon to Bakunin"*, **The Radical Papers**, Dimitrios I. Roussopoulos (ed.), p.32]

Clearly, Stack does not have the faintest idea of what he is talking about! Nor is Kropotkin any safer than Proudhon or Bakunin from Stack's distortions. He claims that:

*"Peter Kropotkin, another famous anarchist leader to emerge in Russia, also looked backwards for change. He believed the ideal society would be based on small autonomous communities, devoted to small scale production. He had witnessed such communities among Siberian peasants and watchmakers in the Swiss mountains."*

First, we must note the plagiarism. Stack is summarising Paul Avrich's summary of Kropotkin's ideas. [**Anarchist Portraits**, p. 62] Rather than go to the source material, Stack provides an interpretation of someone else's interpretation of someone else's ideas! Clearly, the number of links in the chain means that something is going to get lost in the process and, of course, it does. The something which "gets lost"



is, unfortunately, Kropotkin's ideas.

Ultimately, Stack is simply showing his total ignorance of Kropotkin's ideas by making such a statement. At least Avrich expanded upon his summary to mention that Kropotkin's positive evaluation of using modern technology and the need to apply it on an appropriate level to make work and the working environment as pleasant as possible. As Avrich summarises, "[p]laced in small voluntary workshops, machinery would rescue human beings from the monotony and toil of large-scale capitalist enterprise, allow time for leisure and cultural pursuits, and remove forever the stamp of inferiority traditionally borne by manual labour." [Op. Cit., p. 63] Hardly "backward looking" to desire the application of science and technology to transform the industrial system into one based on the needs of people rather than profit!

Stack must be hoping that the reader has, like himself, not read Kropotkin's classic work **Fields, Factories and Workshops** for if they have then they would be aware of the distortion Stack subjects Kropotkin's ideas to. While Avrich does present, in general, a reasonable summary of Kropotkin's ideas, he does place it into a framework of his own making. Kropotkin while stressing the importance of decentralising industry within a free society did not look backward for his inspiration. Rather, he looked to trends within existing society, trends he thought pointed in an anti-capitalist direction. This can be seen from the fact he based his classic work **Field, Factories and Workshops** on detailed analysis of current developments in the economy and came to the conclusion that industry would spread across the global (which has happened) and that small industries will continue to exist side by side with large ones (which also has been confirmed). From these facts he argued that a socialist society would aim to decentralise production, combining agriculture with industry and both using modern technology to the fullest.

As we discuss the fallacy that Kropotkin (or anarchists in general) have argued for "*small autonomous communities, devoted to small scale production*" in [section I.3.8](#), we will not do so here. Suffice to say, Kropotkin's vision was one of federations of decentralised communities in which production would be based on the "*scattering of industries over the country -- so as to bring the factory amidst the fields . . . agriculture . . . combined with industry . . . to produce a combination of industrial with agricultural work.*" He considered this as "*surely the next step to be made, as soon as a reorganisation of our present conditions is possible.*" Indeed, he thought that this step "*is imposed by the very necessity of **producing for the producers themselves.***" Kropotkin attempted to show, based on a detailed analysis of modern economic statistics and trends, a vision of a decentralised, federated communal society where "*the workers*" were "*the real managers of industries*" and what this would imply once society was free of capitalism. Needless to say, he did not think that this "*next step*" would occur until "*a reorganisation of our present conditions [was] possible.*" [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, pp. 157-8] In other words, until after a social revolution which expropriated industry and the land and placed social wealth into the hands of the producers. Until then, the positive trends he saw in modern society would remain circumscribed by the workings of the capitalist market.

He did not, as is often asserted, argue for "*small-scale production*" (he still saw the need for factories,

for example) but rather for production geared to *appropriate* levels, based on the objective needs of production (without the distorting effects generated by the needs of capitalist profits and power) and, of necessity, the needs of those who work in and live alongside industry (and today we would add, the needs of the environment). In other words, the transformation of capitalism into a society human beings could live full and meaningful lives in. Part of this would involve creating an industry based on human needs. *"Have the factory and the workshop at the gates of your fields and gardens and work in them,"* he argued. *"Not those large establishments, of course, in which huge masses of metals have to be dealt with and which are better placed at certain spots indicated by Nature, but the countless variety of workshops and factories which are required to satisfy the infinite diversity of tastes among civilised men [and women]."* The new factories and workplaces would be *"airy and hygienic, and consequently economical, . . . in which human life is of more account than machinery and the making of extra profits."* [Op. Cit., p. 197] Under capitalism, he argued, the whole discourse of economics (like industrial development itself) was based on the logic and rationale of the profit motive:

*"Under the name of profits, rent and interest upon capital, surplus value, and the like, economists have eagerly discussed the benefits which the owners of land or capital, or some privileged nations, can derive, either from the under-paid work of the wage-labourer, or from the inferior position of one class of the community towards another class, or from the inferior economical development of one nation towards another nation. . . ."*

*"In the meantime the great question -- 'What have we to produce, and how?' necessarily remained in the background . . . The main subject of social economy -- that is, the **economy of energy required for the satisfaction of human needs** -- is consequently the last subject which one expects to find treated in a concrete form in economical treatises."* [Op. Cit., p. 17]

Kropotkin's ideas were, therefore, an attempt to discuss how a post-capitalist society could develop, based on an extensive investigation of current trends within capitalism, and reflecting the needs which capitalism ignores. As noted above, current trends within capitalism have positive (socialistic) and negative (capitalistic) aspects as capitalist industry has not developed neutrally (it has been distorted by the twin requirements to maintain capitalist profits and power).

For this reason Kropotkin considered the concentration of capital (which most Marxists base their arguments for socialism on) did not, in fact, represent an advance for socialism as it was *"often nothing but an amalgamation of capitalists for the purpose of **dominating the market**, not for cheapening the technical process."* [Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow, p. 154] Indeed, by basing themselves on the trends of capital towards big business, Leninism simply locks itself into the logic of capitalism and, by implication, sees a socialist society which will basically be the same as capitalism, using the technology, industrial structure and industry developed under class society without change. After all, did Lenin not argue that *"Socialism is merely state capitalist monopoly made to benefit the whole people"?*

Rather than condemn Kropotkin, Stack's comments (and those like them) simply show the poverty of the Leninist critique of capitalism and its vision of the socialist future.

All in all, anyone who claims that anarchism is "*backward looking*" or "*yearns for the past*" simply has no idea what they are talking about.

## H.2.4 Do anarchists think "*the state is the main enemy*" rather than just "*one aspect*" of class society?

Pat Stack argues that "*the idea that dominates anarchist thought*" is "*that the state is the main enemy, rather than identifying the state as one aspect of a class society that has to be destroyed.*" ["Anarchy in the UK?", **Socialist Review**, no. 246]] Paul Thomas states that "*Anarchists insist that the basis source of social injustice is the state.*" [**Karl Marx and the Anarchists**, p. 2]

On the face of it, such assertions make little sense. After all, was not the first work by the first self-declared anarchist called **What is Property?** and contain the revolutionary maxim "*property is theft*"? Surely this fact alone would be enough to put to rest the notion that anarchists view the state as the main problem in the world? Obviously not. Flying in the face of this well known fact as well as anarchist theory, Marxists have constantly repeated the falsehood that anarchists consider the state as the main enemy. Indeed, Stack and Thomas are simply repeating an earlier assertion by Engels:

*"Bakunin has a peculiar theory of his own, a medley of Proudhonism and communism. The chief point concerning the former is that he does not regard capital, i.e. the class antagonism between capitalists and wage workers which has arisen through social development, but the state as the main enemy to be abolished. . . . our view [is] that state power is nothing more than the organisation which the ruling classes -- landowners and capitalists -- have provided for themselves in order to protect their social privileges, Bakunin [on the other hand] maintains that it is the state which has created capital, that the capitalist has his capital **only be the grace of the state**. As, therefore, the state is the chief evil, it is above all the state which must be done away with and then capitalism will go to blazes of itself. We, on the contrary, say: Do away with capital, the concentration of all means of production in the hands of a few, and the state will fall of itself. The difference is an essential one . . . the abolition of capital is precisely the social revolution."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 71]

As will come as no surprise, Engels did not bother to indicate where he discovered Bakunin's ideas on these matters. Similarly, his followers raise this kind of assertion as a truism, apparently without the need for evidence to support the claim. This is hardly surprising as anarchists, including Bakunin, have expressed an idea distinctly at odds with Engels' claims, namely that the social revolution would be marked by the abolition of capitalism and the state at the same time. That this is the case can be seen from John Stuart Mill who, unlike Engels, saw that Bakunin's ideas meant "*not only the annihilation of*

*all government, but getting all property of all kinds out of the hands of the possessors to be used for the general benefit.*" ["*Chapters on Socialism, Principles of Political Economy*, p. 376] If the great liberal thinker could discern this aspect of anarchism, why not Engels? After all, this vision of a **social** revolution (i.e. one that combined political, social **and** economic goals) occurred continuously throughout Bakunin's writings when he was an anarchist. Indeed, to claim that he, or anarchists in general, just opposed the state suggests a total unfamiliarity with anarchist theory. For Bakunin, like all anarchists, the abolition of the state occurs at the same time as the abolition of capital. This joint abolition **is** precisely the social revolution.

In 1865, for example, we discover Bakunin arguing that anarchists "*seek the destruction of all States*" in his "*Program of the Brotherhood*." Yet he also argued that a member of this association "*must be socialist*" and see that "*labour*" was the "*sole producer of social assets*" and so "*anyone enjoying these without working is an exploiter of another man's labour, a thief*." They must also "*understand that there is no liberty in the absence of equality*" and so the "*attainment of the widest liberty*" is possible only "*amid the most perfect (de jure and de facto) political, economic and social equality*." The "*sole and supreme objective*" of the revolution "*will be the effective political, economic and social emancipation of the people*." This was because political liberty "*is not feasible without political equality. And the latter is impossible without economic and social equality*." This mean that the "*land belongs to everyone. But usufruct of it will belong only to those who till it with their own hands*." As regards industry, "*through the unaided efforts and economic powers of the workers' associations, capital and the instruments of labour will pass into the possession of those who will apply them . . . through their own labours*." He opposed sexism, for women are "*equal in all political and social rights*." Ultimately, "*[n]o revolution could succeed . . . unless it was simultaneously a political and a social revolution. Any exclusively political revolution . . . will, insofar as it consequently does not have the immediate, effective, political and economic emancipation of the people as its primary objective, prove to be . . . illusory, phony . . . The revolution should not only be made for the people's sake: it should also be made by the people and can never succeed unless it implicates all of the rural as well as the urban masses*" [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, pp. 134-41]

In 1868, Bakunin was arguing the same ideas. The "*Association of the International Brethren seeks simultaneously universal, social, philosophical, economic and political revolution, so that the present order of things, rooted in property, exploitation, domination and the authority principle*" will be destroyed. The "*revolution as we understand it will . . . set about the . . . complete destruction of the State . . . The natural and necessary upshot of that destruction*" will include the "*[d]issolution of the army, magistracy, bureaucracy, police and clergy*" and "*[a]ll productive capital and instruments of labour . . . be[ing] confiscated for the benefit of toilers associations, which will have to put them to use in collective production*" as well as the "*[s]eizure of all Church and State properties*." The "*federated Alliance of all labour associations . . . will constitute the Commune*." The people "*must make the revolution everywhere, and . . . ultimate direction of it must at all times be vested in the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations . . . organised from the bottom up*." [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 152-6]

As these the words of a person who considered the state as the "*chief evil*" or "*that the state is the main*

*enemy"? Of course not, rather Bakunin clearly identified the state as one aspect of a class society that has to be destroyed. As he put it, the "State, which has never had any task other than to regularise, sanction and . . . protect the rule of the privileged classes and exploitation of the people's labour for the rich, must be abolished. Consequently, this requires that society be organised from the bottom up through the free formation and free federation of worker associations, industrial, agricultural, scientific and artisan alike, . . . founded upon collective ownership of the land, capital, raw materials and the instruments of labour, which is to say, all large-scale property . . . leaving to private and hereditary possession only those items that are actually for personal use." [Op. Cit., p. 182]*

In summary, rather than seeing the state as the main evil to be abolished, Bakunin always stressed that a revolution must be economic **and** political in nature, that it must ensure political, economic and social liberty and equality. As such, he argued for both the destruction of the state and the expropriation of capital (an act conducted, incidentally, by a federation of workers' associations or workers' councils). While the apparatus of the state was being destroyed (*"Dissolution of the army, magistracy, bureaucracy, police and clergy"*), capitalism was also being uprooted and destroyed (*"All productive capital and instruments of labour . . . confiscated for the benefit of toilers associations"*). To assert, as Engels did, that Bakunin ignored the necessity of abolishing capitalism and the other evils of the current system while focusing exclusively on the state, is simply distorting his ideas.

Kropotkin, unsurprisingly, argued along identical lines as Bakunin. He stressed that *"the revolution will burn on until it has accomplished its mission: the abolition of property-owning and of the State."* This revolution, he re-iterated, would be a *"mass rising up against property and the State."* Indeed, Kropotkin always stressed that *"there is one point to which all socialists adhere: the expropriation of capital must result from the coming revolution."* This meant that *"the area of struggle against capital, and against the sustainer of capital -- government"* could be one in which *"various groups can act in agreement"* and so *"any struggle that prepares for that expropriation should be sustained in unanimity by all the socialist groups, to whatever shading they belong."* [Words of a Rebel, p. 75 and p. 204] Little wonder Kropotkin wrote his famous article *"Expropriation"* on this subject! As he put it:

*"Expropriation -- that is the guiding word of the coming revolution, without which it will fail in its historic mission: the complete expropriation of all those who have the means of exploiting human beings; the return to the community of the nation of everything that in the hands of anyone can be used to exploit others." [Op. Cit., pp. 207-8]*

Strange words if Marxist assertions were true. As can be seen, Kropotkin is simply following Bakunin's ideas on the matter. He, like Bakunin, was well aware of the evils of capitalism and that the state protects these evils:

*"When a workman sells his labour to an employer and knows perfectly well that some part of the value of his produce will be unjustly taken by the employer; when he sells it without even the slightest guarantee of being employed so much as six consecutive months, it is a sad mockery to call that a free contract. . . As long as three-quarters of humanity are*

*compelled to enter into agreements of that description, force is of course necessary, both to enforce the supposed agreements and to maintain such a state of things. Force -- and a great deal of force -- is necessary to prevent the labourers from taking possession of what they consider unjustly appropriated by the few; and force is necessary to continually bring new 'uncivilised nations' under the same conditions."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 69]

Little wonder he called anarchism *"the no-government system of socialism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 46] For Kropotkin, the *"State is there to protect exploitation, speculation and private property; it is itself the by-product of the rapine of the people. The proletariat must rely on his own hands; he can expect nothing of the State. It is nothing more than an organisation devised to hinder emancipation at all costs."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 27] Rather than see the state as the main evil, he clearly saw it as the protector of capitalism -- in other words, as one aspect of a class system which needed to be replaced by a better society.

Similarly with all other anarchists. Emma Goldman, for example, summarised for all anarchists when she argued that anarchism *"stands for . . . the liberation of the human body from the domination of property; liberation from the shackles and restraint of government."* [**Anarchism and Other Essays**, p. 62] Errico Malatesta in the *"Anarchist Programme"* he drafted listed *"Abolition of private property"* before *"Abolition of government"* and argued that *"the present state of society"* was one in *"which some have inherited the land and all social wealth, while the mass of the people, disinherited in all respects, is exploited and oppressed by a small possessing class."* It ends by arguing that anarchism wants *"the complete destruction of the domination and exploitation of man by man"* and for *"expropriation of landowners and capitalists for the benefit of all; and the abolition of government."* [**Life and Ideas**, p. 184, p. 183, p. 197 and p. 198] Nearly three decades previously, we find Malatesta arguing the same idea. As he put it in 1891, anarchists *"struggle for anarchy, and for socialism, because we believe that anarchy and socialism must be realised immediately, that is to say that in the revolutionary act we must drive government away, abolish property . . . human progress is measured by the extent government power and private property are reduced."* [**Anarchy**, pp. 53-4] He stressed that, for *"all anarchists,"* it was definitely a case that the *"abolition of political power is not possible without the simultaneous destruction of economic privilege."* [**Life and Ideas**, p. 158]

As Brian Morris correctly summarises:

*"Another criticism of anarchism is that it has a narrow view of politics: that it sees the state as the fount of all evil, ignoring other aspects of social and economic life. This is a misrepresentation of anarchism. It partly derives from the way anarchism has been defined, and partly because Marxist historians have tried to exclude anarchism from the broader socialist movement. But when one examines the writings of classical anarchists. . . as well as the character of anarchist movements. . . it is clearly evident that it has never had this limited vision. It has always challenged all forms of authority and exploitation, and has been equally critical of capitalism and religion as it has been of the state."* [*"Anthropology and Anarchism,"* **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed**, no. 45,

p, p. 40]

All in all, Marxist claims that anarchists view the state as the "*chief evil*" or see the destruction of the state as the "*main idea*" of anarchism are simply talking nonsense. In fact, rather than anarchists having a narrow view of social liberation, it is, in fact, Marxists who do so. By concentrating almost exclusively on the (economic) class source of exploitation, they blind themselves to other forms of exploitation and domination that can exist independently of economic class relationships. This can be seen from the amazing difficulty that many of them got themselves into when trying to analyse the Stalinist regime in Russia. Anarchists are well aware that the state is just one aspect of the current class system. We just recognise that all the evils of that system must be destroyed at the same time to ensure a **social** revolution rather than just a change in who the boss is.

## H.2.5 Do anarchists think "*full blown*" socialism will be created overnight?

Another area in which Marxists misrepresent anarchism is in the assertion that anarchists believe a completely socialist society (an ideal or "*utopian*" society, in other words) can be created "*overnight*." As Marxist Bertell Ollman puts it, "*[u]nlike anarcho-communists, none of us [Marxists] believe that communism will emerge full blown from a socialist revolution. Some kind of transition and period of indeterminate length for it to occur are required.*" [Bertell Ollman (ed.), **Market Socialism: The Debate among Socialists**, p. 177] This assertion, while it is common, fails to understand the anarchist vision of revolution. We consider it a **process** and not an event -- as Malatesta argued, "*[b]y revolution we do not mean just the insurrectionary act.*" [**Life and Ideas**, p. 156]

Once this is understood, the idea that anarchists think a "*full blown*" anarchist society will be created "*overnight*" is a fallacy. As Murray Bookchin pointed out, "*Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta were not so naive as to believe that anarchism could be established overnight. In imputing this notion to Bakunin, Marx and Engels wilfully distorted the Russian anarchist's views.*" [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 213]

Indeed, Kropotkin stressed that anarchists "*do not believe that in any country the Revolution will be accomplished at a stroke, in the twinkling of a eye, as some socialists dream.*" Moreover, "*[n]o fallacy more harmful has ever been spread than the fallacy of a 'One-day Revolution.'*" [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 81] Bakunin argued that a "*more or less prolonged transitional period*" would "*naturally follow in the wake of the great social crisis*" implied by social revolution. [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 412] The question, therefore, is not whether there will be a "*transitional*" society after a revolution but what **kind** of transition will it be.

As such, anarchists are aware that a "*full blown*" communist society will not come about immediately. Rather, the creation of such a society will be a **process** which the revolution will start off. As Alexander Berkman put it, "*you must not confuse the social revolution with anarchy. Revolution, in some of its stages, is a violent upheaval; anarchy is a social condition of freedom and peace. The revolution is the*

*means of bringing anarchy about but it is not anarchy itself. It is to pave the road for anarchy, to establish condition which will make a life of liberty possible.*" However, the *"end shapes the means"* and so *"to achieve its purpose the revolution must be imbued with and directed by the anarchist spirit and ideas . . . the social revolution must be anarchist in method as in aim."* [**ABC of Anarchism**, p. 81]

In his classic introduction to anarcho-communist ideas, Alexander Berkman also acknowledged that *"full blown"* communism was not likely after a successful revolution. *"Of course,"* he argued, "when the social revolution has become thoroughly organised and production is functioning normally there will be enough for everybody. But in the first stages of the revolution, during the process of re-construction, we must take care to supply the people as best we can, and equally, which means rationing." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 67] Clearly, in such circumstances *"full blown"* communism would be impossible and, unsurprisingly, Berkman argues that would not exist. However, the principles that inspire communism and anarchism could be applied immediately. This meant that both the state and capitalism would be abolished. While arguing that *"[t]here is no other way of securing economic equality, which alone is liberty"* than communist anarchism, he also states that it is *"likely . . . that a country in social revolution may try various economic experiments . . . different countries and regions will probably try out various methods, and by practical experience learn the best way. The revolution is at the same time the opportunity and justification for it . . ."* Rather than dictate to the future, Berkman argued that his *"purpose is to suggest, in board outline the principles which must animate the revolution, the general lines of action it should follow if it is to accomplish its aim -- the reconstruction of society on a foundation of freedom and equality."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 80]

As regards Malatesta, he argued along similar lines. While arguing for the *"complete destruction of the domination and exploitation of man by man"* by the *"expropriation of landlords and capitalists for the benefit of all"* and *"the abolition of government,"* he recognised that in *"the post-revolutionary period, in the period of reorganisation and transition, there might be 'offices for the concentration and distribution of the capital of collective enterprises', that there might or might not be titles recording the work done and the quantity of goods to which one is entitled."* However, he stressed that this *"is something we shall have to wait and see about, or rather, it is a problem which will have many and varied solutions according to the system of production and distribution which will prevail in the different localities and among the many . . . groupings that will exist."* He argued that while, eventually, all groups of workers (particularly the peasants) while eventually *"understand the advantages of communism or at least of the direct exchange of goods for goods,"* this may not happen *"in a day."* If some kind of money was used, then it people should *"ensure that [it] truly represents the useful work performed by its possessors"* rather than being *"a powerful means of exploitation and oppression"* is currently is. [**Life and Ideas**, pp. 198-9 and pp. 100-1]

Rather than seeing a *"full blown"* communist society appearing instantly from a revolution, anarcho-communists see a period of transition in which the degree of communism in a given community or area is dependent on the objective conditions facing it. This period of transition would see different forms of social experimentation but the desire is to see libertarian communist principles as the basis of as much of this experimentation as possible. To claim that anarcho-communists ignore reality and see communism as being created overnight is simply a distortion of their ideas. Rather, they are aware that the



development towards communism is dependent on local conditions, conditions which can only be overcome in time and by the liberated community re-organising production and extending it as required.

Clearly, our argument contradicts the widely held view that anarchists believed an utopian world would be created instantly after a revolution. Of course, by asserting that anarchists think "*full blown communism*" will occur without some form of transitional period, Marxists paint a picture of anarchism as simply utopian, a theory which ignores objective reality in favour of wishful thinking. However, as seen above, such is not the case. Anarchists are aware that "*full blown communism*" is dependent on objective conditions and, therefore, cannot be implemented until those conditions are met. Until such time as the objective conditions are reached, various means of distributing goods, organising and managing production, and so on will be tried. Such schemes will be based as far as possible on communistic principles.

Therefore, immediately after a successful revolution a period of reconstruction will begin in which society is slowly transformed towards "*full blown*" communism. The speed and nature of this transformation will, of course, depend on local conditions and needs. However, unlike Marxists, such a period of transition would be based on libertarian and communist principles. The organisation of society would be anarchist -- the state would be abolished and replaced by a free federation of workers and community associations. The economic structure would be socialist -- production would be based on self-managed workplaces and the principles of distribution would be as communistic as possible under the existing objective conditions.

It also seems strange for Marxists to claim that anarchists thought a "*full blown*" communist society was possible "*over-night*" given that anarchists had always stressed the difficulties facing a social revolution. Kropotkin, for example, continually stressed that a revolution would face extensive economic disruption. In his words:

*"A political revolution can be accomplished without shaking the foundations of industry, but a revolution where the people lay hands upon property will inevitably paralyse exchange and production . . . This point cannot be too much insisted upon; the reorganisation of industry on a new basis . . . cannot be accomplished in a few days; nor, on the other hand, will people submit to be half starved for years in order to oblige the theorists who uphold the wage system. To tide over the period of stress they will demand what they have always demanded in such cases -- communisation of supplies -- the giving of rations."* [The Conquest of Bread, pp. 72-3]

The basic principles of this "transition" period would, therefore, be based on the "*socialising of production, consumption and exchange.*" The state would be abolished and "*federated Communes*" would be created. The end of capitalism would be achieved by the "*expropriation*" of "*everything that enables any man -- be he financier, mill-owner, or landlord - - to appropriate the product of others' toil.*" Distribution of goods would be based on "*no stint or limit to what the community possesses in abundance, but equal sharing and dividing of those commodities which are scarce or apt to run*

*short.*" [Op. Cit., p. 136, p. 61 and p. 76] Clearly, while not "full blown" communism by any means, such a regime does lay the ground for its eventual arrival. As Max Nettlau summarised, "[n]othing but a superficial interpretation of some of Kropotkin's observations could lead one to conclude that anarchist communism could spring into life through an act of sweeping improvisation, with the waving of a magic wand." [A Short History of Anarchism, p. 80]

This was what happened in the Spanish Revolution, for example. Different collectives operated in different ways. Some tried to introduce free communism, some a combination of rationing and communism, others introduced equal pay, others equalised pay as much as possible and so on. Over time, as economic conditions changed and difficulties developed the collectives changed their mode of distribution to take them into account. These collectives indicate well the practical aspects of anarchist and its desire to accommodate and not ignore reality.

Lastly, and as an aside, it this anarchist awareness of the disruptive effects of a revolution on a country's economy which, in part, makes anarchists extremely sceptical of pro-Bolshevik rationales that blame the difficult economic conditions facing the Russian Revolution for Bolshevik authoritarianism (see the appendix on ["What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?"](#) for a fuller discussion of this). If, as Kropotkin argued, a social revolution inevitably results in massive economic disruption then, clearly, Bolshevism should be avoided if it cannot handle such inevitable events. In such circumstances, centralisation would only aid the disruption, not reduce it. This awareness of the problems facing a social revolution also led anarchists to stress the importance of local action and mass participation. As Kropotkin put it, the "immense constructive work demanded by a social revolution cannot be accomplished by a central government . . . It has need of knowledge, of brains and of the voluntary collaboration of a host of local and specialised forces which alone can attack the diversity of economic problems in their local aspects." [Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets, pp. 255-6] Without this local action, co-ordinated joint activity would remain a dead letter.

In summary, anarchists acknowledge that **politically** there is no transitional period (i.e. the state must be abolished and replaced by a free federation of self-managed working class organisations). Economically anarchists recognise that different areas will develop in different ways and so there will be various economical transitional forms. Rather than seeing "full blown communism" being the instant result of a socialist revolution, anarchist-communists actually argue the opposite -- "full blown communism" will develop only after a successful revolution and the inevitable period of social reconstruction which comes after it. A "full blown" communist economy will develop as society becomes ready for it. What we **do** argue is that any transitional economic form must be based on the principles of the type of society it desires. In other words, any transitional period must be as communistic as possible if communism is your final aim and, equally, it must be libertarian if your final goal is freedom.

Also see [section I.2.2](#) for further discussion on this issue.

## H.2.6 How do Marxists misrepresent Anarchist ideas on mutual aid?

Anarchist ideas on mutual aid are often misrepresented by Marxists. Looking at Pat Stack's "*Anarchy in the UK?*" article, for example, we find a particularly terrible misrepresentation of Kropotkin's ideas. Indeed, it is so incorrect that it is either a product of ignorance or a desire to deceive (and as we shall indicate, it is probably the latter). Here is Stack's account of Kropotkin's ideas:

*"And the anarchist Peter Kropotkin, far from seeing class conflict as the dynamic for social change as Marx did, saw co-operation being at the root of the social process. He believed the co-operation of what he termed 'mutual aid' was the natural order, which was disrupted by centralised states. Indeed in everything from public walkways and libraries through to the Red Cross, Kropotkin felt he was witnessing confirmation that society was moving towards his mutual aid, prevented only from completing the journey by the state. It follows that if class conflict is not the motor of change, the working class is not the agent and collective struggle not the means."* ["*Anarchy in the UK?*", **Socialist Review**, no. 246]

There are three issues with Stack's summary. Firstly, Kropotkin did not, in fact, reject class conflict as the "*dynamic of social change*" nor reject the working class as its "*agent*." Secondly, all of Stack's examples of "*Mutual Aid*" do not, in fact, appear in Kropotkin's classic book **Mutual Aid**. They do, however, appear in other works by Kropotkin's, but **not** as examples of "*mutual aid*." Thirdly, in **Mutual Aid** Kropotkin discusses such aspects of working class "*collective struggle*" as strikes and unions. All in all, it is Stack's total and utter lack of understanding of Kropotkin's ideas which immediately stands out from his comments.

As we have discussed how collective, working class direct action, organisation and solidarity in the class struggle was at the core of Kropotkin's politics in [section H.2.2](#), we will not do so here. Rather, we will discuss how Stack lies about Kropotkin's ideas on mutual aid. As just noted, the examples Stack lists are not to be found in Kropotkin's classic work **Mutual Aid**. Now, **if** Kropotkin **had** considered them as examples of "*mutual aid*" then he would have listed them in that work. This does not mean, however, that Kropotkin did not mention these examples. He does, but in other works (notably his essay **Anarchist Communism**) and he does **not** use them as examples of mutual aid. Just as Stack's examples are not mentioned in **Mutual Aid**, so Kropotkin fails to use the words "*mutual aid*" in his essay **Anarchist-Communism: Its Basis and Principles**. Here is Kropotkin's own words as regards Stack's "examples":

*"We maintain, moreover, not only that communism is a desirable state of society, but that the growing tendency of modern society is precisely towards communism -- free communism -- notwithstanding the seemingly contradictory growth of individualism. In the growth of individualism . . . we see merely the endeavours of the individual towards emancipating himself from the steadily growing powers of capital and the State. But side by side with this growth we see also . . . the latent struggle of the producers of wealth to maintain the partial communism of old, as well as to reintroduce communist principles in*

*a new shape, as soon as favourable conditions permit it. . . the communist tendency is continually reasserting itself and trying to make its way into public life. The penny bridge disappears before the public bridge; and the turnpike road before the free road. The same spirit pervades thousands of other institutions. Museums, free libraries, and free public schools; parks and pleasure grounds; paved and lighted streets, free for everybody's use; water supplied to private dwellings, with a growing tendency towards disregarding the exact amount of it used by the individual; tramways and railways which have already begun to introduce the season ticket or the uniform tax, and will surely go much further in this line when they are no longer private property: all these are tokens showing in what direction further progress is to be expected.*

*"It is in the direction of putting the wants of the individual **above** the valuation of the service he has rendered, or might render, to society; in considering society as a whole, so intimately connected together that a service rendered to any individual is a service rendered to the whole society."* [Kropotkin's **Revolutionary Pamphlets**, pp. 59-60]

As is clear, the examples Stack selects have nothing to do with mutual aid in Kropotkin's eyes. Rather, they are examples of communistic tendencies within capitalism, empirical evidence that can be used to not only show that communism can work but also that it is not a utopian social solution but an expression of tendencies within society. Simply put, he is using examples from existing society to show that communism is not impossible.

Similarly with Stack's other examples. Kropotkin argued that:

*"we are struck with the infinitesimal part played by government in our life. . . [A] striking feature of our century tells in favour of the . . . no-government tendency. It is the steady enlargement of the field covered by private initiative, and the recent growth of large organisations resulting merely and simply from free agreement. The railway net of Europe -- a confederation of so many scores of separate societies -- and the direct transport of passengers and merchandise over so many lines which were built independently and federated together, without even so much as a Central Board of European Railways, is a most striking instance of what is already done by mere agreement. . . .*

*"But there also is no lack of free organisations for nobler pursuits. One of the noblest achievements of our century is undoubtedly the Lifeboat Association. . . . The Hospitals Association and hundreds of like organisations, operating on a large scale and covering each a wide field, may also be mentioned under this head. . . hundreds of societies are constituted every day for the satisfaction of some of the infinitely varied needs of civilised man. . . in short, there is not a single direction in which men exercise their faculties without combining together for the accomplishment of some common aim. Every day new societies are formed, while every year the old ones aggregate together into larger units, federate across the national frontiers, and co-operate in some common work. . . One of*

*the most remarkable societies which has recently arisen is undoubtedly the Red Cross Society . . .*

*"These facts -- so numerous and so customary that we pass by without even noticing them -- are in our opinion one of the most prominent features of the second half of the nineteenth century. The just-mentioned organisms grew up so naturally, they so rapidly extended and so easily aggregated together, they are such unavoidable outgrowths of the multiplication of needs of the civilised man, and they so well replace State interference, that we must recognise in them a growing factor of our life. Modern progress is really towards the free aggregation of free individuals so as to supplant government in all those functions which formerly were entrusted to it, and which it mostly performed so badly." [Op. Cit., pp. 65-7]*

As is clear, Kropotkin was using these examples **not** as expressions of "*mutual aid*" but rather as evidence that social life can be organised without government. Just as with communism, he gave concrete examples of libertarian tendencies within society to prove the possibility of an anarchist society. And just like his examples of communistic activities within capitalism, his examples of co-operation without the state are not listed as examples of "*mutual aid*."

All this would suggest that Stack has either not read Kropotkin's works or that he has and consciously decided to misrepresent his ideas. In fact, its a combination of the two. Stack (as proven by his talk at **Marxism 2001**) gathered his examples of "*mutual aid*" from Paul Avrich's essay "*Kropotkin's Ethical Anarchism*" contained in his **Anarchist Portraits**. As such, he has not read the source material. Moreover, he simply distorted what Avrich wrote. In other words, not only has he not read Kropotkin's works, he consciously decided to misrepresent the secondary source he used. This indicates the quality of almost all Marxist critiques of anarchism.

For example, Avrich correctly notes that Kropotkin did not "*deny that the 'struggle for existence' played an important role in the evolution of species. In Mutual Aid he declares unequivocally that 'life is struggle; and in that struggle the fittest survive.'*" Kropotkin simply argued that co-operation played a key role in determining who was, in fact, the fittest. Similarly, Avrich lists many of the same examples Stack presents but not in his discussion of Kropotkin's ideas on mutual aid. Rather, he correctly lists them in his discussion of how Kropotkin saw examples of anarchist communism in modern society and was "*manifesting itself 'in the thousands of developments of modern life.'*" This did not mean that Kropotkin did not see the need for a social revolution, quite the reverse. As Avrich notes, Kropotkin "*did not shrink from the necessity of revolution*" as he "*did not expect the propertied classes to give up their privileges and possession without a fight.*" This "*was to be a social revolution, carried out by the masses themselves*" achieved by means of "*expropriation*" of social wealth. [Paul Avrich, **Anarchist Portraits**, p. 58, p. 62 and p. 66]

So much for Stack's claims. As can be seen, they are not only a total misrepresentation of Kropotkin's work, they are also a distortion of his source!

A few more points need to be raised on this subject.

Firstly, Kropotkin never claimed that mutual aid "*was the natural order.*" Rather, he stressed that Mutual Aid was (to use the subtitle of his book on the subject) "*a factor of evolution.*" Never denying the importance of struggle or competition as a means of survival, he argued that co-operation within a species was the best means for it to survive in a hostile environment. This applied to life under capitalism. In the hostile environment of class society, then the only way in which working class people could survive would be to practice mutual aid (in other words, solidarity). Little wonder, then, that Kropotkin listed strikes and unions as expressions of mutual aid in capitalist society. Moreover, if we take Stack's arguments at face value, then he clearly is arguing that solidarity is not an important factor in the class struggle and that mutual aid and co-operation cannot change the world! Hardly what you would expect a socialist to argue. In other words, his inaccurate diatribe against Kropotkin backfires on his own ideas.

Secondly, Stack's argument that Kropotkin argued that co-operation was the natural order is in contradiction with his other claims that anarchism "*despises the collectivity*" and "*dismiss[es] the importance of the collective nature of change.*" How can you have co-operation without forming a collective? And, equally, surely support for co-operation clearly implies the recognition of the "*collective nature of change*"? Moreover, if Stack had bothered to **read** Kropotkin's classic he would have been aware that he listed both unions and strikes as expressions of "*mutual aid*" (a fact, of course, which would undermine Stack's argument that anarchists reject collective working class struggle and organisation).

Thirdly, **Mutual Aid** is primarily a work of popular science and not a work on revolutionary anarchist theory like, say, **The Conquest of Bread** or **Words of a Rebel**. As such, it does not present a full example of Kropotkin's revolutionary ideas and how mutual aid fits into them. However, it does present some insights on the question of social progress which indicate that he did not think that "*co-operation*" was "*at the root of the social process,*" as Stack claims. For example, he notes that "*[w]hen Mutual Aid institutions . . . began . . . to lose their primitive character, to be invaded by parasitic growths, and thus to become hindrances to process, the revolt of individuals against these institutions took always two different aspects. Part of those who rose up strove to purify the old institutions, or to work out a higher form of commonwealth.*" But at the same time, others "*endeavoured to break down the protective institutions of mutual support, with no other intention but to increase their own wealth and their own powers.*" In this conflict "*lies the real tragedy of history.*" He also noted that the mutual aid tendency "*continued to live in the villages and among the poorer classes in the towns.*" Indeed, "*in so far as*" as new "*economical and social institutions*" were "*a creation of the masses*" they "*have all originated from the same source*" of mutual aid. [**Mutual Aid**, pp. 18-9 and p. 180]

Kropotkin was well aware that mutual aid (or solidarity) could not be applied between classes in a class society. Indeed, his chapters on mutual aid under capitalism contain the strike and union. As he put it in an earlier work:

*"What solidarity can exist between the capitalist and the worker he exploits? Between the head of an army and the soldier? Between the governing and the governed?" [Words of a Rebel, p. 30]*

In summary, Stack's assertions about Kropotkin's theory of *"Mutual Aid"* are simply false. He simply distorts the source material and shows a total ignorance of Kropotkin's work (which he obviously has not bothered to read before criticising it). A truthful account of *"Mutual Aid"* would involve recognising that Kropotkin show it being expressed in both strikes and labour unions and that he saw solidarity between working people as the means of not only surviving within the hostile environment of capitalism but also as the basis of a mass revolution which would end it.

## H.2.7 Who do anarchists see as their *"agents of social change"*?

It is often charged, usually without any evidence, that anarchists do not see the working class as the *"agent"* of the social revolution. Pat Stack, for example, states *"the failure of anarchism [is] to understand the centrality of the working class itself."* He argues that for Marx, *"the working class would change the world and in the process change itself. It would become the agent for social advance and human liberty."* For Bakunin, however, *"skilled artisans and organised factory workers, far from being the source of the destruction of capitalism, were 'tainted by pretensions and aspirations'. Instead Bakunin looked to those cast aside by capitalism, those most damaged, brutalised and marginalised. The lumpen proletariat, the outlaws, the 'uncivilised, disinherited, illiterate', as he put it, would be his agents for change."* [*Anarchy in the UK?*", **Socialist Review**, no. 246] He fails to provide any references for his accusations. This is unsurprising, as to do so would mean that the reader could check for themselves the validity of Stack's claims.

Take, for example, the quote *"uncivilised, disinherited, illiterate"* Stack uses as evidence. This expression is from an essay written by Bakunin in 1872 and which expressed what he considered the differences between his ideas and those of Marx. The quote can be found on page 294 of **Bakunin on Anarchism**. On the previous page, we discover Bakunin arguing that *"for the International to be a real power, it must be able to organise within its ranks the immense majority of the proletariat of Europe, of America, of all lands."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 293] This is the context in which Bakunin made the comments Stack quotes. As such, he clearly is quoting out of context in terms of Bakunin's article. Moreover, as we will indicate, Stack's also quotes them outside the historical context as well as Bakunin's ideas taken as a whole.

Let us begin with Bakunin's views on *"skilled artisans and organised factory workers."* In **Statism and Anarchy**, for example, we discover Bakunin arguing that the *"proletariat . . . must enter the International [Workers' Association] en masse, form factory, artisan, and agrarian sections, and unite them into local federations"* for *"the sake of its own liberation."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 51] This perspective is the predominant one in Bakunin's ideas. For example, he argued that anarchists saw *"the new social order"* being *"attained . . . through the social (and therefore anti-political) organisation and*

*power of the working masses of the cities and villages."* He argued that *"only the trade union sections can give their members . . . practical education and consequently only they can draw into the organisation of the International the masses of the proletariat, those masses without whose practical co-operation . . . the Social Revolution will never be able to triumph."* The International, in Bakunin's words, *"organises the working masses . . . from the bottom up"* and that this was *"the proper aim of the organisation of trade union sections."* He stressed that revolutionaries must *"[o]rganise the city proletariat in the name of revolutionary Socialism . . . [and] unite it into one preparatory organisation together with the peasantry."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 300, p. 310, p. 319 and p. 378]

This support for organised workers and artisans can also be seen from the rest of the essay in which Bakunin discusses the *"flower of the proletariat."* He goes on to discuss the policy that the **International Workingmen's Association** should follow (i.e. the organised revolutionary workers). He argued that its *"sections and federations [must be] free to develop its own policies . . . [to] attain real unity, basically economic, which will necessarily lead to real political unity . . . The foundation for the unity of the International . . . has already been laid by the common sufferings, interests, needs, and real aspirations of the workers of the whole world."* He stressed that *"the International has been . . . the work of the proletariat itself. . . It was their keen and profound instinct as workers . . . which impelled them to find the principle and true purpose of the International. They took the common needs already in existence as the foundation and saw the **international organisation of economic conflict against capitalism** as the true objective of this association. In giving it exclusively this base and aim, the workers at once established the entire power of the International. They opened wide the gates to all the millions of the oppressed and exploited."* The International, as well as *"organising local, national and international strikes"* and *"establishing national and international trade unions,"* would discuss *"political and philosophical questions."* The workers *"join the International for one very practical purpose: solidarity in the struggle for full economic rights against the oppressive exploitation by the bourgeoisie."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 297-8, pp. 298-9 and pp. 301-2]

All this, needless to say, makes a total mockery of Stack's claim that Bakunin did not see *"skilled artisans and organised factory workers"* as *"the source of the destruction of capitalism"* and *"agents for change."* Indeed, it is hard to find a greater distortion of Bakunin's ideas. Rather than dismiss *"skilled artisans"* and *"organised factory workers"* Bakunin desired to organise them along with agricultural workers into unions and get these unions to affiliate to the **International Workers' Association**. He argued again and again that the working class, organised in workers associations, were the means of making a revolution (i.e. *"the source of the destruction of capitalism,"* to quote Stack).

Only in **this** context can we understand Bakunin's comments as any apparent contradiction generated by quoting out of context is quickly solved by looking at Bakunin's work. This reference to the *"uncivilised, disinherited, illiterate"* comes from a polemic against Marx. From the context, it can quickly be seen that by these terms Bakunin meant the bulk of the working class. In his words:

*"To me the flower of the proletariat is not, as it is to the Marxists, the upper layer, the aristocracy of labour, those who are the most cultured, who earn more and live more comfortably than all the other workers. Precisely this semi-bourgeois layer of workers*



would, if the Marxists had their way, constitute their **fourth governing class**. This could indeed happen if the great mass of the proletariat does not guard against it. By virtue of its relative well-being and semi-bourgeois position, this upper layer of workers is unfortunately only too deeply saturated with all the political and social prejudices and all the narrow aspirations and pretensions of the bourgeoisie. Of all the proletariat, this upper layer is the least socialist, the most individualist.

*"By the **flower of the proletariat**, I mean above all that great mass, those millions of the uncultivated, the disinherited, the miserable, the illiterates . . . I mean precisely that eternal 'meat' (on which governments thrive), that great **rabble of the people** (underdogs, 'dregs of society') ordinarily designated by Marx and Engels by the phrase . . . Lumpenproletariat" [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 294]*

Thus Bakunin contrasted a "semi-bourgeois" layer to the "great mass of the proletariat." In a later work, **Statism and Anarchy**, Bakunin makes the same point. He argues there was "a special category of relatively affluent workers, earning higher wages, boasting of their literary capacities and . . . impregnated by a variety of bourgeois prejudices . . . in Italy . . . they are insignificant in number and influence . . . In Italy it is the extremely poor proletariat that predominates. Marx speaks disdainfully, but quite unjustly, of this **Lumpenproletariat**. For in them, and only in them, and not in the bourgeois strata of workers, are there crystallised the entire intelligence and power of the coming Social Revolution." [Op. Cit., p. 334] Again it is clear that Bakunin is referring to a small minority within the working class and **not** dismissing the working class as a whole. He explicitly pointed to the "**bourgeois-influenced minority of the urban proletariat**" and contrasted this minority to "the mass of the proletariat, both rural and urban." [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 254]

Clearly, Stack is distorting Bakunin's ideas on this subject when he claims that Bakunin thought **all** workers were "tainted by pretensions and aspirations." In fact, like Marx, Engels and Lenin, Bakunin differentiated between different types of workers. This did not mean he rejected organised workers or skilled artisans nor the organisation of working people into revolutionary unions, quite the reverse. As can be seen, Bakunin argued there was a group of workers who accepted bourgeois society and did relatively well under it. It was **these** workers who were "frequently no less egoistic than bourgeois exploiters, no less pernicious to the International than bourgeois socialists, and no less vain and ridiculous than bourgeois nobles." [The Basic Bakunin, p. 108] It is comments like this that Marxists quote out of context and use for their claims that Bakunin did not see the working class as the agent of social change. However, rather than refer to the whole working class, Stack quotes Bakunin's thoughts in relation to a minority strata within it. Clearly, from the context, Bakunin **did not** mean **all** working class people.

Also, let us not forget the historical context. After all, when Bakunin was writing, the vast majority of the working population across the world was, in fact, illiterate and disinherited. To get some sort of idea of the numbers of working people who would have been classed as "the uncultivated, the disinherited, the miserable, the illiterates" we have to provide some numbers. In Spain, for example, "in 1870, something like 60 per cent of the population was illiterate." [Gerald Brenan, **The Spanish Labyrinth**, p.

50] In Russia, in 1897 (i.e. 21 years after Bakunin's death), *"only 21% of the total population of European Russia was literate. This was mainly because of the appallingly low rate of literacy in the countryside -- 17% compared to 45% in the towns."* [S.A. Smith, **Red Petrograd**, p. 34] Stack, in effect, is excluding the majority of the working masses from the working class movement **and** the revolution in the 1860-70s by his comments. Little wonder Bakunin said what he said. By ignoring the historical context (as he ignores the context of Bakunin's comments), Stack misleads the reader and presents a distinctly distorted picture of Bakunin's thought.

In other words, Bakunin's comments on the *"flower of the proletariat"* apply to the majority of the working class during his lifetime and for a number of decades afterwards and **not** to an underclass, not to what Marx termed the "lumpenproletariat". As proven above, Bakunin's idea of what the *"lumpenproletariat"* is not what Marxists mean by the term. If Bakunin had meant the same as Marx by the "lumpenproletariat" then this would not make sense as the "lumpenproletariat" for Marx were not wage workers. This can best be seen when he argues that the International must organise this *"flower of the proletariat"* and conduct economic collective struggle against the capitalist class. In his other works (and in the specific essay these quotes are derived from) Bakunin stressed the need to organise all workers and peasants into unions to fight the state and bosses and his arguments that workers associations should not only be the means to fight capitalism but also the framework of an anarchist society. Clearly, Sam Dolgoff's summary of Bakunin's ideas on this subject is the correct one:

*"Bakunin's Lumpenproletariat . . . was broader than Marx's, since it included all the submerged classes: unskilled, unemployed, and poor workers, poor peasant proprietors, landless agricultural labourers, oppressed racial minorities, alienated and idealistic youth, declassé intellectuals, and 'bandits' (by whom Bakunin meant insurrectionary 'Robin Hoods' like Pugachev, Stenka Razin, and the Italian Carbonari)." ["Introduction", **Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 13-4]*

Nor is Stack the only anarchist to make such arguments as regards Bakunin. Paul Thomas quotes Bakunin arguing that the working class *"remains socialist without knowing it"* because of *"the very force of its position"* and *"all the conditions of its material existence"* and then, incredulously, adds that *"[i]t is for this reason that Bakunin turned away from the proletariat and its scientific socialism"* towards the peasantry. [**Karl Marx and the Anarchists**, p. 291] A more distorted account of Bakunin's ideas would be hard to find (and there is a lot of competition for that particular honour). The quotes Thomas provides are from Bakunin's *"The Policy of the International"* in which he discusses his ideas on how the International Working-Men's Association should operate (namely *"the collective struggle of the workers against the bosses"*). At the time (and for some time after) Bakunin called himself a revolutionary socialist and argued that by class struggle, the worker would soon *"recognise himself [or herself] to be a revolutionary socialist, and he [or she] will act like one."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 103] As such, the argument that the social position workers are placed makes them *"socialist without knowing"* does not, in fact, imply that Bakunin thought they would become Marxists (*"scientific socialism"*) and, therefore, he turned against them. Rather, it meant that, for Bakunin, anarchist ideas were a product of working class life and it was a case of turning instinctive feelings into conscious thought by collective struggle. As noted above, Bakunin did not *"turn away"* from these ideas nor the proletariat. Indeed, Bakunin held

to the importance of organising the proletariat (along with artisans and peasants) to the end of his life. Quite simply, Thomas is distorting Bakunin's ideas.

Lastly, we have to point out a certain irony (and hypocrisy) in Marxist attacks on Bakunin on this subject. This is because Marx, Engels and Lenin held similar views on the corrupted "*upper strata*" of the working class as Bakunin did. Indeed, Marxists have a specific term to describe this semi-bourgeois strata of workers, namely the "*labour aristocracy*." Marx, for example, talked about the trade unions in Britain being "*an aristocratic minority*" and the "*great mass of workers . . . has long been outside*" them (indeed, "*the most wretched mass has never belonged.*") [Marx-Engels, **Collected Works**, vol. 22, p. 614]

Engels also talked about "*a small, privileged, 'protected' minority*" within the working class, which he also called "*the working-class aristocracy*." [Op. Cit., vol. 27, p. 320 and p. 321] Lenin quotes him arguing that the "*English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois, so that this most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming at the possession of . . . a bourgeois proletariat alongside the bourgeoisie*." [quoted by Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 22, p. 283] Like Lenin, Engels explained this by the dominant position of Britain within the world market. Indeed, Lenin argued that "*a section of the British proletariat becomes bourgeois*." For Lenin, imperialist "*superprofits*" make it "**possible to bribe the labour leaders and the upper stratum of the labour aristocracy**." This "*stratum of workers-turned-bourgeois, or the labour aristocracy, who are quite philistine in their mode of life, in the size of their earnings and in their entire outlook . . . are the real agents of the bourgeoisie in the working-class movement, the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class*." [Op. Cit., p. 284 and p. 194]

As can be seen, this is similar to Bakunin's ideas and, ironically enough, nearly identical to Stack's distortion of those ideas (particularly in the case of Marx). However, only someone with a desire to lie would suggest that any of them dismissed the working class as their "*agent of change*" based on this selective quoting. Unfortunately, that is what Stack does with Bakunin. Ultimately, Stack's comments seem hypocritical in the extreme attacking Bakunin while remaining quiet on the near identical comments of his heroes.

All in all, once a historic and textual context is placed on Bakunin's words, it is clear which social class was considered as the social revolution's "*agents of change*": the working class (i.e. wage workers, artisans, peasants and so on). In this, other revolutionary anarchists follow him. For anarchists, the social revolution will be made by the working class. Ultimately, for anyone to claim that Bakunin, for any social anarchist, rejects the working class as an agent of social change simply shows their ignorance of the politics they are trying to attack.

## H.2.8 What is the relationship of anarchism to syndicalism?

One of the most common Marxist techniques when they discuss anarchism is to contrast the likes of Bakunin and Kropotkin to the revolutionary syndicalists. The argument runs along the lines that "classical" anarchism is individualistic and rejects working class organisation and power and

syndicalism is a step forward from it (i.e. a step closer to Marxism). Sadly, such arguments simply show the ignorance of the author rather than any form of factual basis. When the ideas of revolutionary anarchists like Bakunin and Kropotkin are compared to revolutionary syndicalism, the similarities are soon discovered.

This kind of argument can be found in Pat Stack's essay "*Anarchy in the UK?*" After totally distorting the ideas of anarchists like Bakunin and Kropotkin, Stack argues that anarcho-syndicalists "*tended to look to the spontaneity and anti-statism of anarchism, the economic and materialist analysis of Marxism, and the organisational tools of trade unionism. Practically every serious anarchist organisation came from or leant on this tradition . . . The huge advantage they had over other anarchists was their understanding of the power of the working class, the centrality of the point of production (the workplace) and the need for collective action.*" [Socialist Review, no. 246]

Given that Stack's claims that anarchists reject the "*need for collective action,*" do not understand "*the power of the working class*" and the "*centrality*" of the workplace are simply inventions, it would suggest that Stack's "*huge advantage*" does not, in fact, exist and is pure nonsense. Bakunin, Kropotkin and all revolutionary anarchists, as proven in [section H.2.2](#), already understood all this and based their politics on the need for collective working class struggle at the point of production. As such, by contrasting anarcho-syndicalism with anarchism (as expressed by the likes of Bakunin and Kropotkin) Stack simply shows his utter and total ignorance of his subject matter.

Moreover, if he bothered to read the works of the likes of Bakunin and Kropotkin he would discover that many of their ideas were identical to those of revolutionary syndicalism. For example, Bakunin argued that the "*organisation of the trade sections, their federation in the International, and their representation by Chambers of Labour, . . . [allow] the workers . . . [to] combin[e] theory and practice . . . [and] bear in themselves the living germs of **the social order**, which is to replace the bourgeois world. They are creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself.*" [quoted by Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 45] Like the syndicalists, he argued "*the natural organisation of the masses . . . is organisation based on the various ways that their various types of work define their day-to-day life; it is organisation by trade association*" and once "*every occupation . . . is represented within the International [Working-Men's Association], its organisation, the organisation of the masses of the people will be complete.*" Moreover, Bakunin stressed that the working class had "*but a single path, that of **emancipation through practical action** which meant '**workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses**' by '**trades-unions, organisation, and the federation of resistance funds**'*" [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 139 and p. 103]

Like the syndicalists, Bakunin stressed working class self-activity and control over the class struggle:

*"Toilers count no longer on anyone but yourselves. Do not demoralise and paralyse your growing strength by being duped into alliances with bourgeois Radicalism . . . Abstain from all participation in bourgeois Radicalism and organise outside of it the forces of the proletariat. The bases of this organisation are already completely given: they are the*

*workshops and the federation of workshops, the creation of fighting funds, instruments of struggle against the bourgeoisie, and their federation, not only national, but international.*

*"And when the hour of revolution sounds, you will proclaim the liquidation of the State and of bourgeois society, anarchy, that is to say the true, frank people's revolution . . . and the new organisation from below upwards and from the circumference to the centre."* [quoted by K.J. Kenafick, **Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx**, pp. 120-1]

This new society would be organised *"by free federation, from below upwards, of workers' associations, industrial as well as agricultural . . . in districts and municipalities at first; federation of these into regions, of the regions into nations, and the nations into a fraternal Internationalism."* Moreover, *"capital, factories, all the means of production and raw material"* would be owned by *"the workers' organisations"* while the land would be given *"to those who work it with their own hands."* [quoted by Kenafick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 241 and p. 240]

The similarities with revolutionary syndicalism could not be clearer. Little wonder that all serious historians see the obvious similarities between anarcho-syndicalism and Bakunin's anarchism. For example, George R. Esenwein's (in his study of early Spanish anarchism) comments that syndicalism *"had deep roots in the Spanish libertarian tradition. It can be traced to Bakunin's revolutionary collectivism."* He also notes that the class struggle was *"central to Bakunin's theory."* [**Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain, 1868-1898**, p. 209 and p. 20]

Caroline Cahm, likewise, points to *"the basic syndicalist ideas of Bakunin"* and that he *"argued that trade union organisation and activity in the International [Working Men's Association] were important in the building of working-class power in the struggle against capital . . . He also declared that trade union based organisation of the International would not only guide the revolution but also provide the basis for the organisation of the society of the future."* Indeed, he *"believed that trade unions had an essential part to play in the developing of revolutionary capacities of the workers as well as building up the organisation of the masses for revolution."* [**Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism**, p. 219, p. 215 and p. 216]

Paul Avrich, in his essay *"The Legacy of Bakunin,"* agrees. *"Bakunin,"* he argued, *"perhaps even more than Proudhon, was a prophet of revolutionary syndicalism, who believed that a free federation of trade unions would be the 'living germs of a new social order which is to replace the bourgeois world.'"* [**Anarchist Portraits**, pp. 14-15] Bertrand Russell (in his justly famous discussion of socialism, anarchism and syndicalism) noted that *"[h]ardly any of these ideas [associated with syndicalism] are new: almost all are derived from the Bakunist [sic!] section of the old International"* and that this was *"often recognised by Syndicalists themselves."* [**Roads to Freedom**, p. 52]

Needless to say, anarchists agree with this perspective. Arthur Lehning, for example, summarises the anarchist perspective when he commented that *"Bakunin's collectivist anarchism . . . ultimately formed the ideological and theoretical basis of anarcho-syndicalism."* [*"Introduction"*, **Michael Bakunin:**

**Selected Writings**, p. 29] Kropotkin argued that syndicalism "*is nothing other than the rebirth of the International -- federalist, worker, Latin.*" [quoted by Martin A. Miller, **Kropotkin**, p. 176] Malatesta stated in 1907 that he had "*never ceased to urge the comrades into that direction which the syndicalists, forgetting the past, call new, even though it was already glimpsed and followed, in the International, by the first of the anarchists.*" [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 221] Little wonder that Rudolf Rocker stated the following in his classic introduction to anarcho-syndicalism:

*"Modern Anarcho-syndicalism is a direct continuation of those social aspirations which took shape in the bosom of the First International and which were best understood and most strongly held by the libertarian wing of the great workers' alliance."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 49]

Murray Bookchin just states the obvious:

*"Long before syndicalism became a popular term in the French labour movement of the late [eighteen]nineties, it already existed in the Spanish labour movement of the early seventies. The anarchist-influenced Spanish Federation of the old IWMA was . . . distinctly syndicalist."* ["Looking Back at Spain," pp. 53-96, **The Radical Papers**, p. 67]

Perhaps, in the face of such evidence (and the writings of Bakunin himself), Marxists could claim that the sources we quote are either anarchists or "sympathetic" to anarchism. To counter this is very easy, we need only quote Marx and Engels. Marx attacked Bakunin for thinking that the "*working class . . . must only organise themselves by trades- unions*" and "*not occupy itself with politics.*" Engels argued along the same lines, having a go at the anarchists because in the "*Bakuninist programme a general strike is the lever employed by which the social revolution is started*" and that they admitted "*this required a well-formed organisation of the working class*" (i.e. a trade union federation). Indeed, he summarised Bakunin's strategy as being to "*organise, and when all the workers, hence the majority, are won over, dispose all the authorities, abolish the state and replace it with the organisation of the International.*" [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 48, p. 132, p. 133 and p. 72] Ignoring the misrepresentations of Marx and Engels about the ideas of their enemies, we can state that they got the basic point of Bakunin's ideas -- the centrality of trade union organisation and struggle as well as the use of strikes and the general strike. Therefore, you do not have to read Bakunin to find out the similarities between his ideas and syndicalism, you can read Marx and Engels. Clearly, most Marxist critiques of anarchism haven't even done that!

Latter anarchists, needless to say, supported the syndicalist movement and, moreover, drew attention to its anarchist roots. Emma Goldman noted that in the First International "*Bakunin and the Latin workers*" forged ahead "*along industrial and Syndicalist lines*" and stated that syndicalism "*is, in essence, the economic expression of Anarchism*" and that "*accounts for the presence of so many Anarchists in the Syndicalist movement. Like Anarchism, Syndicalism prepares the workers along direct economic lines, as conscious factors in the great struggles of to-day, as well as conscious factors in the task of reconstructing society.*" After seeing syndicalist ideas in action in France in 1900, she "*immediately*

*began to propagate Syndicalist ideas."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 66, p. 68 and p. 67]

Kropotkin argued anarchist communism "*wins more and more ground among those working-men who try to get a clear conception as to the forthcoming revolutionary action. The syndicalist and trade union movements, which permit the workingmen to realise their solidarity and to feel the community of their interests better than any election, prepare the way for these conceptions.*" [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 174] His support for anarchist participation in the labour movement was strong, considering it a key method of preparing for a revolution and spreading anarchist ideas amongst the working classes. As he put it:

*"The syndicat is absolutely necessary. It is the sole force of the workers which continues the direct struggle against capital without turning to parliamentarism."* [quoted by Miller, **Op. Cit.**, p. 177]

*"Revolutionary Anarchist Communist propaganda within the Labour Unions,"* he argued, *"had always been a favourite mode of action in the Federalist or 'Bakuninist' section of the International Working Men's Association. In Spain and in Italy it had been especially successful. Now it was resorted to, with evident success, in France and Freedom [the British Anarchist paper] eagerly advocated this sort of propaganda."* [**Act For Yourselves**, pp. 119-20] Caroline Cahm notes in her excellent account of Kropotkin's ideas between 1872 and 1886, he *"was anxious to revive the International as an organisation for aggressive strike action to counteract the influence of parliamentary socialists on the labour movement."* This resulted Kropotkin advocating a *"remarkable fusion of anarchist communist ideas with both the bakuninist [sic!] internationalist views adopted by the Spanish Federation and the syndicalist ideas developed in the Jura Federation in the 1870s."* This included seeing the importance of revolutionary labour unions, the value of the strikes as a mode of direct action and syndicalist action developing solidarity. [Cahm, **Op. Cit.**, p. 257]

Clearly, any one claiming that there is a fundamental difference between anarchism and syndicalism is talking nonsense. Syndicalist ideas were being argued by the likes of Bakunin and Kropotkin before syndicalism emerged in the French CGT in the 1890s as a clearly labelled revolutionary theory. Rather than being in conflict, the ideas of syndicalism find their roots in the ideas of Bakunin and "classical" anarchism. This would be quickly seen if the actual writings of Bakunin and Kropotkin were consulted. There **are**, of course, differences between anarchism and syndicalism, but they are **not** those usually listed by Marxists. [Section J.3.9](#) discusses these differences. As will quickly be discovered, they are **not** based on a rejection of working class organisation, direct action, solidarity and collective struggle!

Indeed, rather than acknowledge these similarities to Bakunin's ideas, Stack prefers to rewrite history by claiming (at his meeting on "*Marxism and Anarchism*" at the SWP's **Marxism 2001** conference) that Georges Sorel was the father of syndicalism! Any one familiar with the history of syndicalism and the ideas of Sorel would, of course, know the syndicalist movement had been in existence for a number of years before Sorel wrote **Reflections on Violence**. As such, he discussed from afar a movement which already existed. As the editor to a recent edition of Sorel's book notes, "*the immediate backdrop*" of

**Reflections on Violence** was "*the rise of the French syndicalist movement*" which "*Sorel had been following . . . since the late 1890s.*" It was only "*after 1902, when the Confederation Generale du Travail (CGT) launched a series of spectacular strikes, that syndicalism came to the forefront of Sorel's attention.*" In summary, "*Sorel did not create or even inspire the syndicalist movement.*" [**Reflections on Violence**, pp. viii-ix] Rather, syndicalism came about when anarchists (as Bakunin recommended thirty years previously) entered the trade unions. Indeed, Sorel acknowledges this in his work, arguing that historians "*will one day see in this entry of the anarchists into the **syndicats** one of the greatest events that has been produced in our time.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 35]

Ultimately, claims like Pat Stack's simply shows how unfamiliar the author is with the ideas they are pathetically attempting to critique. Anarchists from Bakunin onwards shared most of the same ideas as syndicalism (which is unsurprising as most of the ideas of anarcho-syndicalism have direct roots in the ideas of Bakunin). In other words, for Stack, the "*huge advantage*" anarcho-syndicalists have "*over other anarchists*" is that they, in fact, share the same "*understanding of the power of the working class, the centrality of the point of production (the workplace) and the need for collective action*"! This, in itself, shows the bankruptcy of Stack's claims and those like it.

## H.2.9 Do anarchists have "*liberal*" politics?

Another assertion by Marxists is that anarchists have "*liberal*" politics or ideas. For example, one Marxist argues that the "*programme with which Bakunin armed his super-revolutionary vanguard called for the 'political, economic and social equalisation of classes and individuals of both sexes, beginning with the abolition of the right of inheritance.'* This is **liberal** politics, implying nothing about the abolition of capitalism." [Derek Howl, "*The Legacy of Hal Draper*," **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 148] That Howl is totally distorting Bakunin's ideas can quickly be seen by looking at the whole of the programme. Simply put, Howl is knowingly quoting Bakunin out of context in order to discredit his ideas.

Howl is quoting from item 2 of the "*Programme of the Alliance.*" Strangely he fails to quote the end of that item, namely when it states this "*equalisation*" was "*in pursuance of the decision reached by the last working men's Congress in Brussels, the land, the instruments of work and all other capital may become the collective property of the whole of society and be utilised only by the workers, in other words by the agricultural and industrial associations.*" If this was not enough to indicate the abolition of capitalism, item 4 states that the Alliance "*repudiates all political action whose target is anything except the triumph of the workers' cause over Capital.*" [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 174] Howl's dishonesty is clear. Bakunin **explicitly** argued for the abolition of capitalism in the same item Howl (selectively) quotes from. If the socialisation of land and capital under the control of workers' associations is not the abolition of capitalism, we wonder what is!

Equally as dishonest as this quoting out of context is Howl's non-mention of the history of the expression "*political, economic and social equalisation of classes and individuals of both sexes.*" After Bakunin sent the Alliance programme to the General Council of the **International Workingmen's**



**Association**, he received a letter date March 9, 1869 from Marx which argued that the term "*the equalisation of classes*" "*literally interpreted*" would mean "*harmony of capital and labour*" as "*persistently preached by the bourgeois socialists.*" The letter argues that it was "*not the logically impossible 'equalisation of classes', but the historically necessary, superseding 'abolition of classes'*" which was the "*true secret of the proletarian movement*" and which "*forms the great aim of the International Working Men's Association.*" Significantly, the letter adds the following:

*"Considering, however, the context in which that phrase 'equalisation of classes' occurs, it seems to be a mere slip of the pen, and the General Council feels confident that you will be anxious to remove from your program an expression which offers such a dangerous misunderstanding."* [Marx-Engels, **Collected Works**, vol 21, p. 46]

And, given the context, Marx was right. The phrase "*equalisation of classes*" placed in the context of the political, economic and social equalisation of individuals obviously implies the abolition of classes. The logic is simple. If both worker and capitalist shared the same economic and social position then wage labour would not exist (in fact, it would be impossible as it is based on social and economic **inequality**) and so class society would not exist. Similarly, if the tenant and the landlord were socially equal then the landlord would have no power over the tenant, which would be impossible. Bakunin agreed with Marx on the ambiguity of the term and the Alliance changed its Programme to call for "*the final and total abolition of classes and the political, economic and social equalisation of individuals of either sex.*" [Bakunin, **Ibid.**] This change ensured the admittance of the Alliance sections into the International Workingmen's Association (although this did not stop Marx, like his followers, bringing up the "*equality of classes*" years later). However, Howl repeating the changed phrase "*equalisation of classes*" out of context helps discredit anarchism and so it is done.

Simply put, anarchists are **not** liberals as we are well aware of the fact that without equality, liberty is impossible except for the rich. As Nicolas Walter put it, "*[l]ike liberals, anarchists want freedom; like socialists, anarchists want equality. But we are not satisfied by liberalism alone or by socialism alone. Freedom without equality means that the poor and weak are less free than the rich and strong, and equality without freedom means that we are all slaves together. Freedom and equality are not contradictory, but complementary; in place of the old polarisation of freedom versus equality -- according to which we are told that more freedom means equals less equality, and more equality equals less freedom -- anarchists point out that in practice you cannot have one without the other. Freedom is not genuine if some people are too poor or too weak to enjoy it, and equality is not genuine if some people are ruled by other.*" [**Reinventing Anarchy**, p. 43] Clearly, anarchists do **not** have liberal politics. Quite the reverse, as we subject it to extensive critique from a working class perspective.

To the claim that anarchism "*combines a socialist critique of capitalism with a liberal critique of socialism,*" anarchists say that this is mistaken. [Paul Thomas, **Karl Marx and the Anarchists**, p. 7] Rather, anarchism is simply a socialist critique of both capitalism and the state. Freedom under capitalism is fatally undermined by inequality -- it simply becomes the freedom to pick a master. This violates liberty and equality. Equally, as regards the state. "*Any State at all,*" argued Bakunin, "*no matter what kind, is a domination and exploitation. It is a negation of Socialism, which wants an equitable*

*human society delivered from all tutelage, from all authority and political domination as well as economic exploitation.*" [quoted by Kenafick, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 95-6] As such, state structures violate not only liberty but also equality. There is no real equality in power between, say, the head of the government and one of the millions who may, or may not, have voted for them. As the Russian Revolution proved, there can be no meaningful equality between a striking worker and the "socialist" political police sent to impose the will of the state.

This means that if anarchists are concerned about freedom (both individual **and** collective) it is not because we are influenced by liberalism. Quite the reverse, as liberalism happily tolerates hierarchy and the restrictions of liberty implied by private property, wage labour and the state. As Bakunin argued, capitalism turns *"the worker into a subordinate, a passive and obedient servant."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 188] As such, anarchism rejects liberalism, although (as Bakunin put it), *"[i]f socialism disputes radicalism, this is hardly to reverse it but rather to advance it."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 87] Therefore, anarchism rejects liberalism, not because it supports the idea of freedom, but precisely because it does not go far enough and fails to understand that without equality, freedom is little more than freedom for the master.

Lastly, a few words on the mentality that could suggest that anarchist concern for liberty means that it is a form of liberalism. Rather than suggest the bankruptcy of anarchism it, in fact, suggests the bankruptcy of the politics of the person making the accusation. After all, the clear implication is that a concern with individual, collective and social freedom is alien to socialist ideas. It also strikes at the heart of socialism -- its concern for equality -- as it clearly implies that some have more power (namely the right to suppress the liberty of others) than the rest. As such, it suggests a superficial understanding of **real** socialism.

Ultimately, to argue that a concern for freedom means *"liberalism"* (or, equally, *"individualism"*) indicates that the person is not a socialist. After all, a concern that every individual controls their daily lives (i.e. to be free) means a wholehearted support for collective self-management of group affairs. It means a vision of a revolution (and post-revolutionary society) based on direct working class participation and management of society from below upwards. To dismiss this vision by dismissing the principles which inspire it as *"liberalism"* means to support rule from above by the "enlightened" elite (i.e. the party) and the hierarchical state structures. It means arguing for **party** power, not **class** power, as liberty is seen as a **danger** to the revolution and so the people must be protected against the "petty-bourgeois"/"reactionary" narrowness of the people. Rather than seeing free debate of ideas and mass participation as a source of strength, it sees it as a source of "bad influences" which the masses must be protected from.

Moreover, it suggests a total lack of understanding of the difficulties that a social revolution will face. Unless it is based on the active participation of the majority of a population, any revolution will fail. The construction of socialism, of a new society, will face thousands of unexpected problems and seek to meet the needs of millions of individuals, thousands of communities and hundreds of cultures. Without the individuals and groups within that society being in a position to freely contribute to that constructive task, it will simply wither under the bureaucratic and authoritarian rule of a few party leaders. As such,

individual liberties are an essential aspect of **genuine** social reconstruction -- without freedom of association, assembly, organisation, speech and so on, the active participation of the masses will be replaced by an isolated and atomised collective of individuals subjected to autocratic rule from above.

Ultimately, as Rudolf Rocker suggested, the *"urge for social justice can only develop properly and be effective, when it grows out of man's sense of personal freedom and it based on that. In other words **Socialism will be free, or it will not be at all.** In its recognition of this lies the genuine and profound justification for the existence of Anarchism."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 20]

## H.2.10 Are anarchists against leadership?

It is a common assertion by Marxists that anarchists reject the idea of *"leadership"* and so think in terms of a totally spontaneous revolution. This is also generally understood to imply that anarchists do not see the need for revolutionaries to organise together to influence the class struggle in the here and now. Hence the British SWP's Duncan Hallas:

*"That an organisation of socialist militants is necessary is common ground on the left, a few anarchist purists apart. But what kind of organisation? One view, widespread amongst newly radicalised students and young workers, is that of the libertarians . . . [They have] hostility to centralised, co-ordinated activity and profound suspicion of anything smacking of 'leadership.' On this view nothing more than a loose federation of working groups is necessary or desirable. The underlying assumptions are that centralised organisations inevitably undergo bureaucratic degeneration and that the spontaneous activities of working people are the sole and sufficient basis for the achievement of socialism . . . some libertarians draw the conclusion that a revolutionary socialist party is a contradiction in terms. This, of course, is the traditional anarcho-syndicalist position."* [**Towards a revolutionary socialist party**, p. 39]

Ignoring the usual patronising references to the age and experience of non-Leninists, this argument can be faulted on many levels. Firstly, while libertarians do reject centralised structures, it does **not** mean we reject co-ordinated activity. This may be a common Marxist argument, but it is a straw man one. Secondly, anarchists do **not** reject the idea of *"leadership."* We simply reject the idea of hierarchical leadership. Thirdly, while all anarchists do think that a *"revolutionary socialist party"* is a contradiction in terms, it does not mean that we reject the need for revolutionary organisations (i.e. organisations of anarchists). While opposing centralised and hierarchical political parties, anarchists have long saw the need for anarchist groups and federations to discuss and spread our ideas and influence. We will discuss each issue in turn.

The first argument is the least important. For Marxists, co-ordination equals centralism and to reject centralisation means to reject co-ordination of joint activity. For anarchists, co-ordination does not each centralism or centralisation. This is why anarchism stresses federation and federalism as the means of co-ordinating joint activity. Under a centralised system, the affairs of all are handed over to a handful of

people at the centre. Their decisions are then binding on the mass of the members of the organisation whose position is simply that of executing the orders of those whom the majority elect. This means that power rests at the top and decisions flow from the top downwards. As such, the "revolutionary" party simply mimics the very society it claims to oppose.

In a federal structure, in contrast, decisions flow from the bottom up by means of councils of elected, mandated and recallable **delegates**. In fact, we discover anarchists like Bakunin and Proudhon arguing for elected, mandated and recallable delegates rather than for representatives in their ideas of how a free society worked years before the Paris Commune applied them in practice. The federal structure exists to ensure that any co-ordinated activity accurately reflects the decisions of the membership. As such, anarchists *"do not deny the need for co-ordination between groups, for discipline, for meticulous planning, and for unity in action. But they believe that co-ordination, discipline, planning, and unity in action must be achieved **voluntarily**, by means of a self-discipline nourished by conviction and understanding, not by coercion and a mindless, unquestioning obedience to orders from above."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 215] In other words, co-ordination comes **from below** rather than being imposed from above by a few leaders. To use an analogy, federalist co-ordination is the co-ordination created in a strike by workers resisting their bosses. It is created by debate amongst equals and flows from below upwards. Centralised co-ordination is the co-ordination imposed from the top-down by the boss.

As such, anarchists reject the "centralised" model of the party as it is a "revolutionary" grouping organised on the capitalist model. As such, it is not revolutionary at all. It simply reproduces the very problems within the "revolutionary" movement that, ironically, inspired the initial revolt of its members towards socialism. The idea that the membership should run the organisation becomes simply that the majority designates its rulers and, like the bourgeois system of parliamentary democracy it is copied from, quickly becomes drained of any real meaning and becomes a veil thrown over the unlimited power of the rulers. The membership does not run the party simply because it elects delegates once a year who, in turn, designate the central committee -- no more than the people are sovereign in a parliamentary-style republic because they vote for the deputies who designate the government. Moreover, it trains the membership in accepting a division between leaders and led which, if applied during a revolution, will quickly mean that the party, **not** the masses, have real power.

Ultimately, centralised organisations become very undemocratic and, equally as important, **ineffective**. Hierarchical organisations kill people's enthusiasm and creativity. Such organisations are organisations where plans and ideas are not adopted because they are the best but simply because it is what a handful of leaders **think** are best for everyone else. Really effective organisations are those which make decisions based frank and open co-operation and debate, where dissent is **not** stifled and ideas are adopted because of their merit, and not **who** suggests them (i.e. the leaders of the party). In their quest for power and command, authoritarians usually end up manipulating processes, railroad their agendas, and in the process alienate people -- exactly those people who are new to organising for social change. They cause experienced organisers to quit and put-off people who might otherwise join the movement.

This is why anarchists stress federalist organisations. It ensures that co-ordination flows from below and

there is no institutionalised leadership. By organising in a way that reflects the kind of society we want, we train ourselves in the skills and decision making processes required to make a free and classless society work. In other words, that means and ends are united and this ensures that the means used will result in the desired ends. Simply put, libertarian means must be used if you want libertarian ends.

Secondly, anarchists are not against all forms of "leadership." We are against hierarchical and institutionalised forms of leadership. In other words, of giving **power** to leaders. This is the key difference, as Albert Meltzer explains. "*Some people in some circumstance,*" he argues, "*do naturally 'give a lead.'* But this should not mean they are a class apart. Any revolutionary in a factory where the majority have no revolutionary experience, will at times, 'give a lead.' But no anarchist would form an **institutionalised leadership**, nor wait for a lead, but give one." [**Anarchism: Arguments for and against**, p. 36]

This means, as we argue in [section J.3.6](#), that anarchists seek to influence the class struggle as **equals**. Rather than aim for positions of power, anarchists want to influence people by the power of their ideas as expressed in the debates that occur in the organisations created in the social struggle itself. This is because anarchists recognise that there is an unevenness in the level of ideas within the working class. This fact is obvious. Some workers accept the logic of the current system, others are critical of certain aspects, others (usually a minority) are consciously seek a better society (and are anarchists, ecologists, Marxists, etc.) and so on. Only constant discussion, the clash of ideas, combined with collective struggle can develop and narrow the unevenness of ideas within the oppressed. As Malatesta argued, "*[o]nly freedom or the struggle for freedom can be the school for freedom.*" [**Life and Ideas**, p. 59]

From this perspective, it follows that any attempt to create an institutionalised leadership structure means the end of the revolutionary process. Such "leadership" automatically means a hierarchical structure, one in which the leaders have power and make the decisions for the rest. This just reproduces the old class division of labour between those who think and those who act (i.e. between order givers and order takers). Rather than the revolutionary masses taking power in such a system, it is the "leaders" (i.e. a specific party hierarchy) who do so and the masses role becomes, yet again, simply that of selecting which boss tells them what to do.

As such, the anarchist federation does not reject the need of "leadership" in the sense of giving a led, of arguing its ideas and trying to win people to them. It does reject the idea that "leadership" should become separated from the mass of the people. Simply put, no party, no group of leaders have all the answers and so the active participation of all is required for a successful revolution. "*To give full scope to socialism,*" argued Kropotkin, "*entails rebuilding from top to bottom a society dominated by the narrow individualism of the shopkeeper . . . it is a question of completely reshaping all relationships . . . In every street, in every hamlet, in every group of men gathered around a factory or along a section of the railway line, the creative, constructive, and organisational spirit must be awakened in order to rebuild life -- in the factory, in the village, in the store, in production, and in distribution of supplies.*" Hence the need to "**shatter the state**" and "*rebuild a new organisation, by beginning from the very foundations of society -- the liberated village commune, federalism, groupings from simple to*

*compound, free workingmen's [and women's] associations." Such a task could **not** be "carried out within the framework of the state and the pyramidal organisation which is the essence of the state." [Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution, pp. 261-2]*

As such, anarchists reject the idea of turning the organs created in the class struggle and revolutionary process into hierarchical structures. By turning them from organs of self-management into organs for nominating "*leaders*," the constructive tasks and political development of the revolution will be aborted before they really begin. The active participation of all will become the picking of new masters and the revolution will falter. For this reason, anarchists "*differ from the Bolshevik type of party in their belief that genuine revolutionaries must function **within the framework of the forms created by the revolution**, not within forms created by the party. . . Anarcho-communists seek to persuade the factory committees, assemblies or soviets to make themselves into **genuine organs of popular self-management**, not to dominate them, manipulate them, or hitch them to an all-knowing political party. Anarcho-communists do not seek to rear a state structure over these popular revolutionary organs.*" [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 217]

This means that "*an organisation is needed to propagate ideas systematically -- and not ideas alone, but **ideas which promote the concept of self-management**.*" In other words, there "*is a need for a revolutionary organisation -- but its function must always be kept clearly in mind. Its first task is propaganda . . . In a revolutionary situation, the revolutionary organisation presents the most advanced demands: it is prepared at every turn of events to formulate -- in the most concrete fashion -- the immediate task that should be performed to advance the revolutionary process. It provides the boldest elements in action and in the decision-making organs of the revolution.*" [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 216-7] But what it does not is supplant those organs or decision-making process by creating institutionalised, hierarchical leadership structures. As such, it is not a question of organisation versus non-organisation, or "leadership" versus non-"leadership" but rather what *kind* of organisation and the *kind* of leadership.

Clearly, then, anarchists do not reject or dismiss the importance of politically aware minorities organising and spreading their ideas within social struggles. As Caroline Cahm summarised in her excellent study of Kropotkin's thought between 1872 and 1886, "*Kropotkin stressed the role of heroic minorities in the preparation for revolution.*" [**Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872-86**, p. 276] However, as John Crump correctly argues, the "*key words here are **in the preparation for revolution**. By their courage and daring in opposing capitalism and the state, anarchist minorities could teach by example and thereby draw increasing numbers into the struggle. But Kropotkin was not advocating substitutionism; the idea that a minority might carry out the revolution in place of the people was as alien to him as the notion that a minority would exercise rule after the revolution. In fact, Kropotkin recognised that the former would be a prescription for the latter.*" [**Hatta Shuzo and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan**, p. 9] In Kropotkin's own words:

*"The idea of anarchist communism, today represented by feeble minorities, but increasingly finding popular expression, will make its way among the mass of the people. Spreading everywhere, the anarchist groups . . . will take strength from the support they find among the people, and will raise the red flag of the revolution . . . On that day, what*

*is now the minority will become the People, the great mass, and that mass rising against property and the State, will march forward towards anarchist communism.*" [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 75]

This influence would be gained simply by the correctness of our ideas and the validity of our suggestions. This means that anarchists seek influence *"through advice and example, leaving the people . . . to adopt our methods and solutions if these are, or seem to be, better than those suggested and carried out by others."* As such, any anarchist organisation would *"strive acquire overwhelming influence in order to draw the [revolutionary] movement towards the realisation of our ideas. But such influence must be won by doing more and better than others, and will be useful if won in that way."* This means rejecting *"taking over command, that is by becoming a government and imposing one's own ideas and interests through police methods."* [Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, pp. 108-9]

Moreover, unlike leading Marxists like Lenin and Karl Kautsky, anarchists think that socialist ideas are developed **within** the class struggle rather than outside it by the radical intelligentsia. According to Lenin (who was only agreeing with Kautsky, the leading light of German and International Social Democracy at the start of the twentieth century) socialist (or "Social-Democratic") *"consciousness could only be brought to them [the workers] from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness."* Socialist ideas did not arise from the labour movement but from the *"educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals."* ["What is to Be Done?", **Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 74]

Anarchists reject this perspective. Kropotkin argued that *"modern socialism has emerged out of the depths of the people's consciousness. If a few thinkers emerging from the bourgeoisie have given it the approval of science and the support of philosophy, the basis of the idea which they have given their own expression has nonetheless been the product of the collective spirit of the working people. The rational socialism of the International is still today our greatest strength, and it was elaborated in working class organisation, under the first influence of the masses. The few writers who offered their help in the work of elaborating socialist ideas have merely been giving form to the aspirations that first saw their light among the workers."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 59] In other words, anarchists are a part of the working class (either by birth or by rejecting their previous class background and becoming part of it), the part which has generalised its own experiences, ideas and needs into a theory called *"anarchism"* and seeks to convince the rest of the validity of its ideas and tactics. This would be a dialogue, based on both learning **and** teaching.

As such, this means that the relationship between the specifically anarchist groups and oppressed peoples in struggle is a two way one. As well as trying to influence the social struggle, anarchists also try and learn from the class struggle and try to generalise from the experiences of their own struggles and the struggles of other working class people. Rather than seeing the anarchist group as some sort of teacher, anarchists see it as simply part of the social struggle and its ideas can and must develop from active participation within the class struggle. As anarchists agree with Bakunin and reject the idea that their organisations should take power on behalf of the masses, it is clear that such groups are not imposing alien ideas upon people but rather try to clarify the ideas generated by working class people in

struggle. It is an objective fact that there is a great difference in the political awareness within the masses of oppressed people. This uneven development means that they do not accept, all at once or in their totality, revolutionary ideas. There are layers. Groups of people, by ones and twos and then in larger numbers, become interested, read literature, talk with others, and create new ideas. The first groups that explicitly call their ideas "*anarchism*" have the right and duty to try to persuade others to join them. This is not opposed to the self-organisation of the working class, rather it is how the working class self-organises.

Thirdly, as we discuss in [section J.3](#), anarchists recognise the need to create specifically anarchist organisations to spread anarchist ideas and influence the class struggle. As we discuss the different kinds of anarchist organisations in that section, we will not do so here. Suffice to say, the idea that anarchists reject this need to organise politically in order to achieve a revolution is not to be found in the theory and practice of all the major anarchist thinkers.

Ultimately, if spontaneity was enough to create (and ensure the success of) a social revolution then we would be living in a libertarian socialist society. The fact that we are not suggests that spontaneity, however important, is not enough in itself. This simple fact of history is understood by anarchists and all the major anarchist thinkers.

See [section J.3](#) for more details on what organisations anarchists create and their role in anarchist revolutionary theory. [Section J.3.6](#) has a fuller discussion of the role of anarchist groups in the class struggle. For a discussion of the role of anarchists in a revolution, see [section J.7.5](#). For a fuller discussion why anarchists reject the idea of a revolutionary socialist party see section H.5.1 ("[Why are vanguard parties anti-socialist?](#)").

## H.2.11 Are anarchists "*anti-democratic*"?

One of the common arguments against anarchism is that it is "*anti-democratic*" (or "*elitist*"). For example, the British **Socialist Workers Party** journal **International Socialism** (number 52) denounces anarchism for being "*necessarily deeply anti-democratic*" due to its "*thesis of the absolute sovereignty of the individual ego as against the imposition of **any** 'authority' over it,*" which, it is claimed, is the "*distinctly anarchist concept.*" Then Hal Draper is quoted arguing that "*[o]f all ideologies, anarchism is the most fundamentally anti-democratic in principle, since it is not only unalterably hostile to democracy in general but particularly to any socialist democracy of the most ideal kind that could be imagined.*" This is because "*[b]y the 'principle of authority' the consistent anarchist means principled opposition to any exercise of authority, including opposition to authority derived from the most complete democracy and exercised in completely democratic fashion.*" The author of the review argues that this position is an "*idealist conception*" in which "***any** authority is seen as despotic; 'freedom' and 'authority' (and therefore 'freedom' and 'democracy' are opposites. This presumption of opposition to 'authority' was fostered by liberalism.*" Needless to say, he contrasts this with the "*Marxist*" "*materialist understanding of society*" in which it "*was clear that 'authority' is necessary in **any** society where labour*



*is collaborative.*" [Derek Howl, "*The Legacy of Hal Draper*," **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 145]

Such an argument is, of course, just ridiculous. Indeed, it is flawed on so many levels it's hard to know where to start. The obvious place to start is the claim that anarchism is the most "*fundamentally anti-democratic in principle.*" Now, given that there are fascists, monarchists, supporters (like Trotsky) of "*party dictatorship*" and a host of others who advocate minority rule (even by one person) over everyone else, can it be argued with a straight face that anarchism is the most "*anti-democratic*" because it argues for the liberty of all? Is the idea and practice of absolute monarchy **really** more democratic than anarchism? Clearly not, although this does indicate the quality of this kind of argument.

Another obvious point is that anarchists do not see **any** authority as "*despotic.*" As we indicated in [section H.4](#), this common Marxist assertion is simply not true. Anarchists have always been very clear on the fact they reject specific kinds of authority and not "*authority*" as such. In fact, by the term "*principal of authority*," Bakunin meant **hierarchical** authority, and not "*authority*" as such. This explains why Kropotkin argued that "*the origin of the anarchist inception of society . . . [lies in] the criticism . . . of the hierarchical organisations and the authoritarian conceptions of society*" and stressed that anarchism "*refuses all hierarchical organisation.*" [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 158 and p. 137]

This means, just to state the obvious, that making and sticking by collective decisions are **not** acts of authority. Rather they are simply expressions of individual autonomy. Clearly in most activities there is a need to co-operate with other people. Indeed, **living** involves the "*absolute sovereignty of the individual ego*" (as if anarchists like Bakunin used such terms!) being "*restricted*" by exercising that "*sovereignty.*" Take, for example, playing football. This involves finding others who seek to play the game, organising into teams, agreeing on rules and so on. All terrible violations of the "*absolute sovereignty of the individual ego*," yet it was precisely the "*sovereignty*" of the "*individual*" which produced the desire to play the game in the first place. What sort of "*sovereignty*" is it that negates itself when it is exercised? Clearly, then, the Marxist "summary" of anarchist ideas on this matter, like of many others, is poverty stricken.

And, unsurprisingly enough, we find anarchist thinkers like Bakunin and Kropotkin attacking this idea of "*the absolute sovereignty of the individual ego*" in the most severe terms. Indeed, they thought it was a bourgeois theory which simply existed to justify the continued domination and exploitation of working class people by the ruling class. Kropotkin quite clearly recognised its anti-individual and unfree nature by labelling it "*the authoritarian individualism which stifles us*" and stressing its "*narrow-minded, and therefore foolish*" nature. [**Conquest of Bread**, p. 130] Similarly, it would do the Marxist argument little good if they quoted Bakunin arguing that the "*freedom of individuals is by no means an individual matter. It is a collective matter, a collective product. No individual can be free outside of human society or without its co-operation*" or that he considered "*individualism*" as a "*bourgeois principle.*" [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 46 and p. 57] Perhaps, of course, these two famous anarchists were not, in fact, "*consistent*" anarchists, but that claim is doubtful.

Anarchism does, of course, derive from the Greek for "*without authority*" or "*without rulers*" and this, unsurprisingly, informs anarchist theory and visions of a better world. This means that anarchism is against the "*domination of man by man*" (and woman by woman, woman by man, and so on). However, "*[a]s knowledge has penetrated the governed masses . . . the people have revolted against the form of authority then felt most intolerable. This spirit of revolt in the individual and the masses, is the natural and necessary fruit of the spirit of domination; the vindication of human dignity, and the saviour of social life.*" Thus "*freedom is the necessary preliminary to any true and equal human association.*" [Charlotte Wilson, **Anarchist Essays**, p. 54 and p. 40] In other words, anarchism comes from the struggle of the oppressed against their rulers and is an expression of individual and social freedom. Anarchism was born from the class struggle.

Taking individual liberty as a good thing, the next question is how do free individuals co-operate together in such a way as to ensure their continued liberty. This, of course, means that any association must be one of equality between the associating individuals. This can only be done when everyone involved takes a meaningful role in the decision making process and because of this anarchists stress the need for **self-government** (usually called *self-management*) of both individuals and groups. Self-management within free associations and decision making from the bottom-up is the only way domination can be eliminated. This is because, by making our own decisions ourselves, we automatically end the division of society into governors and governed (i.e. end hierarchy). As anarchism clearly means support for freedom and equality, it automatically implies opposition to all forms of hierarchical organisation and authoritarian social relationship. This means that anarchist support for individual liberty does not end, as many Marxists assert, in the denial of organisation or collective decision making but rather in support for **self-managed** collectives. Only this form of organisation can end the division of society into rulers and ruled, oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited and create an environment in which individuals can associate without denying their freedom and equality.

This is why anarchists stress such things as decision making by mass assemblies and the co-ordination of decisions by the free federation of mandated and recallable delegates. This would allow those affected by a decision to have a say in it, so allowing them to manage their own affairs directly and without hierarchy.

Therefore, the **positive** side of anarchism (which naturally flows from its opposition to authority) results in a political theory which argues that people must control their own struggles, organisations and affairs directly. This means we support mass assemblies and their federation via councils of mandated delegates subject to recall if they break their mandates (i.e. they act as they see fit, i.e. as politicians or bureaucrats, and not as the people who elected them desire). This way people directly govern themselves and control their own lives. Rather than imply an "individualism" which denies the importance of association and the freedom it can generate, anarchism implies an opposition to hierarchy in all its forms and the support free association of equals. In other words, anarchism can generally be taken to mean support for self-government or self-management, both by individuals and by groups.

In summary, anarchist support for individual liberty incurs a similar support for self-managed groups. In

such groups, individuals co-operate as equals to maximise their liberty. This means, for anarchists, Marxists are just confusing co-operation with coercion, agreement with authority, association with subordination. Thus the Marxist "*materialist*" concept of authority distorts the anarchist position and, secondly, is a supra-historical in the extreme. Different forms of decision making are lumped together, independent of the various forms it may assume. To equate hierarchical and self-managed decision making, antagonistic and harmonious forms of organisation, alienated authority or authority retained in the hands of those directly affected by it, can only be a source of confusion. Rather than being a "*materialistic*" approach, the Marxist one is pure philosophical idealism -- the postulating of a-historic concepts independently of the individuals and societies that generate specific social relationships and ways of working together.

Similarly, it would be churlish to note that Marxists themselves have habitually rejected democratic authority when it suited them. Even that "*higher type of democracy*" of the soviets was ignored by the Bolshevik party once it was in power. In response to the "*great Bolshevik losses in the soviet elections*" during the spring and summer of 1918 which resulted in "*big gains by the SRs and particularly by the Mensheviks,*" "*Bolshevik armed force usually overthrew the results of these provincial elections.*" In addition, "*the government continually postponed the new general elections to the Petrograd Soviet, the term of which had ended in March 1918. Apparently, the government feared that the opposition parties would show gains.*" Moreover, the Bolsheviks "*pack[ed] local soviets once they could no longer count on an electoral majority*" by giving representation to organisations they dominated. [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, pp. 23-4, p. 22 and p. 33] This, needless to say, made these elections meaningless and made the regime "soviet" in name only. The Bolsheviks simply undermined soviet democracy to ensure their hold in power.

In the workplace, the Bolsheviks replaced workers' economic democracy with "*one-man management*" appointed from above, by the state. Lenin was at the forefront of this process, arguing that workers' must "*unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of labour*" in April 1918 along with granting "*individual executives dictatorial power (or 'unlimited' powers).*" He argued that "*the appointment of individuals, dictators with unlimited powers*" was, in fact, "*in general compatible with the fundamental principles of Soviet government*" simply because "*the history of revolutionary movements*" had "*shown*" that "*the dictatorship of individuals was very often the expression, the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of revolutionary classes.*" He notes that "*[u]ndoubtedly, the dictatorship of individuals was compatible with bourgeois democracy.*" [**The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, p. 34 and p. 32] This nonsense reached its heights (or, more correctly, depths) with Trotsky's ideas on the "*militarisation of labour*" he advanced in late 1919 and early 1920 as a means of reconstructing Russia in a socialist (!) manner after the (fast approaching) end of the Civil War. Need we also mention that Trotsky also abolished democratic forms of organisation in the military **before** the start of the Civil War -- as he put it, the "*elective basis is politically pointless and technically inexpedient and has already been set aside by decree.*" [quoted by M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, pp. 37-8]

These are a few examples of Trotsky's argument that you cannot place "*the workers' right to elect representatives above the party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy!*" He continued by stating the

*"Party is obliged to maintain its dictatorship . . . regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class . . . The dictatorship does not base itself at every moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy."* [quoted by Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 78] He repeated this argument nearly two decades later, stating that the *"very same masses are at different times inspired by different moods and objectives. It is just for this reason that a centralised organisation of the vanguard is indispensable. Only a party, wielding the authority it has won, is capable of overcoming the vacillation of the masses themselves."* [**The Moralists and Sycophants**, p. 59] Ultimately, for Leninists, the revolution is seen purely as a way for the "revolutionary" party to take power. Trotsky, for example, argued that *"the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard"* and that a *"revolutionary party, even having seized power . . . is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* Note, the party is *"the sovereign ruler of society,"* **not** the working class. He stressed this by arguing that those *"who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."* [**Stalinism and Bolshevism**]

So, remember when Lenin or Trotsky argue for *"the dictatorship of individuals,"* the over-riding of the democratic decisions of the masses by the party, the elimination of workers factory committees in favour of appointed managers armed with *"dictatorial"* power or when the Bolshevik disbanded soviets with non-Bolshevik majorities, it is **anarchism** which is fundamentally *"anti-democratic"*! All in all, that anyone can claim that anarchism is more *"anti-democratic"* than Leninism is a joke. However, all these anti-democratic acts do fit in nicely with Howl's *"materialist"* Marxist concept that *"'authority' is necessary in **any** society where labour is collaborative."* As such, since *"authority"* is essential and all forms of collective decision making are necessarily *"authoritarian"* and involve *"subordination,"* then it clearly does not really matter how collectives are organised and how decisions are reached. Hence the lack of concern for the liberty of the working people subjected to the (peculiarly bourgeois-like) forms of authority preferred by Lenin and Trotsky. It was precisely for this reason, to differentiate between egalitarian (and so libertarian) forms of organisation and decision making and authoritarian ones, that anarchists called themselves *"anti-authoritarians."*

Even if we ignore all the anti-democratic acts of Bolshevism (or justify them in terms of the problems facing the Russian Revolution, as most Leninists do), the anti-democratic nature of Marxist ideas still come to the fore. The Leninist support for centralised state power brings their attack on anarchism as being *"anti-democratic"* into clear perspective. Ultimately, Marxism results in the affairs of millions being decided upon by a handful of people in the Central Committee of the vanguard party. As an example, we will discuss Trotsky's arguments against the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine.

Trotsky argued that the Makhnovists were against *"Soviet power."* This, he argued, was simply *"the authority of all the local soviets in the Ukraine"* because they all *"recognise the central power which they themselves have elected."* Consequently, the Makhnovists reject not only central authority about also the local soviets as well. Trotsky also argued that there were no *"appointed"* persons in Russia as *"there is no authority in Russia but that which is elected by the whole working class and working peasantry. It follows [!] that commanders appointed by the central Soviet Government are installed in their positions by the will of the working millions."* He stressed that one can speak of *"appointed"*

persons *"only under the bourgeois order, when Tsarist officials or bourgeois ministers appointed at their own discretion commanders who kept the soldier masses subject to the bourgeois classes."* [**The Makhno Movement**] When the Makhnovists tried to call the fourth regional conference of peasants, workers and partisans to discuss the progression of the Civil War in early 1919, Trotsky, unsurprisingly enough, banned it.

In other words, because the Bolshevik government had been elected one year previously under a regime which had manipulated and overturned soviet elections, he (as its representative) had the right to ban a conference which would have expressed the wishes of millions of workers, peasants and partisans fighting for the revolution! The fallacious nature of his arguments is easily seen. Rather than executing the will of millions of toilers, Trotsky was simply executing his own will. He did not consult those millions nor the local soviets who had, in Bolshevik ideology, surrendered their power to the handful of people in the central committee of the Bolshevik Party. By banning the conference he was very effectively undermining the practical, functional democracy of millions and replacing it with a purely formal "democracy" based on empowering a few leaders at the centre. Yes, indeed, truly democracy in action when one person can deny a revolutionary people its right to decide its own fate!

Unsurprisingly, the anarchist Nestor Makhno replied by arguing that he considered it *"an inviolable right of the workers and peasants, a right won by the revolution, to call congresses on their own account, to discuss their affairs. That is why the prohibition by the central authorities on the calling of such congresses . . . represent a direct and insolent violation of the rights of the workers."* [quoted by Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 129] We will leave it to the readers to decide which of the two, Trotsky or Makhno, showed the fundamentally *"anti-democratic"* perspective.

Lastly, there are a few theoretical issues that need to be raised on this matter. Notice, for example, that no attempt is made to answer the simple question of why having 51% of a group automatically makes you right! It is taken for granted that the minority should subject themselves to the will of the majority before that will is even decided upon. Does that mean, for example, that Marxists refuse minorities the right of civil disobedience if the majority acts in a way which harms their liberties and equality? If, for example, the majority in community decides to implement race laws, does that mean that Marxists would **oppose** the discriminated minority taking direct action to change those laws? Or, to take an example closer to Marxism, in 1914 the leaders of the Social Democratic Party in the German Parliament voted for war credits. The anti-war minority of that group went along with the majority in the name of "democracy," "unity" and "discipline". Would Howl and Draper argue that they were right to do so? If they were not right to betray the ideas of Marxism and the international working class, then why not? They did, after all, subject themselves to the *"most perfect socialist democracy"* and so, presumably, made the correct decision. Simply put, the arguments that anarchists are *"anti-democratic"* are question-begging in the extreme.

As a general rule-of-thumb, anarchists have little problem with the minority accepting the decisions of the majority after a process of free debate and discussion. As we argue in [section A.2.11](#), such collective decision making is compatible with anarchist principles -- indeed, is based on them. By governing

ourselves directly, we exclude others governing us. However, we do not make a fetish of this, recognising that, in certain circumstances, the minority must and should ignore majority decisions. For example, if the majority of an organisation decide on a policy which the minority thinks is disastrous then why should they follow the majority? Equally, if the majority make a decision which harms the liberty and equality of a non-oppressive and non-exploitative minority, then that minority has the right to reject the "authority" of the majority. Hence Carole Pateman:

*"The essence of liberal social contract theory is that individuals ought to promise to, or enter an agreement to, obey representatives, to whom they have alienated their right to make political decisions . . . Promising . . . is an expression of individual freedom and equality, yet commits individuals for the future. Promising also implies that individuals are capable of independent judgement and rational deliberation, and of evaluating and changing their own actions and relationships; promises may sometimes justifiably be broken. However, to promise to obey is to deny or limit, to a greater or lesser degree, individuals' freedom and equality and their ability to exercise these capacities. To promise to obey is to state that, in certain areas, the person making the promise is no longer free to exercise her capacities and decide upon her own actions, and is no longer equal, but subordinate."* [The Problem of Political Obligation, p. 19]

Thus, for anarchists, a democracy which does not involve individual rights to dissent, to disagree and to practice civil disobedience would violate freedom and equality, the very values Marxists usually claim to be at the heart of their politics. The claim that anarchism is "anti-democratic" basically hides the argument that the minority must become the slave of the majority -- with no right of dissent when the majority is wrong (in practice, of course, it is usually meant the orders and laws of the minority who are elected to power). In effect, it wishes the minority to be subordinate, not equal, to the majority. Anarchists, in contrast, because we support self-management also recognise the importance of dissent and individuality -- in essence, because we are in favour of self-management ("democracy" does not do the concept justice) we also favour the individual freedom that is its rationale. We support the liberty of private individuals because we believe in self-management ("democracy") so passionately.

Indeed, Howl and Draper fail to understand the rationale for democratic decision making -- it is not based on the idea that the majority is always right but that individual freedom requires democracy to express and defend itself. By placing the collective above the individual, they undermine democratic values and replace them with little more than tyranny by the majority (or, more likely, those who claim to represent the majority).

Progress is determined by those who dissent and rebel against the status quo and the decisions of the majority. That is why anarchists support the right of dissent in self-managed groups -- in fact, as we argue in [section A.2.11](#), dissent, refusal, revolt by individuals and minorities is a key aspect of self-management. Given that Leninists do not support self-management (rather they, at best, support the Lockean notion of electing a government as being "democracy") it is hardly surprising they, like Locke, views dissent as a danger and something to denounce. Anarchists, on the other hand, recognising that

self-management's (i.e. direct democracy's) rationale and base is in individual freedom, recognise and support the rights of individuals to rebel against what they consider as unjust impositions. As history shows, the anarchist position is the correct one -- without rebellion, numerous minorities would never have improved their position and society would stagnate. Indeed, Howl's and Draper's comments are just a reflection of the standard capitalist diatribe against strikers and protestors -- they don't need to protest, for they live in a "democracy."

So, yes, anarchists do support individual freedom to resist even democratically made decisions simply because democracy **has to be** based on individual liberty. Without the right of dissent, democracy becomes a joke and little more than a numerical justification for tyranny. This does not mean we are "*anti-democratic*," indeed the reverse as we hold true to the fundamental rationale for democratic decision-making -- it allows individuals to combine as equals and not as subordinates and masters. Moreover, diversity is essential for any viable eco-system and it is essential in any viable society (and, of course, any society worth living in). This means that a healthy society is one which encourages diversity, individuality, dissent and, equally, self-managed associations to ensure the freedom of all.

As Malatesta argued, "*[t]here are matters over which it is worth accepting the will of the majority because the damage caused by a split would be greater than that caused by error; there are circumstances in which discipline becomes a duty because to fail in it would be to fail in the solidarity between the oppressed and would mean betrayal in face of the enemy . . . What is essential is that individuals should develop a sense of organisation and solidarity, and the conviction that fraternal co-operation is necessary to fight oppression and to achieve a society in which everyone will be able to enjoy his [or her] own life.*" [**Life and Ideas**, pp. 132-3]

As such, anarchists are not against majority decision making as such. We simply recognise it has limitations. In practice, the need for majority and minority to come to an agreement is one most anarchists would recognise:

*"But such an adaptation [of the minority to the decisions of the majority] on the one hand by one group must be reciprocal, voluntary and must stem from an awareness of need and of goodwill to prevent the running of social affairs from being paralysed by obstinacy. It cannot be imposed as a principle and statutory norm. . .*

*"So . . . anarchists deny the right of the majority to govern in human society in general . . . how is it possible . . . to declare that anarchists should submit to the decisions of the majority before they have even heard what those might be?"* [Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, pp. 100-1]

Therefore, while accepting majority decision making as a key aspect of a revolutionary movement and a free society, anarchists do not make a fetish of it. We recognise that we must use our own judgement in evaluating each decision reached simply because the majority is not always right. We must balance the need for solidarity in the common struggle and needs of common life with critical analysis and

judgement. As Malatesta argues:

*"In any case it is not a question of being right or wrong; it is a question of freedom, freedom for all, freedom for each individual so long as he [or she] does not violate the equal freedom of others. No one can judge with certainty who is right and who is wrong, who is closer to the truth and which is the best road for the greatest good for each and everyone. Experience through freedom is the only means to arrive at the truth and the best solutions; and there is no freedom if there is not the freedom to be wrong.*

*"In our opinion, therefore, it is necessary that majority and minority should succeed in living together peacefully and profitably by mutual agreement and compromise, by the intelligent recognition of the practical necessities of communal life and of the usefulness of concessions which circumstances make necessary." [Life and Ideas, p. 72]*

Needless to say, our arguments apply with even more force to the decisions of the **representatives** of the majority, who are in practice a very small minority. Leninists usually try and confuse these two distinct forms of decision making. When Leninists discuss majority decision making they almost always mean the decisions of those elected by the majority -- the central committee or the government -- rather than the majority of the masses or an organisation. Ultimately, the Leninist support for democracy (as the Russian Revolution showed) is conditional on whether the majority supports them or not. Anarchists are not as hypocritical or as elitist as this, arguing that everyone should have the same rights the Leninists usurp for their leaders.

Therefore the Marxist attack on anarchism as "*anti-democratic*" is not only false, it is ironic and hypocritical. Firstly, anarchists do **not** argue for "*the absolute sovereignty of the individual ego.*" Rather, we argue for individual freedom. This, in turn, implies a commitment to self-managed forms of social organisation. This means that anarchists do not confuse agreement with (hierarchical) authority. Secondly, Marxists do not explain why the majority is always right or why their opinions are automatically the truth. Thirdly, the logical conclusions of their arguments would result in the absolute enslavement of the individual to the representatives of the majority. Fourthly, rather than being supporters of democracy, Marxists like Lenin and Trotsky explicitly argued for minority rule and the ignoring of majority decisions when they clashed with the decisions of the ruling party. Fifthly, their support for "*democratic*" centralised power means, in practice, the elimination of democracy in the grassroots. As can be seen from Trotsky's arguments against the Makhnovists, the democratic organisation and decisions of millions can be banned by a single individual.

All in all, Marxists claims that anarchists are "*anti-democratic*" just backfire on Marxism.

## **H.2.12 Does anarchism survive only in the absence of a strong workers' movement?**



Derek Howl argues that anarchism "*survives only in the absence of a strong workers themselves.*" This was based, apparently, anarchism is the politics of "*non-proletarians.*" As he puts it, there "*is a class basis of this. Just as Proudhon's 'anarchism' reflected the petty bourgeoisie under pressure, so too Bakuninism as a movement rested upon non-proletarians . . . In Italy Bakuninism was based upon the large 'lumpen bourgeoisie', doomed petty bourgeois layers. In Switzerland the Jura Federation . . . was composed of a world of cottage industry stranded between the old world and the new, as were pockets of newly proletarianised peasants that characterised anarchism in Spain.*" He quotes Hal Draper statement that anarchism "*was an ideology alien to the life of modern working people.*" ["*The Legacy of Hal Draper,*" **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 148]

Ignoring the obvious contradiction of "*newly proletarianised peasants*" being "*non-proletarians,*" we have the standard Marxist "*class analysis*" of anarchism. This is to assert that anarchism is "*non-proletarian*" while Marxism is "*proletarian.*" On the face of it, such an assertion seems to fly in the face of historical facts. After all, when Marx and Engels were writing the **Communist Manifesto**, the proletariat was a tiny minority of the population of a mostly rural, barely industrialised Germany and France. Perhaps it was Engels experiences as a capitalist in England that allowed him an insight into "*the life of modern working people?*"

Beyond this there are a few problems with this type of argument. Firstly, there is the factual problems. Simply put, anarchism appealed to "*modern*" working people and Marxism has appealed to the "*non-proletarian*" groups and individuals (and vice versa, of course). This can be seen from the examples Howl lists as well as the rise of syndicalist ideas after the reformism of the first Marxist movement (social democracy) became apparent. Simply put, the rise of Marxism within the labour movement is associated with its descent into reformism, **not** revolution. Secondly, there is the slight ideological problem that Lenin himself argued that the working class, by its own efforts, did not produce socialist ideas which were generated far from "*the life of modern working people*" by the intelligentsia. Lastly, there is the assumption that two long dead Germans, living in an environment where "*modern working people*" (proletarians) were a small minority of the working population, could really determine for all history which is (and is not) "*proletarian*" politics.

Taking the countries Howl lists, we can see that any claim that anarchism is "*alien*" to the working class is simply false. Looking at each case, it is clearly the case that the **politics** of the people involved signify their working class credentials for Marxists, **not** their actual economic or social class. Thus we have the sociological absurdity that makes anarchist workers "*petty bourgeois*" while actual members of the bourgeoisie (like Engels) or professional revolutionaries (and the sons of middle class families like Marx, Lenin and Trotsky) are considered as representatives of "*proletarian*" politics. Indeed, when these radical members of the middle-class repress working class people (as did Lenin and Trotsky were in power) they **remain** figures to be followed and their acts justified in terms of the "objective" needs of the working people they are oppressing! Ultimately, for most Marxists, whether someone is "*non-proletariat*" depends on their ideological viewpoint and not, in fact, their actual class.

Hence we discover Marx and Engels (like their followers) blaming Bakunin's success in the International, as one historian notes, "*on the middle-class leadership of Italy's socialist movement and*

*the backwardness of the country. But if middle-class leaders were the catalysts of proletarian revolutionary efforts in Italy, this was also true of every other country in Europe, not excluding the General Council in London.*" [T.R. Ravindranathan, **Bakunin and the Italians**, p. 168] And by interpreting the difficulties for Marxism in this way, Marx and Engels (like their followers) need not question their own ideas and assumptions. As Nunzio Pernicone notes, "*[f]rom the outset, Engels had consistently underestimated Bakunin as a political adversary and refused to believe that Italian workers might embrace anarchist doctrines.*" However, "*even a casual perusal of the internationalist and dissident democratic press would have revealed to Engels that Bakuninism was rapidly developing a following among Italian artisans and workers. But this reality flew in the face of his unshakeable belief that Italian internationalists were all a 'gang of declasses, the refuse of the bourgeoisie.'*" Even after the rise of the Italian Marxism in the 1890s, "*the anarchist movement was proportionately more working-class than the PSI*" and the "*the number of bourgeois intellectuals and professionals that supported the PSI [Italian Socialist Party] was vastly greater*" than those supporting anarchism. Indeed, "*the percentage of party membership derived from the bourgeoisie was significantly higher in the PSI than among the anarchists.*" [**Italian Anarchism, 1864-1892**, p. 82 and p. 282] Ironically, given Engels diatribes against the Italian anarchists stopping workers following "*proletarian*" (i.e. Marxist) politics and standing for elections, "*as the PSI grew more working-class, just before the outbreak of war [in 1914], its Directorate [elected by the party congress] grew more anti-parliamentary.*" [Gwyn A. Williams, **Proletarian Order**, p. 29]

As we noted in [section A.5.5](#), the role of the anarchists and syndicalists compared to the Marxists during the 1920 near revolution suggested that the real "*proletarian*" revolutionaries were, in fact, the former and **not** the latter. All in all, the history of the Italian labour movement clearly show that, for most Marxists, whether a group represents the "*proletariat*" is simply dependent on their ideological commitment, **not** their actual class.

As regards the Jura Federation, we discover that its support was wider than suggested by Marxists. As Marxist Paul Thomas noted, "*Bakunin's initial support in Switzerland -- like Marx's in England -- came from resident aliens, political refugees . . . but he also gathered support among **Gastarbeitier** for whom Geneva was already a centre, where builders, carpenters and and workers in heavy industry tended to be French or Italian . . . Bakunin . . . also marshalled considerable support among French speaking domestic workers and watchmakers in the Jura.*" [**Karl Marx and the Anarchists**, p. 390] It would be interesting to hear a Marxist claim that "*heavy industry*" represented the past or "*non-proletarian*" elements! Similarly, E. H. Carr in his (hostile) biography of Bakunin, noted that the "*sections of the International at Geneva fell into two groups.*" Skilled craftsmen formed the "*Right wing*" while "*the builders, carpenters, and workers in the heavier trades, the majority of whom were immigrants from France and Italy, represented the Left.*" Unsurprisingly, these different groups of workers had different politics. The craftsmen "*concentrated on . . . reform*" while the latter "*nourished hopes of a complete social upheaval.*" Bakunin, as would be expected, "*fanned the spirit of revolt*" among these, the proletarian, workers and soon had a "*commanding position in the Geneva International.*" [**Michael Bakunin**, p. 361] It should be noted that Marx and the General Council of the International consistently supported the reformist wing of the International in Geneva which organised political alliances with the middle-class liberals during elections. Given these facts, it is little wonder that Howl concentrates on the

support Bakunin received from domestic workers producing watches. To mention the support for Bakunin by organised, obviously proletarian, workers would undermine his case and so it is ignored.

Lastly, there is Spain. It seems funny that a Marxist would use Spain as an example **against** the class roots of anarchism. After all, that is one of the countries where anarchism dominated the working class movement. As one historian points out, "*it was not until the 1860s -- when anarchism was introduced -- that a substantive working class movement began to emerge*" and "*throughout the history of Spanish anarchism, its survival depended in large measure on the anarchists' ability to maintain direct links with the workers.*" [George R. Esenwein, **Anarchist Ideology and the Working-Class Movement in Spain, 1868-1898**, p. 6 and p. 207] As well as organising "*newly proletarianised peasants*," the "*Bakuninists*" also organised industrial workers -- indeed, far more successfully than the Socialists. Indeed, the UGT only started to approach the size of the CNT once it had started to organise "*newly proletarianised peasants*" in the 1930s (i.e. anarchist unions organised more of the industrial working class than the Socialist ones). From such a fact, we wonder if Marxists would argue that socialism rested on "*non-proletarian*" elements?

Moreover, the logic of dismissing anarchism as "*non-proletarian*" because it organised "*newly proletarianised peasants*" is simply laughable. After all, capitalism needed landless labours in order to start. This meant that the first proletarians existing in rural areas and were made up of ex-peasants. When these ex-peasants arrived in the towns and cities, they were still "*newly proletarianised peasants.*" To ignore these groups of workers would mean, of course, that they would lack basic socialist ideas once they reached urban areas, so potentially harming the labour movement there. And, of course, a large section of Bolshevik support in 1917 was to be found in "*newly proletarianised peasants*" whether in the army or working in the factories. Ironically enough, the Mensheviks argued that the Bolsheviks gained their influence from worker-peasant industrial "*raw recruits*" and not from the genuine working class. [Orlando Figes, **A People's Tragedy**, p. 830] As such, to dismiss anarchism because it gained converts from similar social strata as the Bolsheviks seems, on the face of it, a joke.

As can be seen Howl's attempts to subject anarchism to a "*class analysis*" simply fails. He selects the evidence which fits his theory and ignores that which does not. However, looking at the very examples he bases his case on shows how nonsensical it is. Simply put, anarchist ideas appealed to many types of workers, including typically "*proletarian*" ones who worked in large-scale industries. What they seem to have in common is a desire for radical social change, organised by themselves in their own combative class organs (such as unions). Moreover, like the early British workers movement, they considered that these unions, as well as being organs of class struggle, could also be the framework of a free socialist society. Such a perspective is hardly backward (indeed, since 1917 most Marxists pay lip-service to this vision!).

Which brings us to the next major problem with Howl's argument, namely the fate of Marxism and the "*strong*" labour movement it allegedly is suited for. Looking at the only nation which did have a "*modern*" working class during the most of Marx's life, Britain, the "*strong*" labour movement it produced was (and has) not been anarchist, it is true, but neither was it (nor did it become) Marxist. Rather, it has been a mishmash of conflicting ideas, predominately reformist state socialist ones which

owe little, if anything, to Marx. Indeed, the closest Britain came to developing a wide scale revolutionary working class movement was during the "*syndicalist revolt*" of the 1910s. Ironically, some Marxists joined this movement simply because the existing Marxist parties were so reformist or irrelevant to the "*life of modern working people.*"

Looking at the rise of capitalism in other countries, we find the same process. The rise of social democracy (Marxism) in the international labour movement simply signified the rise of reformism. Instead of producing a **revolutionary** labour movement, Marxism helped produce the opposite (although, initially, hiding reformist activity behind revolutionary rhetoric). So when Howl asserts that anarchism "*survives in the absence of a strong workers' movement,*" we have to wonder what planet he is on.

Thus, to state matters more correctly, anarchism flourishes during those periods when the labour movement and its members are radical, taking direct action and creating new forms of organisation which are still based on workers' self-management. This is to be expected as anarchism is both based upon and is the result of workers' self-liberation through struggle. In less militant times, the effects of bourgeois society and the role of unions within the capitalist economy can de-radicalise the labour movement and lead to the rise of bureaucracy within it. It is then, during periods when the class struggle is low, that reformist ideas spread. Sadly, Marxism aided that spread by its tactics -- the role of electioneering focused struggle away from direct action and into the ballot-box and so onto leaders rather than working class self-activity.

Moreover, if we look at the current state of the labour movement, then we would have to conclude that Marxism is "*an ideology alien to the life of modern working people.*" Where are the large Marxist working class unions and parties? There are a few large reformist socialist and Stalinist parties in continental Europe, but these are not Marxist in any meaningful sense of the word. Most of the socialist ones used to be Marxist, although they relatively quickly stopped being revolutionary in any meaningful sense of the word a very long time ago (some, like the German Social Democrats, organised counter-revolutionary forces to crush working class revolt after the First World War). As for the Stalinist parties, it would be better to consider it a sign of shame that they get any support in the working class at all. Simply put, in terms of revolutionary Marxists, there are various Trotskyist sects arguing amongst themselves on who is the **real** vanguard of the proletariat, but **no** Marxist labour movement.

Which, of course, brings us to the next point, namely the ideological problems for Leninists themselves by such an assertion. After all, Lenin himself argued that "*the life of modern working people*" could only produce "*trade-union consciousness.*" Indeed, according to him, socialist ideas were developed independently of working people by the socialist (middle-class) "*intelligentsia.*" As he put it in **What is to be done?**, "*the working class, exclusively by their own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness . . . the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose quite independently of the spontaneous growth of the labour movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of ideas among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia.*" This meant that "*Social Democratic [i.e. socialist] consciousness . . . could only be brought to them [the workers] from without.*" [**Essential Works of Lenin**, pp. 74-5] Clearly, then, for Lenin, socialism was an ideology which was alien to the life of

modern working class people.

Lastly, there is the question of whether Marx and Engels can seriously be thought of as being able to decree once and for all what is and is not "*proletarian*" politics. Given that neither of these men were working class (one was a capitalist!) it makes the claim that they would know "*proletarian*" politics suspect. Moreover, they formulated their ideas of what constitute "*proletarian*" politics before a modern working class actually developed in any country bar Britain. This means, that from the experience of one section of the proletariat in one country in the 1840s, Marx and Engels have decreed for all time what is and is not a "*proletarian*" set of politics! On the face of it, it is hardly a convincing argument, particularly as we have over 150 years of experience of these tactics with which to evaluate them!

Based on this perspective, Marx and Engels opposed all other socialist groups as "*sects*" if they did not subscribe to their ideas. Ironically, while arguing that all other socialists were fostering their sectarian politics onto the workers movement, they themselves fostered their own perspective onto it. Originally, because the various sections of the International worked under different circumstances and had attained different degrees of development, the theoretical ideals which reflected the real movement would also diverge. The International, therefore, was open to all socialist and working class tendencies its general policies would be, by necessity, based on conference decisions that reflected this divergence. These decisions would be determined by free discussion within and between sections of all economic, social and political ideas. Marx, however, replaced this policy with a common program of "*political action*" (i. e. electioneering) by mass political parties via the fixed Hague conference of 1872. Rather than having this position agreed by the normal exchange of ideas and theoretical discussion in the sections guided by the needs of the practical struggle, Marx imposed what **he** considered as the future of the workers movement onto the International -- and denounced those who disagreed with him as sectarians. The notion that what Marx considered as necessary might be another sectarian position imposed on the workers' movement did not enter his head nor those of his followers.

Thus the Marxist claim that true working class movements are based on mass political parties based on hierarchical, centralised, leadership and those who reject this model and political action (electioneering) are sects and sectarians is simply their option and little more. Once we look at the workers' movement without the blinkers created by Marxism, we see that Anarchism was a movement of working class people using what they considered valid tactics to meet their own social, economic and political goals -- tactics and goals which evolved to meet changing circumstances. Seeing the rise of anarchism and syndicalism as the political expression of the class struggle, guided by the needs of the practical struggle they faced naturally follows when we recognise the Marxist model for what it is -- just one possible interpretation of the future of the workers' movement rather than **the** future of that movement (and as the history of Social Democracy indicates, the predictions of Bakunin and the anarchists within the First International were proved correct).

This tendency to squeeze the revolutionary workers' movement into the forms decreed by two people in the mid-nineteenth century has proved to be disastrous for it. Even after the total failure of social democracy, the idea of "*revolutionary*" parliamentarianism was fostered onto the Third International by

the Bolsheviks in spite of the fact that more and more revolutionary workers in advanced capitalist nations were rejecting it in favour of direct action and autonomous working class self-organisation. Anarchists and libertarian Marxists based themselves on this actual movement of working people, influenced by the failure of "*political action*," while the Bolsheviks based themselves on the works of Marx and Engels and their experiences in a backward, semi-feudal society whose workers had already created factory committees and soviets by direct action. It was for this reason that the anarcho-syndicalist Augustin Souchy said he referred "*to the tendencies that exist in the modern workers' movement*" when he argued at the Second Congress of the Communist International:

*"It must be granted that among revolutionary workers the tendency toward parliamentarism is disappearing more and more. On the contrary, a strong anti-parliamentary tendency is becoming apparent in the ranks of the most advanced part of the proletariat. Look at the Shop Stewards' movement [in Britain] or Spanish syndicalism . . . The IWW is absolutely antiparliamentary . . . I want to point out that the idea of antiparliamentarism is asserting itself more strongly in Germany . . . as a result of the revolution itself. . . We must view the question in this light."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol 1, pp. 176-7]

Of course, this perspective of basing yourself on the ideas and tactics generated by the action class struggle was rejected in favour of a return to the principles of Marx and Engels and their vision of what constituted a genuine "*proletarian*" movement. If these tactics were the correct ones, then why did they not lead to a less dismal set of results? After all, the degeneration of social democracy into reformism would suggest their failure and sticking "*revolutionary*" before their tactics (as in "*revolutionary parliamentarianism*") changes little. Marxists, like anarchists, are meant to be materialists, not idealists. What was the actual outcome of the Leninist strategies? Did they result in successful proletarian revolutions. No, they did not. The revolutionary wave peaked and fell and the Leninist parties themselves very easily and quickly became Stalinised. Significantly, those areas with a large anarchist, syndicalist or quasi-syndicalist (e.g. the council communists) workers movements (Italy, Spain and certain parts of Germany) came closest to revolution and by the mid-1930s, only Spain with its strong anarchist movement had a revolutionary labour movement. Therefore, rather than representing "*non-proletarian*" or "*sectarian*" politics forced upon the working class, anarchism reflected the politics required to build a **revolutionary** workers' movement rather than a reformist mass party.

As such, perhaps we can finally lay to rest the idea that Marx predicted the whole future of the labour movement and the path it must take like some kind of socialist Nostradamus. Equally, we can dismiss Marxist claims of the "*non-proletarian*" nature of anarchism as uninformed and little more than an attempt to squeeze history into an ideological prison. As noted above, in order to present such an analysis, the actual class compositions of significant events and social movements have to be manipulated. This is the case of the Paris Commune, for example, which was predominantly a product of artisans (i.e. the "*petit bourgeoisie*"), **not** the industrial working class and yet claimed by Marxists as an example of the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*." Ironically, many of the elements of the Commune praised by Marx can be found in the works of Proudhon and Bakunin which pre-date the uprising. Similarly, the idea that workers' fighting organisations ("*soviets*") would be the means to abolish the

state and the framework of a socialist society can be found in Bakunin's works, decades before Lenin paid lip-service to this idea in 1917. For a theory allegedly resting on "*non-proletarian*" elements it has successfully predicted many of the ideas Marxists claim to have learnt from proletarian class struggle!

So, in summary, the claims that anarchism is "*alien*" to working class life, that it is "*non-proletarian*" or "*survives in the absence of a strong workers' movement*" are simply false. Looking objectively at the facts of the matter quickly shows that this is the case.

## H.2.13 Do anarchists reject "*political*" struggles and action?

A common Marxist claim is that anarchists and syndicalists ignore or dismiss the importance of "*political*" struggles or action. This is not true. Rather, as we discuss in [section J.2.10](#), we think that "*political*" struggles should be conducted by the same means as social and economic struggles, namely by direct action, solidarity and working class self-organisation.

As this is a common assertion, it is useful to provide a quick summary of why anarchists do not, in fact, reject "*political*" struggles and action as such. Rather, to quote Bakunin, anarchism "*does not reject politics generally. It will certainly be forced to involve itself insofar as it will be forced to struggle against the bourgeois class. It only rejects bourgeois politics . . . [as it] establishes the predatory domination of the bourgeoisie.*" [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 313] For Kropotkin, it was a truism that it was "*absolutely impossible . . . to confine the ideas of the working mass within the narrow circle of reductions in working hours and wage increases . . . The social question compels attention.*" This fact implied two responses: "*the workers' organisation propels itself either into the sterile path of parliamentary politics as in Germany, or into the path of revolution.*" [quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872-1886**, p. 241]

So while Marxists often argue that anarchists exclusively interested in economic struggle and reject "*politics*" or "*political action*," the truth of the matter is different. We are well aware of the importance of political issues, although anarchists reject using bourgeois methods in favour of direct action. Moreover, we are aware that any social or economic struggle has its political aspects and that such struggles bring the role of the state as defender of capitalism and the need to struggle against it into focus:

*"There is no serious strike that occurs today without the appearance of troops, the exchange of blows and some acts of revolt. Here they fight with the troops; there they march on the factories; . . . in Pittsburgh in the United States, the strikers found themselves masters of a territory as large as France, and the strike became the signal for a general revolt against the State; in Ireland the peasants on strike found themselves in open revolt against the State. Thanks to government intervention the rebel against the factory becomes the rebel against the State."* [quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Op. Cit.**, p. 256]

As Malatesta argued, from "*the economic struggle one must pass to the political struggle, that is to*

*struggle against government; and instead of opposing the capitalist millions with the workers' few pennies scraped together with difficulty, one must oppose the rifles and guns which defend property with the more effective means that the people will be able to defeat force by force."* [**Life and Ideas**, pp. 193-4] So anarchists are well aware of the need to fight for political issues and reforms, and so are *"not in any way opposed to the political struggle, but in their opinion this struggle, too, must take the form of direct action, in which the instruments of economic [and social] power which the working class has at its command are the most effective. The most trivial wage-fight shows clearly that, whenever the employers find themselves in difficulties, the state steps in with the police, and even in some cases with the militia, to protect the threatened interests of the possessing classes. It would, therefore, be absurd for them to overlook the importance of the political struggle."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 65]

This means that the question of whether to conduct political struggles is **not** the one which divides anarchists from Marxists. Rather, it is a question of **how** this struggle is fought. For anarchists, this struggle is best fought using **direct action** (see [section J.2](#)) and fighting working class organisations based in our workplaces and communities. For Marxists, the political struggle is seen as being based on standing candidates in bourgeois elections. This can be seen from the resolution passed by the socialist ("Second") International in 1893. This resolution was designed to exclude anarchists and stated that only *"those Socialist Parties and Organisations which recognise the organisation of workers and of political action."* By "political action" it mean *"that the working-class organisations seek, in as far as possible, to use or conquer political rights and the machinery of legislation for the furthering of the interests of the proletariat and the conquest of political power."* [quoted by Susan Milner, **The Dilemmas of Internationalism**, p. 49] Significantly, while this International and its member parties (particular the German Social Democrats) were happy to expel anarchists, they never expelled the leading reformists from their ranks.

So, in general, anarchists use the word *"political action"* to refer exclusively to the taking part of revolutionaries in bourgeois elections (i.e. electioneering or parliamentarianism). It does not mean a rejection of fighting for political reforms or a lack of interest in political issues, quite the reverse in fact. The reason **why** anarchists reject this tactic is discussed in section J.2.6 (["What are the effects of radicals using electioneering?"](#)), which means we will give a short summary here.

Simply put, for anarchists, the net effect of socialists using bourgeois elections would be to put them (and the movements they represent) into the quagmire of bourgeois politics and influences. In other words, the parties involved will be shaped by the environment they are working within and not vice versa. As Bakunin argued, the *"inevitable result"* of electing workers into bourgeois state would be to see them *"become middle class in their outlook"* due to them being *"transferred to a purely bourgeois environment and into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois political ideas."* This meant that as *"long as universal suffrage is exercised in a society where the people, the mass of workers, are economically dominated by a minority holding exclusive possession the property and capital of the country . . . elections . . . . can only be illusory, anti-democratic in their results."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 216 and p. 213] This meant that *"the election to the German parliament of one or two workers . . . from the Social Democratic*



Party" was "not dangerous" and, in fact, was "highly useful to the German state as a lightning-rod, or a safety-valve." Unlike the "political and social theory" of the anarchists, which "leads them directly and inexorably to a complete break with all governments and all forms of bourgeois politics, leaving no alternative but social revolution," Marxism, he argued, "inexorably enmeshes and entangles its adherents, under the pretext of political tactics, in endless accommodation with governments and the various bourgeois political parties -- that is, it thrusts them directly into reaction." [Bakunin, **Statism and Anarchy**, p. 193 and pp. 179-80] In the case of the German Social Democrats, this became obvious in 1914, when they supported their state in the First World war, and after 1918, when they crushed the German Revolution.

For Kropotkin, the idea that you could somehow "prepare" for a revolution by electioneering was simply a joke. "As if the bourgeoisie," he argued, "still holding on to its capital, could allow them [the socialists] to experiment with socialism even if they succeeded in gaining control of power! As if the conquest of the municipalities were possible without the conquest of the factories." He saw that "those who yesterday were considered socialists are today letting go of socialism, by renouncing its mother idea [" the need to replace the wage system and to abolish individual ownership of . . . social capital"] and passing over into the camp of the bourgeoisie, while retaining, so as to hide their turnabout, the label of socialism." [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 181 and p. 180]

Ultimately, the bourgeois tactics used ended up with bourgeois results. As Emma Goldman argued, socialism "was led astray by the evil spirit of politics" and "landed in the [political] trap and has now but one desire -- to adjust itself to the narrow confines of its cage, to become part of the authority, part of the very power that has slain the beautiful child Socialism and left begin a hideous monster." [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 80] The net effect of "political action" was the corruption of the socialist movement into a reformist party which betrayed the promise of socialism in favour of making existing society better (so it can last longer). This process confirmed Bakunin's predictions as well as Kropotkin's comments:

*"The middle class will not give up its power without a struggle. It will resist. And in proportion as Socialists will become part of the Government and share power with the middle class, their Socialism will grow paler and paler. This is, indeed, what Socialism is rapidly doing. Were this no so, the middle classes . . . would not share their power with the Socialists."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 102]

In addition, as we argue in sections [H.1.5](#) and [J.2.5](#), direct action is either based on (or creates) forms of self-managed working class organisations. The process of collective struggle, in other words, necessitates collective forms of organisation and decision making. These combative organisations, as well as conducting the class struggle under capitalism, can also be the framework of a free society (see [section H.1.4](#)). However, standing in elections does **not** produce such alternative social structures and, indeed, hinders them as the focus for social changes becomes a few leaders working in existing (i.e. bourgeois) structures and bodies.

As can be seen, anarchists reject "*political*" struggle (i.e. electioneering) for good (and historically vindicated) reasons. This makes a mockery of Marxists assertions (beginning with Marx) that anarchists like Bakunin "*opposed all political action by the working class since this would imply 'recognition' of the existing state.*" [Derek Howl, "*The Legacy of Hal Draper*," **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 147] This, in fact, is a common Marxist claim, namely that anarchists reject "*political struggle*" on principle (i.e. for idealistic purposes). In the words of Engels, Bakunin was "*opposed to all political action by the working class, since this would in fact involve recognition of the existing state.*" [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 49] Sadly, like all Marxists, he failed to indicate where, in fact, Bakunin actually said that. As can be seen, this was **not** the case. Bakunin, like all revolutionary anarchists, reject "*political action*" (in the sense of electioneering) simply because they feared that such tactics would be counterproductive and undermine the revolutionary nature of the labour movement. As the experience of Marxist Social Democracy showed, he was proved correct.

In summary, while anarchists reject standing of socialists in elections ("*political action*," narrowly defined), we do not reject the need to fight for political reforms or specific political issues. However, we see such action as being based on collective working class **direct action** organised around combative organs of working class self-management and power rather than the individualistic act of placing a cross on a piece of paper once every few years and letting leaders fight your struggles for you.

## H.2.14 Are anarchist organisations either "*ineffective*," "*elitist*" or the "*downright bizarre*"?

Marxists often accuse anarchist organisations of being "*elitist*" or "*secret*." Pat Stack (of the British SWP) ponders the history of anarchist organisation (at least the SWP version of that history):

*"how otherwise [than Leninist vanguard political parties] do revolutionaries organise? Apart from the serious efforts of anarcho-syndicalists to grapple with this problem, anarchists have failed to pose any serious alternative. In as much as they do, they have produced either the ineffective, the elitist or the downright bizarre. Bakunin's organisation, the 'Alliance of Social Democracy', managed all three: 'The organisation had two overlapping forms, one secret, involving only the "intimates", and one public, the Alliance of Social Democracy. Even in its open, public mode, the alliance was to be a highly centralised organisation, with all decisions on the national level approved by the Central Committee. Since it was the real controlling body, the secret organisation was even more tightly centralised . . . with first a Central Committee, then a "central Geneva section" acting as the "permanent delegation of the permanent Central Committee", and, finally, within the central Geneva section a "Central Bureau", which was to be both the "executive power . . . composed of three, or five, or even seven members" of the secret organisation and the executive directory of the public organisation.'*

*"That this was far more elitist and less democratic than Lenin's model is clear."*

There are, as is obvious, numerous problems with Stack's assertions. Firstly, he makes absolutely **no** attempt to discuss anarchist ideas on the question of revolutionary organisation. In [section J.3](#), we discuss the various approaches anarchists have historically suggested in this area and Stack fails to mention any of them. Rather, he prefers to present a somewhat distorted account of the ideas of Bakunin on the structural aspects of his organisation, ideas which died with him in 1876! Secondly, as Stack fails to discuss how anarchists (including Bakunin) see their organisations operating, it's hard to determine whether they are "*ineffective*" or "*elitist*." This is hardly surprising, as they are neither. Thirdly, even as regards his own example (Bakunin's Alliance) his claim that it was "*ineffectual*" seems inappropriate in the extreme. Whether it was "*elitist*" or "*downright bizarre*" is hard to determine, as Stack quotes an unnamed author and their quotes from its structure. Fourthly, and ironically for Stack, Lenin's "*model*" shared many of the same features as those of Bakunin's!

As noted, Stack fails to discuss any of the standard anarchist ideas on how revolutionaries should organise. As we discuss in [section J.3](#), there are three main types: the "*synthesis*" federation, the "*class struggle*" federation and the "*Platform*." In the twenty-first century, these are the main types of anarchist organisation. As such, it would be extremely hard to argue that these are "*elitist*," "*ineffective*" or "*downright bizarre*." What these organisational ideas have in common is the vision of an anarchist organisation as a federation of autonomous self-managed groups which work with others as equals. How can directly democratic organisations, which influence others by the force of their ideas and by their example, be "*elitist*" or "*downright bizarre*"? Little wonder, then, that Stack used an example from 1868 to attack anarchism in the twenty-first century! If he actually presented an honest account of anarchist ideas then his claims would quickly be seen to be nonsense. And as for the claim of being "*ineffective*," well, given that Stack's article is an attempt to combat anarchist influence in the anti-globalisation movement it would suggest the opposite.

For a modern account of how anarchist groups operate, organise and try to influence the class struggle directly, by the "*natural influence*" (to use Bakunin's expression) of its members in working class organisations see [section J.3](#).

Even looking at the example of Bakunin's Alliance, we can see evidence that Stack's summary is simply wrong. Firstly, it seems strange for Stack to claim that the Alliance was "*ineffective*." After all, Marx spent many years combating it (and Bakunin's influence) in the First International. Indeed, so effective was it that anarchist ideas dominated most sections of that organisation, forcing Marx to move the General Council to America to ensure that it did not fall into the hands of the anarchists (i.e. of the majority). Moreover, it was hardly "*ineffective*" when it came to building the International. As Marxist Paul Thomas notes, "*the International was to prove capable of expanding its membership only at the behest of the Bakuninists [sic!]*" and "*[w]herever the International was spreading, it was doing so under the mantle of Bakuninism.*" [**Karl Marx and the Anarchists**, p. 315 and p. 319] Yet Stack considers this as an example of an "*ineffective*" organisation!

As regards Stack's summary of Bakunin's organisation goes, we must note that Stack is quoting an unnamed source on Bakunin's views on this subject. We, therefore, have no way of evaluating whether

this is a valid summary of Bakunin's ideas on this matter. As we indicate elsewhere (see [section J.3.7](#)) Leninist summaries of Bakunin's ideas on secret organising usually leave a lot to be desired (by usually leaving a lot out or quoting out of context certain phrases). As such, and given the total lack of relevance of this model for anarchists since the 1870s, we will not bother to discuss this summary. Simply put, it is a waste of time to discuss an organisational model which no modern anarchist supports.

However, as we discuss in [section J.3.7](#), there is a key way in which Bakunin's ideas on this issue were far **less "elitist"** and **more "democratic"** than Lenin's model. Simply, Bakunin always stressed that his organisation *"rules out any idea of dictatorship and custodial control."* The revolution *"everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations . . . organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 172] In other words, Bakunin saw the social revolution in terms of popular participation and control, **not** the seizing of power by a "revolutionary" party or group.

The *"main purpose and task of the organisation,"* argued Bakunin, would be to *"help the people to achieve self-determination."* It would *"not threaten the liberty of the people because it is free from all official character"* and *"not placed above the people like state power."* Its programme *"consists of the fullest realisation of the liberty of the people"* and its influence is *"not contrary to the free development and self-determination of the people, or its organisation from below according to its own customs and instincts because it acts on the people only by the natural personal influence of its members who are not invested with any power."* Thus the revolutionary group would be the *"helper"* of the masses, with an *"organisation within the people itself."* [quoted by Michael Confino, **Daughter of a Revolutionary**, p. 259, p. 261, p. 256 and p. 261] The revolution itself would see *"an end to all masters and to domination of every kind, and the free construction of popular life in accordance with popular needs, not from above downward, as in the state, but from below upward, by the people themselves, dispensing with all governments and parliaments -- a voluntary alliance of agricultural and factory worker associations, communes, provinces, and nations; and, finally, . . . universal human brotherhood triumphing on the ruins of all the states."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 33]

Unlike Lenin, Bakunin did not confuse party power with people power. His organisation, for all its faults (and they were many), did not aim to take power in the name of the working class and exercise power through a centralised, top-down, state. Rather, its influence would be based on the *"natural influence"* of its members within mass organisations. The influence of anarchists would, therefore, be limited to the level by which their specific ideas were accepted by other members of the same organisations after discussion and debate. As regards the nature of the labour movement, we must point out that Bakunin provided the same *"serious"* answer as the anarcho-syndicalists -- namely, revolutionary labour unionism. As we discuss in [section H.2.8](#), Bakunin's ideas on this matter are nearly identical to those of the syndicalists Stack praises.

As noted, however, no anarchist group has reproduced the internal structure of the Alliance, which means that Stack's point is simply historical in nature. Sadly this is not the case with his own politics as

the ideas he attacks actually parallel Lenin's model in many ways (although, as indicated above, how Bakunin's organisation would function in the class struggle was fundamentally different, as Lenin's party sought power for itself). Given that Stack is proposing Lenin's model as a viable means of organising revolutionaries, it is useful to summarise it. We shall take as an example two statements issued by the Second World Congress of the Communist International in 1920 under the direction of Lenin. These are "*Twenty-One Conditions of Communism*" and "*Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution.*" These two documents provide a vision of Leninist organisation which is fundamentally elitist.

Lenin's "*model*" is clear from these documents. The parties adhering to the Communist International had to have two overlapping forms, one legal (i.e. public) and another "*illegal*" (i.e. secret). It was the "*duty*" of these parties "*to create everywhere a parallel illegal organisational apparatus.*" [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 2, p. 767]

Needless to say, this illegal organisation would be the real controlling body, as it would have to be made up of trusted communists and could only be even more tightly centralised than the open party as its members could only be appointed from above by the illegal organisation's central committee. To stress that the "*illegal*" (i.e. secret) organisation controlled the party, the Communist International agreed that while "*the Communist Parties must learn to systematically combine legal and illegal activity,*" the legal work "*must be under the actual control of the illegal party at all times.*" [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 1, p. 199]

Even in its open, public mode, the Communist Party was to be a highly centralised organisation, with all decisions on the national level made by the Central Committee. The parties must be as centralised as possible, with a party centre which has strength and authority and is equipped with the most comprehensive powers. Also, the party press and other publications, and all party publishing houses, must be subordinated to the party presidium. This applied on an international level as well, with the decisions of its Communist International's Executive Committee were binding on all parties belonging to the Communist International. [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 2, p. 769]

Moreover, "*Communist cells of all kinds must be subordinate to each other in a strictly hierarchical order of rank as precisely as possible.*" Democratic centralism itself was fundamentally hierarchical, with its "*basic principles*" being that "*the higher bodies shall be elected by the lower, that all instructions of the higher bodies are categorically and necessarily binding on the lower.*" Indeed, "*there shall be a strong party centre whose authority is universally and unquestionably recognised for all leading party comrades in the period between congresses.*" Any "*advocacy of broad 'autonomy' for the local party organisations only weakens the ranks of the Communist Party*" and "*favours petty-bourgeois, anarchist and disruptive tendencies.*" [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 1, p. 198]

It seems strange for Stack to argue that Bakunin's ideas (assuming he presents an honest account of them, of course) were "*far more elitist and less democratic than Lenin's model*" as it obviously was not. Indeed, the similarities between Stack's summary of Bakunin's ideas and Leninist theory are striking. The Leninist party has the same division between open and secret (legal and illegal) structures as in

Bakunin's, the same centralism and top-down nature. Lenin argued that "*[i]n all countries, even in those that are freest, most 'legal,' and most 'peaceful' . . . it is now absolutely indispensable for every Communist Party to systematically combine legal and illegal work, legal and illegal organisation.*" He stressed that "*[o]nly the most reactionary philistine, no matter what cloak of fine 'democratic' and pacifist phrases he may don, will deny this fact or the conclusion that of necessity follows from it, viz., that all legal Communist parties must immediately form illegal organisations for the systematic conduct of illegal work.*" [**Collected Works**, vol. 31, p. 195]

This was due to the threat of state repression, which also faced Bakunin's Alliance. As Murray Bookchin argues, "*Bakunin's emphasis on conspiracy and secrecy can be understood only against the social background of Italy, Spain, and Russia the three countries in Europe where conspiracy and secrecy were matters of sheer survival.*" [**The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 24]

For anarchists, the similarity in structure between Bakunin and Lenin is no source of embarrassment. Rather, we argue that it is due to a similarity in political conditions in Russia and **not** similarities in political ideas. If we look at Bakunin's ideas on social revolution and the workers' movement we see a fully libertarian perspective -- of a movement from the bottom-up, based on the principles of direct action, self-management and federalism. Anarchists since his death have applied **these** ideas to the specific anarchist organisation as well, rejecting the non-libertarian elements of Bakunin's ideas which Stack correctly (if somewhat hypocritically and dishonestly) denounce. All in all, Stack has shown himself to be a hypocrite or, at best, a "*most reactionary philistine*" (to use Lenin's choice expression).

In addition, it would be useful to evaluate the effectiveness of Stack's Leninist alternative. Looking at the outcome of the Russian Revolution, we can only surmise that it is not very effective. This is because its goal is meant to be a socialist society based on soviet democracy. Did the Russian Revolution actually result in such a society? Far from it. The Kronstadt revolt was repressed in 1921 because it demanded soviet power (see ["What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?"](#)). Nor was this an isolated example. The Bolsheviks had been disbanding soviets with elected non-Bolshevik majorities since early 1918 (i.e. **before** the start of the Civil War) and by 1920 leading Bolsheviks were arguing that dictatorship of the proletariat could only be expressed by means of the dictatorship of the party (see [section 6](#) of the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#) for details). Clearly, the Bolshevik method is hardly "*effective*" in the sense of achieving its stated goals. Nor was it particularly effective before the revolution either. During the 1905 revolution, the Bolsheviks opposed the councils of workers' deputies (soviets) which had been formed and gave them an ultimatum: either accept the programme of the Bolsheviks or else disband! The soviets ignored them. In February 1917 the Bolshevik party opposed the actions that produced the revolution which overthrew the Tsar. Simply put, the one event that validates the Bolshevik model is the October Revolution of 1917 and even that failed.

The weakness of Stack's diatribe can be seen from his use of the Alliance example. Moreover, it backfires on his own politics. The similarities between Bakunin's ideas and Lenin's on this subject are clear. The very issues which Stack raises as being "*elitist*" in Bakunin (secret and open organisation, centralisation, top-down decision making) are shared by Lenin. Given that no other anarchist

organisation has ever followed the Alliance structure (and, indeed, it is doubtful the Alliance followed it!), it makes a mockery of the scientific method to base a generalisation on an exception rather than the norm (indeed, the only exception). For Stack to use Bakunin's ideas on this issue as some kind of evidence against anarchism staggers belief. Given that anarchists reject Bakunin's ideas on this subject while Leninists continue to subscribe to Lenin's, it is very clear that Stack is being extremely hypocritical in this matter.

All in all, anarchists would argue that it is Leninist ideas on the vanguard party which are "*elitist*," "*ineffective*" and "*downright bizarre*." As we discuss in [section H.5](#), the only thing the Leninist "revolutionary" party is effective for is replacing one set of bosses with a new set (the leaders of the party).

## H.2.15 Do anarchists reject discipline?

The idea that anarchists reject the need for discipline, or are against organisation, or base their ideas on the whim of the individual, are common place in Marxism. Simply put, the idea that anarchists reject "*discipline*" is derived from the erroneous Marxist assertion that anarchism is basically a form of "*individualism*" and based on the "*absolute sovereignty of the individual ego*" (see [section H.2.11](#)). From this (incorrect) position, it is logically deduced that anarchism must reject the need for "*discipline*" (i.e. the ability to make and stick to collective decisions). Needless to say, this is false. Anarchists are well aware of the need to organise together and, therefore, the need to stick by decisions reached. The importance of solidarity in anarchist theory is an expression of this awareness.

However, there is "*discipline*" and "*discipline*." There can be no denying that in a capitalist workplace or army there is "*discipline*" yet few, if any, sane persons would argue that this distinctly top-down and hierarchical "*discipline*" is something to aspire to, particularly if you seek a free society. This cannot be compared to a making and sticking by a collective decision reached by free discussion and debate within a self-governing associations. As Bakunin argued:

*"Discipline, mutual trust as well as unity are all excellent qualities when properly understood and practised, but disastrous when abused . . . [one use of the word] discipline almost always signifies despotism on the one hand and blind automatic submission to authority on the other . . .*

*"Hostile as I am to [this,] the authoritarian conception of discipline, I nevertheless recognise that a certain kind of discipline, not automatic but voluntary and intelligently understood is, and will ever be, necessary whenever a greater number of individuals undertake any kind of collective work or action. Under these circumstances, discipline is simply the voluntary and considered co-ordination of all individual efforts for a common purpose. At the moment of revolution, in the midst of the struggle, there is a natural division of functions according to the aptitude of each, assessed and judged by the collective whole: Some direct and others carry out orders. But no function remains fixed*

*and it will not remain permanently and irrevocably attached to any one person. Hierarchical order and promotion do not exist, so that the executive of yesterday can become the subordinate of tomorrow. No one rises above the others, and if he does rise, it is only to fall back again a moment later, like the waves of the sea forever returning to the salutary level of equality.*

*"In such a system, power, properly speaking, no longer exists. Power is diffused to the collectivity and becomes the true expression of the liberty of everyone, the faithful and sincere realisation of the will of all . . . this is the only true discipline, the discipline necessary for the organisation of freedom. This is not the kind of discipline preached by the State . . . which wants the old, routine-like, automatic blind discipline. Passive discipline is the foundation of every despotism."* [Bakunin on Anarchism, pp. 414-5]

Clearly, anarchists see the need for **self**-discipline rather than the hierarchical "*discipline*" associated with capitalism and other class systems. It simply means that *"anyone who associates and co-operates with others for a common purpose must feel the need to co-ordinate his [or her] actions with those of his [or her] fellow members and do nothing that harms the work of others and, thus, the common cause; and respect the agreements that have been made -- except when wishing sincerely to leave the association when emerging differences of opinion or changed circumstances or conflict over preferred methods make co-operation impossible or inappropriate."* [Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, pp. 107-8] As such, we reject hierarchical "*discipline*," considering it as confusing agreement with authority, co-operation with coercion and helping with hierarchy.

Anarchists are not alone in this. A few Marxists have also seen this difference. For example, Rosa Luxemburg repeated (probably unknowingly) Bakunin's distinction between forms of "*discipline*" when she argued, against Lenin, that:

*"Lenin . . . declares that 'it is no longer the proletarians but certain intellectuals in our party who need to be educated in the matters of organisation and discipline' . . . He glorifies the educative influence of the factory, which, he says, accustoms the proletariat to 'discipline and organisation' . . .*

*"Saying all this, Lenin seems to demonstrate . . . his conception of socialist organisation is quite mechanistic. The discipline Lenin has in mind being implanted in the working class not only by the factory but also by the military and the existing state bureaucracy -- by the entire mechanism of the centralised bourgeois state.*

*"We misuse words and we practice self-deception when we apply the same term -- discipline -- to such dissimilar notions as: (1) the absence of thought and will in a body with a thousand automatically moving hands and legs, and (2) the spontaneous co-ordination of the conscious, political acts of a body of men. What is there in common between the regulated docility of an oppressed class and the self-discipline and*



*organisation of a class struggling for its emancipation?*

*"The self-discipline of the social democracy is not merely the replacement of the authority of the bourgeois rulers with the authority of a socialist central committee. The working class will acquire the sense of the new discipline, the freely assumed self-discipline of the social democracy, not as a result of the discipline imposed on it by the capitalist state, but by extirpating, to the last root, its old habits of obedience and servility."* [Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, pp. 119-20]

Like Luxemburg, anarchists stress the difference in forms of decision making and reject authoritarian organisations along with hierarchical "discipline" (see [section H.4](#)). This support for self-discipline within self-managed organisations flows directly from the anarchist awareness of the **collective** nature of social change: as "*[t]oday, in revolutionary action as in labour itself, collectivism must replace individualism. Understand clearly that in organising yourselves you will be stronger than all the political leaders in the world.*" [Bakunin, quoted by K.J. Kenafick, **Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx**, p. 244]

For anarchists, collective organisation and co-operation does not mean the end of individuality. As Bakunin argued:

*"You will think, you will exist, you will act collectively, which nevertheless will not prevent in the least the full development of the intellectual and moral faculties of each individual. Each of you will bring to you his own talents, and in all joining together you will multiply your value a hundred fold. Such is the law of collective action . . . in giving your hands to each other for this action in common, you will promise to each other a mutual fraternity which will be . . . a sort of free contract . . . Then proceed collectively to action you will necessarily commence by practising this fraternity between yourselves . . . by means of regional and local organisations . . . you will find in yourselves strength that you had never imagined, if each of you acted individually, according to his own inclination and not as a consequence of a unanimous resolution, discussed and accepted beforehand."* [quoted by Kenafick, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 244-5]

Therefore, anarchists see the need for "discipline," assuming that it is created in appropriately libertarian ways. We reject it if it simply means blindly following the orders of those in power, which is usually done within modern society and, sadly, large parts of the labour and socialist movements. However, this does not mean that the majority is always right. As Malatesta argued, "*[t]here are matters over which it is worth accepting the will of the majority because the damage caused by a split would be greater than that caused by error; there are circumstances in which discipline becomes a duty because to fail in it would be to fail in the solidarity between the oppressed and would mean betrayal in face of the enemy. But when is convinced that the organisation is pursuing a course which threatens the future and makes it difficult to remedy the harm done, then it is a duty to rebel and to resist even at the risk of providing a split.*" Therefore, "*anarchists should extend our activities into all organisations to preach*

*unity among all workers, decentralisation, freedom of initiative, within the common framework of solidarity . . . What is essential is that individuals should develop a sense of organisation and solidarity, and the conviction that fraternal co-operation is necessary to fight oppression and to achieve a society in which everyone will be able to enjoy his [or her] own life."* [**Life and Ideas**, pp. 132-3]

In other words, anarchists reject the idea that obeying orders equals "*discipline*" and recognise that real discipline means evaluating the needs of solidarity and equality with your fellow workers and acting accordingly.

## H.2.16 Does the Spanish Revolution show the failure of anarchism?

The actions of the anarchists of the CNT and FAI during the Spanish Civil War is almost always mentioned by Marxists when they attack anarchism. Take, for example, Pat Stack. He argues as follows:

*"This question of state power, and which class holds it, was to prove crucial for revolutionaries during the Spanish Civil War and in particular during the revolutionary upheavals in Catalonia. Here anarchism faced its greatest test and greatest opportunity, yet it failed the former and therefore missed the latter.*

*"When the government in the region under the leadership of Companys admitted its impotence and offered to dissolve, effectively handing power to the revolutionary forces, the anarchists turned them down. CNT leader and FAI . . . militant Garcia Oliver explained, 'The CNT and the FAI decided on collaboration and democracy, renouncing revolutionary totalitarianism which would lead to the strangulation of the revolution by the anarchist and Confederal dictatorship. We had to choose, between Libertarian Communism, which meant anarchist dictatorship, and democracy, which meant collaboration.' The choice was between leaving the state intact and paving the way for Franco's victory or building a workers' government in Catalonia which could act as a focal point for the defeat of Franco and the creation of the structures of a new workers' state. In choosing the former the anarchists were refusing to distinguish between a capitalist state and a workers' state . . . The movement that started by refusing to build a workers' state ended up by recognising a capitalist one and betraying the revolution in the process."* ["Anarchy in the UK?", **Socialist Review**, no. 246]

While we have addressed this issue in sections [I.8.10](#) and [I.8.11](#), it is useful to summarise a few key points on this issue. First, there is the actual objective situation in which the decision to collaborate was made in. Strangely, for all his talk of anarchists ignoring "*material conditions*," Stack fails to mention any when he discusses the decisions of Spanish Anarchism. As such, his critique is pure idealism, without any attempt to ground it in the objective circumstances facing the CNT and FAI. Second, the quote provided as the only evidence for Stack's analysis dates from a year after the decision was made.

Rather than reflect the actual concerns of the CNT and FAI when they made their decision, they reflect the attempts of the leaders of an organisation which had significantly departed from its libertarian principles to justify their actions. While this obviously suits Stack's idealist analysis of events, its use can be flawed for this reason. Thirdly, clearly the decision of the CNT and FAI **ignored** anarchist theory. As such, it seems ironic to blame anarchism when anarchists ignores its recommendations, yet this is what Stack argues. Lastly, there is the counter-example of Aragon, which clearly refutes Stack's analysis.

To understand why the CNT and FAI made the decisions it did, it is necessary to do what Stack fails to do, namely to provide some context. The decision to ignore anarchist theory, ignore the state rather than smashing it and work with other anti-fascist organisations was made immediately after the army had been defeated on the streets of Barcelona on the 20th of July, 1936. It is this fact, the success of a popular insurrection in one region against a **nation wide** military coup, which helps place the CNT's decisions into context. Catalonia is but one region in Spain. While the CNT had great strength in many regions of that country, it was not uniform. Some areas, such as around Madrid and in Asturias, the socialist UGT was stronger (although the CNT had been making inroads in both areas). This meant any decision to introduce libertarian communism in Catalonia would have, in all likelihood, meant isolation within Republican Spain and the possibility that the CNT would have to fight both the Republican state **as well as** Franco.

As such, the **real** choice facing the CNT was not *"between leaving the state intact . . . or building a workers' government in Catalonia which could act as a focal point for the defeat of Franco"* but rather something drastically different. Either work with other anti-fascists against Franco so ensuring unity against the common enemy and implement anarchism after victory **or** immediately implement libertarian communism and possibly face a conflict on two fronts, against Franco **and** the Republic (and, possibly, imperialist intervention against the social revolution). This situation made the CNT-FAI decided to collaborate with other anti-fascist groups in the Catalan **Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias**. To downplay these objective factors and simply blame the decision on anarchist politics is a joke. As we argue in [section I.8.10](#) in more detail, this dilemma was the one which was driving the decisions of the CNT leadership, **not** any failings in anarchist politics (see [section I.8.11](#) for a discussion of why applying anarchist ideas would have been the correct decision, although hindsight is always twenty-twenty).

Similarly, the Garica Oliver quote provided by Stack dated from a year **after** the events of July 1936. As discussed in [section I.8.11](#), these comments are justifications of CNT-FAI actions and were designed for political effect. As such, they simply cannot be taken at face value for two reasons.

Firstly, the decision to collaborate was obviously driven by fear of Franco and the concern not to divide the forces fighting him. As the 1937 report to the AIT put it, the CNT had a *"difficult alternative: to completely destroy the state, to declare war against the Rebels, the government, foreign capitalists . . . or collaborating."* [quoted by Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 2, p. 1156] That was the reality facing the CNT -- not Stack's pondering of Garcia Oliver quotes ripped from

their historical context.

Secondly, Oliver's arguments are totally contradictory. After all, he is arguing that libertarian communism (a society based on directly democratic free associations organised and run from the bottom up) is an "*anarchist dictatorship*" and **less** democratic than the capitalist Republic Garica Oliver had been fighting against for most of his life! Moreover, libertarian communism **was** the revolution. As such, to choose it over capitalist democracy to stop "*the strangulation of the revolution*" makes no sense, as the revolution which was created by the rank-and-file of the anarchist movement after the defeat of Franco was based on libertarian communist ideas and ideals!

For these reasons, it is safe to take Garica Oliver's words with a large pinch of salt. To rely upon them for an analysis of the actions of the Spanish Anarchists or the failings of anarchism suggests an extremely superficial perspective. This is particularly the case when we look at both the history of the CNT and anarchist theory. According to anarchist ideas, the social revolution, to quote Bakunin, must "*totally destroy the State,*" expropriate capital and the land "*on behalf of workers' associations*" and create "*the federative Alliance of all working men's associations*" which "*will constitute the Commune.*" [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 170] Therefore, it is "*not true to say that we completely ignore politics. We do not ignore it, for we definitely want to destroy it.*" [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 331] As can be seen, the CNT ignored these recommendations. Given that the CNT did **not** destroy the state, nor create a federation of workers' councils, then how can anarchist theory be blamed? It seems strange to point to the failure of anarchists to apply their politics as an example of the failure of those politics, yet this is what Stack is doing.

As we discuss in [section I.8.11](#), the CNT leadership, going against anarchist theory, decided to postpone the revolution until **after** Franco was defeated. As the Catalan CNT leadership put it in August 1936:

*"Reports have also been received from other regions. There has been some talk about the impatience of some comrades who wish to go futher than crushing fascism, but for the moment the situation in Spain as a whole is extremely delicate. In revolutionary terms, Catalonia is an oasis within Spain.*

*"Obviously no one can foresee the changes which may follow the civil war and the conquest of that part of Spain which is still under the control of mutinous reactionaries."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 151-2]

As can be seen, concern that Catalonia would be isolated from the rest of the Republic is foremost in their minds. Equally, there is the acknowledgement that many CNT members were applying anarchist politics by fighting fascism via a revolutionary war. This can be seen by the rank and file of the CNT and FAI ignoring the decision "postpone" the revolution in favour of an anti-fascist war. All across Republican Spain, workers and peasants started to expropriate capital and the land, placing it under workers' self-management. They did so on their own initiative. They also applied anarchist ideas in full

in Aragon, where the **Council of Aragon** was created in October 1936 at a meeting of delegates from CNT unions, village collectives and militia columns. In other words, the creation of a federation of workers' associations as argued by Bakunin. Little wonder Stack fails to mention what happened in Aragon, it would undermine his argument against anarchism to mention it.

To contrast Catalonia and Aragon shows the weakness of Stack's argument. The same organisation, with the same politics, yet different results. How can anarchist ideas be blamed for what happened in Catalonia when they had been applied in Aragon? Such a position could not be logically argued and, unsurprisingly, Aragon usually fails to get mentioned by Marxists when discussing Anarchism during the Spanish Civil War. The continuity of what happened in Aragon with the ideas of anarchism and the CNT's 1936 Zaragoza Resolution on Libertarian Communism is clear.

In summary, how could anarchism have *"failed"* during the Spanish Revolution when it was ignored in Catalonia (for fear of fascism) and applied in Aragon? How can it be argued that anarchist politics were to blame when those very same politics had formed the Council of Aragon? It cannot. Simply put, the Spanish Civil War showed the failure of certain anarchists to apply their ideas in a difficult situation rather than the failure of anarchism.

Needless to say, Stack also claims that the **Friends of Durruti** group developed towards Marxism. As he puts it:

*"Interestingly the one Spanish anarchist group that developed the most sophisticated critique of all this was the Friends of Durutti. As Felix Morrow points out, 'They represented a conscious break with the anti-statism of traditional anarchism. They explicitly declared the need for democratic organs of power, juntas or soviets, in the overthrow of capitalism, and the necessary state measures of repression against the counter-revolution.' The failure of the Spanish anarchists to understand exactly that these were the stark choices, workers' power, or capitalist power followed by reaction."*

The **Friends of Durruti** (FoD) were an anarchist grouping within the CNT and FAI which, like a large minority of others, strongly and consistently opposed the policy of anti-fascist unity. However, rather than signify a *"conscious break"* with anarchism, it signified a conscious **return** to it. This can be clearly seen when we compare their arguments to those of Bakunin. As noted by Stack, the FoD argued for *"juntas"* in the overthrow of capitalism and to defend against counter-revolution. This is **exactly** what revolutionary anarchists have argued for since Bakunin (see [section H.2.1](#) for details)! The continuity of the ideas of FoD with the pre-Civil War politics of the CNT and the ideas of revolutionary anarchism are clear. As such, the FoD were simply arguing for a return to the traditional positions of anarchism and cannot be considered to have broken with it. If Stack or Morrow knew anything about anarchism, then they would have known this.

(See ["Did the Friends of Durruti 'break with' anarchism?"](#) in the ["Marxists and Spanish Anarchism"](#) appendix for a much fuller discussion of this topic.)

As such, the failure of the Spanish anarchists was not the "*stark choice*" between "*workers' power*" and "*capitalist power*" but rather the making of the wrong choice in the real dilemma of introducing anarchism (which would, by definition, be based on workers' power, organisation and self-management) or collaborating with other anti-fascist groups in the struggle against the greater enemy of Franco (i.e. fascist reaction). That Stack does not see this suggests that he simply has no appreciation of the dynamics of the Spanish Revolution and prefers abstract sloganeering to a serious analysis of the problems facing it.

Stack ends by summarising:

*"The most important lesson . . . is that whatever ideals and gut instincts individual anarchists may have, anarchism, both in word and deed, fails to provide a roadworthy vehicle for human liberation. Only Marxism, which sees the centrality of the working class under the leadership of a political party, is capable of leading the working class to victory."*

As a useful antidote to these claims, we need simply quote Trotsky on what the Spanish anarchists should have done. In his words: "*Because the leaders of the CNT renounced dictatorship for themselves they left the place open for the Stalinist dictatorship.*" [our emphasis, **Writings 1936-7**, p. 514] Hardly an example of "workers' power"!

Or, as he put it in his essay "*Stalinism and Bolshevism*," a "*revolutionary party, even having seized power (of which the anarchist leaders were incapable in spite of the heroism of the anarchist workers), is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society.*" [**Stalinism and Bolshevism**] Rather than seeing "*democratic organs of power, juntas or soviets, in the overthrow of capitalism*" as being the key issue, Trotsky considered the party as being the decisive factor. Indeed, the idea that such organs ("juntas" or "soviets," to use Stack's words) could replace the party dictatorship is dismissed:

*"Those who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."* [**Op. Cit.**]

Clearly, the leading Marxist at the time was not arguing for the "*centrality of the working class under the leadership of a political party.*" He was arguing for the dictatorship of a "revolutionary" party **over** the working class. Rather than the working class being "central" to the running of a revolutionary regime, Trotsky saw the party being in the central position. What sort of "*victory*" is possible when the party has dictatorial power over the working class and the "*sovereign ruler*" of society? Simply the kind of "*victory*" that leads to Stalinism.

Anarchists reject this vision. They also reject the first step along this path, namely the identification of party power with workers' power. Simply put, if the "revolutionary" party is in power then the working class is not. Rather than seeing working class organisations as the means by which working people run

society, Leninists see them purely in instrumental terms -- the means by which the party can seize power. As the Russian Revolution proved beyond doubt, in a conflict between workers' power and party power Leninists will suppress the former to ensure the latter (see the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#)). As Trotsky argued in 1939 (18 years after he made similar arguments when he was in power) the *"very same masses are at different times inspired by different moods and objectives. It is just for this reason that a centralised organisation of the vanguard is indispensable. Only a party, wielding the authority it has won, is capable of overcoming the vacillation of the masses themselves."* [**The Moralists and Sycophants**, p. 59]

To paraphrase Stack, the most important lesson from both the Russian and Spanish revolutions is that whatever ideals and gut instincts individual Leninists may have, Leninism, both in word and deed, fails to provide a roadworthy vehicle for human liberation. Only Anarchism, which sees the centrality of the working class management of the class struggle and revolution, is capable of ensuring the creation of a real, free, socialist society.

Therefore, rather than see the failure of anarchism, the Spanish Revolution showed the failure of anarchists to apply their politics due to exceptionally difficult objective circumstances, a mistake which almost all anarchists acknowledge and have learned from. This does not justify the decision, rather it helps to explain it. Moreover, the Spanish Revolution also has a clear example of anarchism being applied in the Council of Aragon. As such, it is hard to blame anarchism for the failure of the CNT when the same organisation applied its ideas successfully there. Simply put, Marxist claims that the Spanish Revolution shows the failure of anarchist ideas are not only wrong, they are extremely superficial and not rooted in the objective circumstances of the time.

# Appendix : Anarchism and Marxism

This appendix exists to refute some of the many anti-anarchist diatribes produced by Marxists. While we have covered why anarchists oppose Marxism in [section H](#), we thought it would be useful to reply to Marxist webpages and books whose content is not explicitly covered in that section. In this way we hope to indicate that Marxism is a flawed theory, flawed even to the extent of not being able to present a honest critique of anarchism. This consistent attempt to smear anarchism and distort its history and ideas is no co-incidence -- rather it is required in order to present Marxism as the only viable form of socialism and, more importantly, to hide the fact that much of the populist Marxist rhetoric was, in fact, said by anarchists first and latter stolen by Marxists to hide the authoritarian basis of their politics.

One last point. We are aware that we repeat many of our arguments in these appendices. That, unfortunately, is avoidable for two reasons. Firstly, Marxists usually repeat the same false assertions against anarchism and so we have to answer them each time they appear. Marxists seem to subscribe to the point of view that repeating an error often enough makes it true. Secondly, we have tried to make each appendix as self-contained as possible and that meant repeating certain material and arguments to achieve this. We hope the reader understands.

- [\*\*\*Reply to errors and distortions in David McNally's pamphlet "Socialism from Below"\*\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Marxists and Spanish Anarchism\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Reply to errors and distortions in Phil Mitchinson's "Marxism and direct action"\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Reply to errors and distortions in the SWP's "Marxism and Anarchism"\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Reply to errors and distortions in John Fisher's "Why we must further Marxism and not Anarchism"\*\*](#)



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## Reply to errors and distortions in David McNally's pamphlet "Socialism from Below"

### 1. Introduction

2. Is anarchism the politics of the "small property owner"?

3. Does anarchism "glorify values from the past"?

4. Why are McNally's comments on Proudhon a distortion of his ideas?

5. Why are McNally's comments on Bakunin a distortion of his ideas?

6. Are the "quirks of personality" of Proudhon and Bakunin listed by McNally actually rooted "in the very nature of anarchist doctrine"?

7. Are anarchists against democracy?

8. Are Leninists in favour of democracy?

9. Why is McNally wrong on the relation of syndicalism to anarchism?

10. Do syndicalists reject working class political action?

11. Why is McNally's claim that Leninism supports the principle of working class self-emancipation is wrong?

12. Why is Marxist "class analysis" of anarchism contradictory?

13. If Marxism is "socialism from below," why do anarchists reject it?

14. Why is McNally's use of the term "socialism from below" dishonest?

15. Did Trotsky keep alive Leninism's "democratic essence"?

## Marxists and Spanish Anarchism

1. Were the Spanish Anarchists "Primitive Rebels"?

2. How accurate is Felix Morrow's book on the Spanish Revolution?

3. Did a "highly centralised" FAI control the CNT?

4. What is the history of the CNT and the Communist International?

5. Why did the CNT not join the Workers' Alliance?

6. Was the October 1934 revolt sabotaged by the CNT?

7. Were the Friends of Durruti Marxists?

8. Did the Friends of Durruti "break with" anarchism?

9. Were the Friends of Durruti influenced by Trotskyists?
10. What does the Friends of Durruti's programme tell us about Trotskyism?
11. Why is Morrow's comments against the militarisation of the Militias ironic?
12. What is ironic about Morrow's vision of revolution?
13. Why do anarchists reject the Marxist "workers' state"?
14. What is wrong with Morrow's "*fundamental tenet*" of anarchism?
15. Did Spanish Anarchism aim for the creation of "collectives" before the revolution?
16. How does the development of the collectives indicate the differences between Bolshevism and anarchism?
17. Why is Morrow's support for "*proletarian methods of production*" ironic?
18. Were the federations of collectives an "*abandonment*" of anarchist ideas?
19. Did the experience of the rural collectives refute anarchism?
20. Does the experience of the Spanish Revolution indicate the failure of anarchism or the failure of anarchists?

## Reply to errors and distortions in Phil Mitchinson's "*Marxism and direct action*"

1. How does Mitchinson impoverish the politics of the direct action groups?
2. Does anarchism "*juxtapose*" theory and action?
3. How does Mitchinson distort the London May Day demo?
4. Do anarchists really think "*the bosses will do nothing to defend their system*"?
5. How does Mitchinson misrepresent anarchist organisation?
6. How does Mitchinson define anarchism wrongly?
7. Does anarchism reject fighting for reforms?

8. Does anarchism see the state as the root of all problems?
9. Why is Mitchinson wrong about the "*Abolition [i.e. Abolition] of the state*"?
10. Why is Mitchinson's comment that we face either "*socialism or barbarism*" actually undermine his case?
11. Why is Mitchinson wrong to assert anarchists do not believe in defending a revolution?
12. Would the "workers' state" really be different, as Mitchinson claims?
13. Is the Marxist "worker's state" really the rule of one class over another?
14. Why do anarchists reject the Marxist notion of "conquest of power"?
15. What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?
16. Did anarchists reject "*the need for organisation in the shape of trade unions*"?
17. Why do anarchists reject political activity?
18. How do anarchists struggle for reforms under capitalism?
19. How does Mitchinson distorts the use of the term "*Self-reliance*"?
20. Is anarchism an example of "*Philosophical idealism*"?
21. How is Mitchinson's critique self-contradictory?
22. How did Trotsky make the trains run on time?
23. Can centralised planning meet the needs of the whole of society?
24. Is technology neutral?
25. Do anarchists ignore the "*strength of the working class*"?
26. What does Mitchinson's article tell about the nature of Trotskyism?

## Reply to errors and distortions in the SWP's "*Marxism and Anarchism*"

1. What does the anti-globalisation movement tell us about the effectiveness of the "vanguard" parties like the SWP?

2. What does the SWP miss out in its definition of anarchism?
3. Why does mentioning the history of anarchism weaken the SWP's argument?
4. How is the SWP wrong about centralisation?
5. Why does the SWP's "*picket line is 'authoritarian'*" argument totally miss the point?
6. Why are the SWP's examples of "*state functions*" wrong?
7. What is ironic about the SWP's comment that workers' councils must "*break up*" the capitalist state?
8. How do the SWP re-write the history of the Russian Revolution?
9. How do the SWP re-write the history of the Spanish Revolution?
10. Do anarchists ignore the fact that ideas change through struggle?
11. Why do anarchists oppose the Leninist "*revolutionary party*"?
12. Why do the SWP make a polemical fetish of "*unity*" and "*democracy*" to the expense of common sense and freedom?
13. How does the Battle of Prague expose the SWP as hypocrites?
14. Is the Leninist tradition actually as democratic as the SWP like to claim?
15. Why is the SWP's support for centralisation anti-socialist?
16. Why is the SWP wrong about the A16 Washington D.C. demo?
17. Why does the SWP's Washington example refute the SWP's own argument and not anarchism?
18. Why is a "*revolutionary party*" a contradiction in terms?
19. Do anarchists operate "*in secret*"?
20. Why is the SWP wrong about Bakunin's organisation?
21. Why is the SWP's attack on Bakunin's organisation ironic?
22. Was the F.A.I. a "*centralised and secret*" organisation that shunned "*open debate and common struggle*"?
23. Do anarchists wait for "*spontaneous upsurges by workers*"?
24. Do anarchists blame workers "*for being insufficiently revolutionary*"?
25. Why does the history of centralised parties refute the SWP's arguments?

## **Reply to errors and distortions in John Fisher's "*Why we must further Marxism and not Anarchism*"**

- 1. Why should "*the so-called Anarchistic youth of today*" be concerned that Trotskyists consider them allies?**
- 2. What else do people learn about when they discover anarchism is more than "*utter rebellion*"?**
- 3. What do anarchists think will "*replace the smashed state machine*"?**
- 4. What did Trotsky and Lenin think must replace the bourgeois state?**
- 5. Is the "*proletarian 'state'*" really a new kind of state?**
- 6. Do anarchists "*hope the capitalists do not make any attempts of counterrevolution*"?**
- 7. Are Anarchists simply "*potential Marxists*"?**
- 8. Is Marxism a scientific?**
- 9. What does the Russian Revolution tell us about Trotskyism?**
- 10. Do anarchists reject "*leadership*"?**
- 11. Does the Spanish Revolution show anarchism is flawed?**
- 12. Does anarchism believe in spontaneous revolution?**

# Section H - Why do anarchists oppose state socialism?

## Introduction

### H.1 Have anarchists always opposed state socialism?

H.1.1 What was Bakunin's critique of Marxism?

H.1.2 What are the key differences between Anarchists and Marxists?

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H.1.6 Why do anarchists try to "build the new world in the shell of the old"?

H.1.7 Haven't you read Lenin's "State and Revolution"?

### H.2 What parts of anarchism do Marxists particularly misrepresent?

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[H.3.3 Is Leninism "\*socialism from below\*"?](#)

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H.5.8 Are vanguard parties effective?

H.5.9 What are vanguard parties effective at?

H.5.10 Why does "*democratic centralism*" produce "*bureaucratic centralism*"?

H.5.11 Can you provide an example of the negative nature of vanguard parties?



# Section H - Why do anarchists oppose state socialism?

The socialist movement has been continually divided, with various different tendencies and movements. Two of the main tendencies of socialism are state socialism (Marxism, Leninism, Maoism and so on) and libertarian socialism (anarchism in all its many forms). The conflict and disagreement between anarchists and Marxists is legendary. As Benjamin Tucker noted:

*"[I]t is a curious fact that the two extremes of the [socialist movement] . . . though united . . . by the common claim that labour should be put in possession of its own, are more diametrically opposed to each other in their fundamental principles of social action and their methods of reaching the ends aimed at than either is to their common enemy, existing society. They are based on two principles the history of whose conflict is almost equivalent to the history of the world since man came into it . . .*

*"The two principles referred to are AUTHORITY and LIBERTY, and the names of the two schools of Socialistic thought which fully and unreservedly represent one or the other are, respectively, State Socialism and Anarchism. Whoso knows that these two schools want and how they propose to get it understands the Socialistic movement. For, just as it has been said that there is no half-way house between Rome and Reason, so it may be said that there is no half-way house between State Socialism and Anarchism."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 78-9]

In addition to this divide between libertarian and authoritarian forms of socialism, there is another divide between reformist and revolutionary wings of these two tendencies. *"The term 'anarchist,'" Murray Bookchin writes, "is a generic word like the term 'socialist,' and there are probably as many different kinds of anarchists as there are socialists. In both cases, the spectrum ranges from individuals whose views derive from an extension of liberalism (the 'individualist anarchists', the social-democrats) to revolutionary communists (the anarcho-communists, the revolutionary Marxists, Leninists and Trotskyites)."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 214f]

In this section of the FAQ we concentrate on the conflict between the revolutionary wings of both movements. Here we discuss why communist-anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and other revolutionary anarchists reject Marxist theories, particularly the revolutionary ideas of Leninists and Trotskyites. We will concentrate almost entirely on the works of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky as well as the Russian Revolution. This is because many Marxists reject the Chinese, Cuban and other revolutions as being infected by Stalinism. In contrast, there is a general agreement in Marxist circles that the Russian Revolution was a true socialist revolution and the ideas of Lenin (and usually Trotsky) follow in Marx's footsteps. What we say against Marx and Lenin is also applicable to their more controversial followers, therefore we ignore them. We also dismiss out of hand any suggestion that the Stalinist regime was

remotely socialist. Unfortunately many serious revolutionaries consider Lenin's regime to be a valid example of a valid socialist revolution so we have to discuss why it was not.

As noted, two main wings of the revolutionary socialist movement, anarchism and Marxism, have always been in conflict. While, with the apparent success of the Russian revolution, the anarchist movement was overshadowed by its authoritarian name-sake in many countries, this situation has been changing. In recent years anarchism has seen a revival as more and more people recognise the fundamentally anti-socialist nature of the Russian "experiment" and the politics that inspired it. With this re-evaluation of socialism and the Soviet Union, more and more people are rejecting Marxism and embracing libertarian socialism. As can be seen from the press coverage from such events as the anti-Poll Tax riots in the UK at the start of the 1990s, the J18 and N30 anti-capitalist demonstrations in 1999, anarchism has become synonymous with anti-capitalism.

Needless to say, the self-proclaimed "vanguard(s) of the proletariat" become worried and hurriedly write patronising articles on "anarchism" (without bothering to really understand it or its arguments against Marxism). These articles are usually a mishmash of lies, irrelevant personal attacks, distortions of the anarchist position and the ridiculous assumption that anarchists are anarchists because no one has bothered to inform of us of what "Marxism" is "really" about. We do not aim to repeat such "scientific" analysis in our FAQ so we shall concentrate on politics and history. By so doing we will indicate that anarchists are anarchists because we understand Marxism and reject it as being unable to lead to a socialist society.

It is unfortunately common for many Marxists, particularly Leninist influenced ones, to concentrate on personalities and not politics when discussing anarchist ideas. Albert Meltzer put it well when he argued that it is *"very difficult for Marxist-Leninists to make an objective criticism of Anarchism, as such, because by its very nature it undermines all the suppositions basic to Marxism. If Marxism is held out to be indeed **the** basic working class philosophy, and the proletariat cannot owe its emancipation to anyone but itself, it is hard to go back on it and say that the working class is not yet ready to dispense with authority placed over it. Marxists therefore, normally refrain from criticising anarchism as such -- unless driven to doing so, when it exposes its own authoritarianism . . . and concentrates its attack not on **anarchism**, but on **anarchists**"* [**Anarchism: Arguments For and Against**, p. 37]

This can be seen, for example, when many Leninists attempt to "refute" the whole of anarchism, its theory and history, by pointing out the personal failings of specific anarchists. They say that Proudhon was anti-jewish and sexist, that Bakunin was racist, that Kropotkin supported the Allies in the First World War and so anarchism is flawed. All these facts about Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin are true and they are all irrelevant to a critique of anarchism. Such a "critique" does not address anarchist ideas, all of which are ignored by this approach. In other words, they attack anarchists, not anarchism.

Even taken at face value, you would have to be stupid to assume that Proudhon's misogyny or Bakunin's racism had equal weighting with Lenin's and the Bolsheviks' behaviour (for example, the creation of a party dictatorship, the repression of strikes, free speech, independent working class organisation, the

creation of a secret police force, the attack on Kronstadt, the betrayal of the Makhnovists, the violent repression of the Russian anarchist movement, etc.) in the league table of despicable activity. It seems strange that personal bigotry is of equal, or even more, importance in evaluating a political theory than its practice during a revolution.

Moreover, such a technique is ultimately dishonest. Looking at Proudhon, for example, Proudhon's anti-semitic outbursts remained unpublished in his note books until well after his ideas and, as Robert Graham points out, "*a reading of **General Idea of the Revolution** will show, anti-semitism forms no part of Proudhon's revolutionary programme.*" ["Introduction", **The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. xxxvi] Similarly, Bakunin's racism is an unfortunate aspect of his life, an aspect which is ultimately irrelevant to the core principles and ideas he argued for. Moreover, Bakunin and his associates totally rejected Proudhon's sexism and argued for complete equality between the sexes. Why mention these aspects of their ideas at all? They are irrelevant to evaluating anarchism as a viable political theory. To do so is to dishonestly imply that anarchism is racist and sexist, which it is not.

If we look at Kropotkin's support for the Allies in the First World War we discover a strange hypocrisy on the part of Marxists as well as an attempt to distort history. Why hypocrisy? Simply because Marx and Engels supported the Prussian during the Franco-Prussian war (in contrast, Bakunin argued for a popular uprising and social revolution to stop the war). As Marx wrote to Engels on July 20th, 1870:

*"The French need to be overcome. If the Prussians are victorious, the centralisation of the power of the State will be useful for the centralisation of the German working class. Moreover, German ascendancy will transfer the centre of gravity of the European worker's movement from France to Germany . . . On a world scale, the ascendancy of the German proletariat the French proletariat will at the same time constitute the ascendancy of **our** theory over Proudhon's."* [quoted by Arthur Lehning, **Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 284]

Marx, in part, supported the deaths of working class people in war in order to see **his** ideas become more important than Proudhon's! At least Kropotkin supported the allies because he was against the dangers to freedom implied by the German military state. The hypocrisy of the Marxists is clear -- if anarchism is to be condemned for Kropotkin's actions, then Marxism must be equally condemned for Marx's.

This analysis also rewrites history as the bulk of the Marxist movement supported their respective states during the conflict. A handful of the parties of the Second International opposed the war (and those were the smallest ones as well). The father of Russian Marxism, George Plekhanov, supported the Allies. The German Social Democratic Party (the jewel in the crown of the Second International) supported the war (a small minority of it did not). There was just one man in the German Reichstag in August 1914 who did not vote for war credits (and he did not even vote against them, he abstained). And many of the anti-war minority went along with the majority of party in the name of "discipline" and "democratic" principles.

In contrast, only a **very** small minority of anarchists supported any side during the conflict. The bulk of the anarchist movement (including such leading lights as Malatesta, Rocker, Goldman and Berkman) opposed the war, arguing that anarchists must "*capitalise upon every stirring of rebellion, every discontent in order to foment insurrection, to organise the revolution to which we look for the ending of all of society's iniquities.*" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2., p. 36] As Malatesta noted at the time, the "pro-war" anarchists were "*not numerous, it is true, but [did have] amongst them comrades whom we love and respect most.*" He stressed that the "*almost all*" of the anarchists "*have remained faithful to their convictions*" namely "*to awaken a consciousness of the antagonism of interests between dominators and dominated, between exploiters and workers, and to develop the class struggle inside each country, and solidarity among all workers across the frontiers, as against any prejudice and any passion of either race or nationality.*" [Life and Ideas, p. 243, p. 248 and p. 244]

By pointing to Kropotkin, Marxists hide the fact that it was the official Marxist movement which betrayed the cause of internationalism, not anarchism. Indeed, the betrayal of the Second International was the natural result of the "*ascendancy*" of Marxism over anarchism that Marx had hoped. The rise of Marxism, in the form of social-democracy, ended as Bakunin predicted, with the corruption of socialism in the quagmire of electioneering and statism. As Rudolf Rocker correctly argues, "*the Great War of 1914 was the exposure of the bankruptcy of political socialism.*" [Marx and Anarchism]

We will not follow this common Marxist approach here as the failings of Marxism, particularly in its Leninist form, come not from the personal failings of individuals but from their politics and how they would work in practice. No one ever lives up totally to their ideals in practice, we are all human and pointing out individual faults does not undermine the theory they contributed to. If this was the case then Marxism would be "refuted" because of Marx and Engel's anti-Slav feelings and their support for the German State during the Franco-Prussian war of 1871.

Rather, we will analyse Marxism in terms of its theories and how these theories worked in practice. Thus we will conduct a scientific analysis of Marxism, looking at its claims and comparing them to what they achieved in practice. Few, if any, Marxists present such an analysis of their own politics, which makes Marxism more a belief system rather than analysis. For example, many Marxists point to the success of the Russian Revolution and argue that while anarchists attack Trotsky and Lenin for being statists and authoritarians, that statism and authoritarianism saved the revolution.

In reply, anarchists point out that the Marxist revolution did, in fact, **fail**. After all, the aim of those revolutions was to create a free, democratic, classless society of equals. In fact it created a one party dictatorship based around a class system of bureaucrats exploiting and dominating working class people and a society lacking equality and freedom. As the stated aims of the Marxist revolution failed to materialise, anarchists would argue that those revolutions failed even though a "Communist" Party remained in power for over 70 years. And as for statism and authoritarianism "saving" the revolution, they saved it for Stalin, not socialism. That is nothing to be proud of.

From an anarchist perspective, this makes perfect sense as "*[n]o revolution can ever succeed as factor of*

*liberation unless the MEANS used to further it be identical in spirit and tendency with the PURPOSE to be achieved.*" [Emma Goldman, **Patterns of Anarchy**, p. 113] In other words, statist and authoritarian means will result in statist and authoritarian ends. Calling a new state a "workers state" will not change the state's nature as a form of minority (and so class) rule. It has nothing to do with the ideas or nature of those who gain power, it has to do with the nature of the state and the social relationships it generates. The state structure is an instrument of minority rule, it cannot be used by the majority because it is based on hierarchy, centralisation and the empowerment of the minority at the top at the expense of everyone else. States have certain properties **just because they are states**. They have their own dynamics which place them outside popular control and are not simply a tool in the hands of the economically dominant class. Making the minority Socialists within a "workers' state" does not change the fundamental nature of the state as an instrument of minority rule -- it just changes the minority in charge, the minority exploiting and oppressing the majority.

Similarly, in spite of over 100 years of socialists and radicals using elections to put forward their ideas and the resulting corruption of every party which has done so, most Marxists still call for socialists to take part in elections. For a theory which calls itself scientific this ignoring of empirical evidence, the facts of history, is truly amazing. Marxism ranks with economics as the "science" which most consistently ignores history and evidence.

Indeed, this refusal to look at factual evidence can be seen from the common comment Marxists make of anarchists, namely that we are "*petty-bourgeois*." For anarchists, such comments indicate that, for many Marxists, class is more a source of insults than analysis. This can be seen when Marxists state that, say, Kropotkin or Bakunin was "petty-bourgeois." As if a member of the Russian ruling class could be petty-bourgeois! If we look at class as an socio-economic fact and a social relationship (which it is) rather than an insult, then we discover if Bakunin and Kropotkin were "petty-bourgeois" then so was Marx, for they both shared the same socio-economic situation! Nor can it explain how Marx (a member of the petty-bourgeois, an independent journalist, when he worked at all) and Engels (an **actual** bourgeois, a factory owner!) could have created a "proletarian science." After all, in order to be a "proletarian" theory it must be developed by working class people in struggle. It was not. Albert Meltzer explains the problems Marxists face when they call us "petty-bourgeois":

*"This leads them into another difficulty: How can one reconcile the existence of anarcho-syndicalist unions with 'petty bourgeois' origins -- and how does one get over the fact that most Marxist-Leninists of today are professional ladies and gentlemen studying for or belonging to the professions? The answer is usually given that **because** anarchism is 'petty bourgeois' those embracing it -- 'whatever their occupation or social origins' must also be 'petty bourgeois.' Thus because 'Marxism is working class', its adherents must be working class 'at least subjectively.' This is a sociological absurdity, as if 'working class' meant an ideological viewpoint. It is also a built in escape clause."* [Op. Cit., p. 39]

As this section of the FAQ will make clear, this name calling and concentration on the personal failings of individual anarchists by Marxists is not an accident. If we take the ability of a theory to predict future events as an indication of its power then it soon becomes clear that anarchism is far more useful a tool in

working class struggle than Marxism. After all, anarchists predicted with amazing accuracy the future development of Marxism. Bakunin argued that electioneering would corrupt the socialist movement, making it reformist and just another bourgeois party (see [section J.2](#)). This is what in fact happened to the Social-Democratic movement across the world by the turn of the twentieth century (the rhetoric remained radical for a few more years, of course). Murray Bookchin's comments about the German Social Democrats are appropriate here:

*"[T]he party's preoccupation with parliamentarism was taking it ever away from anything Marx had envisioned. Instead of working to overthrow the bourgeois state, the SPD, with its intense focus on elections, had virtually become an engine for getting votes and increasing its Reichstag representation within the bourgeois state . . . The more artful the SPD became in these realms, the more its membership and electorate increased and, with the growth of new pragmatic and opportunistic adherents, the more it came to resemble a bureaucratic machine for acquiring power under capitalism rather than a revolutionary organisation to eliminate it."* [**The Third Revolution**, vol. 2, p. 300]

The reality of working within the state soon transformed the party and its leadership, as Bakunin predicted. If we look at the 1920s, we discover a similar failure to consider the evidence:

*"From the early 1920s on, the Leninist attachment to pre-WWI social democratic tactics such as electoral politics and political activity within pro-capitalist labour unions dominated the perspectives of the so-called Communist. But if these tactics were correct ones, why didn't they lead to a less dismal set of results? We must be materialists, not idealists. What was the actual outcome of the Leninist strategies? Did Leninist strategies result in successful proletarian revolutions, giving rise to societies worthy of the human beings that live in them? The revolutionary movement in the inter-war period was defeated. . ."* [Max Anger, "The Spartacist School of Falsification", **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed**, no. 43, Spring/Summer 1997, pp. 51-2]

As Scottish Anarchist Ethel McDonald argued in 1937, the tactics urged by Lenin were a disaster in practice:

*"At the Second Congress of the Third International, Moscow, a comrade who is with us now in Spain, answering Zinoviev, urged faith in the syndicalist movement in Germany and the end of parliamentary communism. He was ridiculed. Parliamentarianism, communist parliamentarianism, but still parliamentarianism would save Germany. And it did. . . Saved it from Socialism. Saved it for Fascism."* ["The Volunteer Ban", **Workers City**, Farquhar McLay (ed.), p. 74]

When the Nazi's took power in 1933 in Germany the 12 million Socialist and Communist voters and 6 million organised workers took no action. In Spain, it was the anarcho-syndicalist CNT which led the battle against fascism on the streets and helped create one of the most important social revolutions the

world has seen. The contrast could not be more clear. And many Marxists urge us to follow Lenin's advice today!

If we look at the "workers' states" created by Marxists, we discover, yet again, anarchist predictions proved right. Bakunin argued that "*[b]y popular government they [the Marxists] mean government of the people by a small under of representatives elected by the people. . . [That is,] government of the vast majority of the people by a privileged minority. But this minority, the Marxists say, will consist of workers. Yes, perhaps, of **former** workers, who, as soon as they become rulers or representatives of the people will cease to be workers and will begin to look upon the whole workers' world from the heights of the state. They will no longer represent the people but themselves and their own pretensions to govern the people.*" [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 178] The history of every Marxist revolution proves Bakunin was right.

Due to these "workers' states" socialism has become associated with repressive regimes, with totalitarian regimes the total opposite of what socialism is actually about. Nor does it help when self-proclaimed socialists (such as Trotskyites) "*obscenely describe regimes that exploit, imprison and murder wage labourers in Cuba, North Korea, and China as 'workers' states'*" [Max Anger, **Op. Cit.**, p. 52] Little wonder many anarchists do not use the terms "socialist" or "communist" and just call themselves "anarchists." They are associated with regimes which have nothing in common with our ideas, or, indeed, the ideas of socialism as such.

This does not mean that anarchists reject everything Marx wrote. Far from it. Much of his analysis of capitalism is acceptable to anarchists, for example (both Bakunin and Tucker considered Marx's economic analysis as important). Indeed, there are some schools of Marxism which are very libertarian and are close cousins to anarchism (for example, council communism and autonomist Marxism are close to revolutionary anarchism). Unfortunately, these forms of Libertarian Marxism are a minority current within that movement.

In other words, Marxism is not all bad -- unfortunately the vast bulk of it is and those elements which are not are found in anarchism anyway. For most, Marxism is the school of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, not Marx, Pannekoek, Gorter, Ruhle and Mattick. The minority libertarian trend of Marxism is based, like anarchism, on a rejection of party rule, electioneering and creating a "workers' state." They also, like anarchists, support direct action, self-managed class struggle, working class autonomy and a self-managed socialist society. These Marxists oppose the dictatorship of the party over the proletariat and, in effect, agree with Bakunin when he argued against Marx that socialists should "*not accept, even in the process of revolutionary transition, either constituent assemblies, provisional governments or so-called revolutionary dictatorships; because we are convinced that revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses, and that when it is concentrated in those of a few ruling individuals it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction.*" Like Bakunin, they think that "*a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations . . . organised from the bottom upwards*" will be the basis of a new society (Libertarian Marxists usually call these associations workers' councils). [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 237 and p. 172]

These libertarian forms of Marxism should be encouraged and not tarred with the same brush as Leninism and social democracy (indeed Lenin commented upon "*the anarchist deviation of the German Communist Workers' Party*" and other "*semi-anarchist elements*," the very groups we are referring to here under the term "libertarian Marxism." [**Marx, Engels and Lenin, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism***, p. 333 and p. 338]). Over time, hopefully, such comrades will see that the libertarian element of their thought outweighs the Marxist legacy. So our comments in this section of the FAQ are mostly directed to the majority form of Marxism, not to its libertarian wing.

One last point. We should point out that in the past many leading Marxists have argued that anarchism and socialism were miles apart: indeed, that anarchism was not a form of socialism. The leading American Marxist Daniel De Leon took this line, along with many others. This is true, in a sense, as anarchists are not **Marxian** socialists -- we reject such "socialism" as deeply authoritarian. However, all anarchists **are** members of the socialist movement and we reject attempts by Marxists to monopolise the term. Be that as it may, sometimes in this section we may find it useful to use the term socialist/communist to describe "state socialist" and anarchist to describe "libertarian socialist/communist." This in no way implies that anarchists are not socialists. It is purely a tool to make our arguments easier to read.

In the sections that follow we will discuss Marxism and the practice of Marxists in power. This will indicate why anarchists reject it in favour of a **libertarian** form of socialism.



# H.1 Have anarchists always opposed state socialism?

Yes. Anarchists have always argued that real socialism cannot be created using a state. The basic core of the argument is simple. Socialism implies equality, yet the state signifies inequality -- inequality in terms of power. As we argued in [section B.2](#), anarchists consider one of the defining aspects of the state is its hierarchical nature. In other words, the delegation of **power** into the hands of a few. As such, it violates the core idea of socialism, namely social equality. Those who make up the governing bodies in a state have more power than those who have elected them.

Hence these comments by Malatesta and Hamon:

*"It could be argued with much more reason that we are the most logical and most complete socialists, since we demand for every person not just his [or her] entire measure of the wealth of society but also his [or her] portion of social power."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 20]

It is with this perspective that anarchists have combated the idea of state socialism and Marxism (although we should stress that libertarian forms of Marxism, such as council communism, have strong similarities to anarchism). This opposition to authoritarian socialism is a core aspect of anarchism, an opposition which has been consistent and strong. While it is sometimes argued by some on the right that libertarian socialists and anarchists only started voicing their opposition to Marxism and Leninism after the Soviet Union collapsed, the truth is totally different. Anarchists, we must stress, have been opposed to all forms of state socialism from the start (in the case of the Russian Revolution, the anarchists were amongst the first on the left to be suppressed by the Bolsheviks). Indeed, the history of Marxism is, in part, a history of its struggles against anarchists just as the history of anarchism is also, in part, a history of its struggle against the various forms of Marxism and its offshoots. To state, or imply, that anarchists have only lately opposed Marxism is false -- we have been arguing against Marxism since the start.

While both Stirner and Proudhon wrote many pages against the evils and contradictions of state socialism, anarchists have only really been fighting the Marxist form of state socialism since Bakunin. This is because, until the First International, Marx and Engels were relatively unknown socialist thinkers. Proudhon was aware of Marx (they had met in France in the 1840s and had corresponded) but Marxism was unknown in France during his life time and so Proudhon did not directly argue against Marxism (he did, however, critique Louis Blanc and other French state socialists). Similarly, when Stirner wrote **The Ego and Its Own** Marxism did not exist bar a few works by Marx and Engels. Indeed, it could be argued that Marxism finally took shape after Marx had read Stirner's classic and produced his notoriously inaccurate diatribe **The German Ideology** against him. However, like Proudhon, Stirner attacked **other** state socialists and communists.

Before discussing Bakunin's opposition and critique of Marxism in the [next section](#), we should consider the thoughts of Stirner and Proudhon on state socialism. These critiques contain many important ideas and so are worth summarising. However, it is worth noting that when both Stirner and Proudhon were writing communist ideas were all authoritarian in nature. Libertarian communism only developed after Bakunin's death in 1876. This means that when Proudhon and Stirner were critiquing "communism" they were attacking a specific form of communism, the form which subordinated the individual to the community. Anarchist communists like Kropotkin and Malatesta also opposed such kinds of "communism" (as Kropotkin put it, *"before and in 1848" communism "was put forward in such a shape as to fully account for Proudhon's distrust as to its effect upon liberty. The old idea of Communism was the idea of monastic communities . . . The last vestiges of liberty and of individual energy would be destroyed, if humanity ever had to go through such a communism.*" [Act for Yourselves, p. 98]). Of course, it may be likely that Stirner and Proudhon would have rejected libertarian communism as well, but bear in mind that not all forms of "communism" are identical.

For Stirner, the key issue was that communism (or socialism), like liberalism, looked to the "human" rather than the unique. *"To be looked upon as a mere part, part of society,"* asserted Stirner, *"the individual cannot bear -- because he is more; his uniqueness puts from it this limited conception."* [The Ego and Its Own, p. 265] As such, his protest against communism was similar to his protest against liberalism (indeed, he drew attention to their similarity by calling socialism and communism "social liberalism").

Stirner was aware that capitalism was not the great defender of freedom it was claimed to be by its supporters. *"Restless acquisition,"* he argued, *"does not let us take breath, take a claim enjoyment: we do not get the comfort of our possessions."* Communism, by the "organisation of labour," can "bear its fruit" so that *"we come to an agreement about human labours, that they may not, as under competition, claim all our time and toil."* However, communism "is silent" over *"for whom is time to be gained."* He, in contrast, stresses that it is for the individual, *"[t]o take comfort in himself as the unique."* [Op. Cit., pp. 268-9] Thus state socialism does not recognise that the purpose of association is to free the individual and instead subjects the individual to a new tyranny:

*"it is not another State (such as a 'people's State') that men aim at, but their union, uniting, this ever-fluid uniting of everything standing -- A State exists even without my co-operation . . . the independent establishment of the State founds my lack of independence; its condition as a 'natural growth,' its organism, demands that my nature do not grow freely, but be cut to fit it."* [Op. Cit., p. 224]

Similarly, Stirner argued that *"Communism, by the abolition of all personal property, only presses me back still more into dependence on another, to wit, on the generality or collectivity . . . [which is] a condition hindering my free movement, a sovereign power over me. Communism rightly revolts against the pressure that I experience from individual proprietors; but still more horrible is the might that it puts in the hands of the collectivity."* [The Ego and Its Own, p. 257]

History has definitely confirmed this. By nationalising property, the various state socialist regimes turned the worker from a servant of the capitalist into a serf of the state. In contrast, communist-anarchists argue for free association and workers' self-management as the means of ensuring that socialised property does not turn into the denial of freedom rather than as a means of ensuring it. As such, Stirner's attack on what Marx termed "*vulgar communism*" is still important and finds echoes in communist-anarchist writings as well as the best works of Marx and his more libertarian followers.

To show the difference between the "communism" Stirner attacked and anarchist-communism, we can show that Kropotkin was not "silent" on why organising production is essential. Like Stirner, he thought that under libertarian communism the individual would "*discharge his [or her] task in the field, the factory, and so on, which he owes to society as his contribution to the general production. And he will employ the second half of his day, his week, or his year, to satisfy his artistic or scientific needs, or his hobbies.*" [**Conquest of Bread**, p. 111] In other words, he considered the whole point of organising labour as the means of providing the individual the time and resources required to express their individuality. As such, anarcho-communism incorporates Stirner's legitimate concerns and arguments.

Similar arguments to Stirner's can be found in Proudhon's works against the various schemes of state socialism that existing in France in the middle of the nineteenth century. He particularly attacked the ideas of Louis Blanc. Blanc, whose most famous book was **Organisation du Travail (Organisation of Work**, published in 1840) argued that social ills could be solved by means of government initiated and financed reforms. More specifically, he argued that it was "*necessary to use the whole power of the state*" to ensure the creation and success of workers' associations (or "*social workshops*"). Since that "*which the proletarians lack to free themselves are the tools of labour,*" the government "*must furnish them*" with these. "*The state,*" in short, "*should place itself resolutely at the head of industry.*" Capitalists would be encouraged to invest money in these workshops, for which they would be guaranteed interest. Such state-initiated workshops would soon force privately owned industry to change itself into social workshops, so eliminating competition. [quoted by K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 139]

Proudhon objected to this scheme on many levels. Firstly, he argued that Blanc's scheme appealed "*to the state for its silent partnership; that is, he gets down on his knees before the capitalists and recognises the sovereignty of monopoly.*" Given that Proudhon saw the state as an instrument of the capitalist class, asking that state to abolish capitalism was illogical and impossible. Moreover, by getting the funds for the "social workshop" from capitalists, Blanc's scheme was hardly undermining their power. "*Capital and power,*" Proudhon argued, "*secondary organs of society, are always the gods whom socialism adores; if capital and power did not exist, it would invent them.*" [quoted by Vincent, **Op. Cit.**, p. 157] He stressed the authoritarian nature of Blanc's scheme:

*"M. Blanc is never tired of appealing to authority, and socialism loudly declares itself anarchistic; M. Blanc places power above society, and socialism tends to subordinate it to society; M. Blanc makes social life descend from above, and socialism maintains that it springs up and grows from below; M. Blanc runs after politics, and socialism is in quest of science. No more hypocrisy, let me say to M. Blanc: you desire neither Catholicism nor*

*monarchy nor nobility, but you must have a God, a religion, a dictatorship, a censorship, a hierarchy, distinctions, and ranks. For my part, I deny your God, your authority, your sovereignty, your judicial State, and all your representative mystifications."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**]

Equally, Proudhon opposed the "top-down" nature of Blanc's ideas. Instead of reform from above, Proudhon stressed the need for working class people to organise themselves for their own liberation. As he put it, the "*problem before the labouring classes . . . [is] not in capturing, but in subduing both power and monopoly, -- that is, in generating from the bowels of the people, from the depths of labour, a greater authority, a more potent fact, which shall envelop capital and the state and subjugate them."* For, "*to combat and reduce power, to put it in its proper place in society, it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings: an agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave."* [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 398 and p. 397] Proudhon stressed in 1848 that "*the proletariat must emancipate itself without the help of the government."* [quoted by George Woodcock, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography**, p. 125] This was because the state "*finds itself inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat."* [Proudhon, **System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 399] In addition, by guaranteeing interest payments, Blanc's scheme insured the continued exploitation of labour by capital.

Proudhon, in contrast, argued for a two-way approach to undermining capitalism from below: the creation of workers associations and the organisation of credit. By creating mutual banks, which provided credit at cost, workers could create associations to compete with capitalist firms, drive them out of business and so eliminate exploitation once and for all by workers' self-management. In this way, the working class would emancipate itself from capitalism and build a socialist society from below upwards by their own efforts and activities. Proudhon, as Marxist Paul Thomas notes, "*believed fervently . . . in the salvation of working men, by their own efforts, through economic and social action alone . . . Proudhon advocated, and to a considerable extent inspired, the undercutting of this terrain [of the state] from without by means of autonomous working-class associations."* [**Karl Marx and the Anarchists**, pp. 177-8]

Rejecting violent revolution (and, indeed, strikes as counter productive) he argued for economic means to end economic exploitation and, as such, he saw anarchism come about by reform via competition by workers' associations displacing capitalist industry (unlike later anarchists, who were revolutionaries that argued that capitalism cannot be reformed away and so supported strikes and other forms of collective working class direct action, struggle and combative organisation). Given that the bulk of the French working class was artisans and peasants, such an approach reflected the social context in which it was proposed.

It was this social context, this predominance of peasants and artisans in French society which informed Proudhon's ideas. He never failed to stress that association would be tyranny if imposed upon peasants and artisans (rather, he thought that associations would be freely embraced by these workers if they thought it was in their interests to). He also stressed that state ownership of the means of production was

a danger to the liberty of the industrial worker and, moreover, the continuation of capitalism with the state as the new boss. As he put it in 1848, he *"did not want to see the State confiscate the mines, canals and railways; that would add to monarchy, and more wage slavery. We want the mines, canals, railways handed over to democratically organised workers' associations . . . these associations [will] be models for agriculture, industry and trade, the pioneering core of that vast federation of companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic social Republic."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 62] Workers' associations would be applied for those industries which objectively needed it (i.e. capitalist industry) and for those other toilers who desired it.

Marx, of course, had replied to Proudhon's work **System of Economic Contradictions** with his **Poverty of Philosophy**. Marx's work aroused little interest when published, although Proudhon did carefully read and annotate his copy of Marx's work, claiming it to be *"a libel"* and a *"tissue of abuse, calumny, falsification and plagiarism"* (he even called Marx *"the tapeworm of Socialism."*) [quoted by George Woodcock, **Proudhon**, p. 102] Sadly, Proudhon did not reply to Marx's work due to an acute family crisis and then the start of the 1848 revolution in France. However, given his views of Louis Blanc and other socialists who saw socialism being introduced after the seizing of state power, he would hardly have been supportive of Marx's ideas.

So while none of Proudhon's and Stirner's arguments are directly aimed at Marxism, their ideas are applicable to much of mainstream Marxism as this inherited many of the ideas of the state socialism they attacked. Thus they both made forceful critiques of the socialist and communist ideas that existed during their lives. Much of their analysis was incorporated in the collectivist and communist ideas of the anarchists that followed them (some directly, as from Proudhon, some by co-incidence as Stirner's work was quickly forgotten and only had an impact on the anarchist movement when George Henry MacKay rediscovered it in the 1890s). This can be seen from the fact that Proudhon's ideas on the management of production by workers' associations, opposition to nationalisation as state-capitalism and the need for action from below, by working people themselves, all found their place in communist-anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism and in their critique of mainstream Marxism (such as social democracy) and Leninism.

Echoes of these critiques can be found Bakunin's comments of 1868:

*"I hate Communism because it is the negation of liberty and because for me humanity is unthinkable without liberty. I am not a Communist, because Communism concentrates and swallows up in itself for the benefit of the State all the forces of society, because it inevitably leads to the concentration of property in the hands of the State . . . I want to see society and collective or social property organised from below upwards, by way of free associations, not from above downwards, by means of any kind of authority whatsoever . . . That is the sense in which I am a Collectivist and not a Communist."* [quoted by K.J. Kenafick, **Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx**, pp. 67-8]

It is with Bakunin that Marxism and Anarchism came into direct conflict. It was Bakunin who lead the

struggle against Marx in the **International Workingmen's Association** between 1868 and 1872. It was in these exchanges that the two schools of socialism (the libertarian and the authoritarian) clarified themselves. With Bakunin, the anarchist critique of Marxism (and state socialism in general) starts to reach its finalised form. Needless to say, this critique continued to develop after Bakunin's death (particularly after the experiences of actual Marxist movements and revolutions). However, much of this involved expanding upon many of Bakunin's original predictions and analyses.

We will discuss Bakunin's critique in the [next section](#).

## H.1.1 What was Bakunin's critique of Marxism?

Bakunin and Marx famously clashed in the first **International Working Men's Association** between 1868 and 1872. This conflict helped clarify the anarchist opposition to the ideas of Marxism and can be considered as the first major theoretical analysis and critique of Marxism by anarchists. Later critiques followed, of course, particularly after the degeneration of Social Democracy into reformism and the failure of the Russian Revolution (both of which allowed the theoretical critiques to be enriched by empirical evidence) but the Bakunin/Marx conflict laid the ground for what came after. As such, an overview of Bakunin's critique is essential.

First, however, we must stress that Marx and Bakunin had many similar ideas. They both stressed the need for working people to organise themselves to overthrow capitalism. They both argued for a socialist revolution from below. They argued for collective ownership of the means of production. They both constantly stressed that the emancipation of the workers must be the task of the workers themselves. They differed, of course, in exactly how these common points should be implemented in practice. Both, moreover, had a tendency to misrepresent the opinions of the other on certain issues (particularly as the struggle reached its climax). Anarchists, unsurprisingly, argue Bakunin has been proved right by history, so confirming the key aspects of his critique of Marx.

So what was Bakunin's critique of Marxism? There are five main areas. Firstly, there is the question of current activity (i.e. whether the workers' movement should participate in "politics" and the nature of revolutionary working class organisation). Secondly, there is the issue of the form of the revolution (i.e. whether it should be a political **then** an economic one, or whether it should be both at the same time). Thirdly, there is the issue of the "dictatorship of the proletariat." Fourthly, there is the question of whether political power **can** be seized by the working class as a whole or whether it can only be exercised by a small minority. Fifthly, there was the issue of whether the revolution be centralised or decentralised in nature. We shall discuss each in turn.

On the issue of current struggle, the differences between Marx and Bakunin were clear. For Marx, the proletariat had to take part in bourgeois elections as an organised political party. As the resolution of the (gerrymandered) Hague Congress of First International put it, "*[i]n its struggle against the collective power of the possessing classes the proletariat can act as a class only by constituting itself a distinct political party, opposed to all the old parties formed by the possessing classes . . . the conquest of*

*political power becomes the great duty of the proletariat."* [Marx, Engels, Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 85]

This political party must stand for elections and win votes. As Marx argued in the preamble of the French Workers' Party, the workers must turn the franchise "*from a means of deception . . . into an instrument of emancipation.*" This can be considered as part of the process outlined in the **Communist Manifesto**, where it was argued that the "*immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties,*" namely the "*conquest of political power by the proletariat,*" the "*first step in the revolution by the working class*" being "*to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy.*" Engels latter stressed (in 1895) that the "**Communist Manifesto** had already proclaimed the winning of universal suffrage, of democracy, as one of the first and most important tasks of the militant proletariat" and that German Social Democracy had showed workers of all countries "*how to make use of universal suffrage.*" [Marx and Engels Reader, p. 566, p. 484, p. 490 and p. 565]

With this analysis in mind, Marxist influenced political parties have consistently argued for and taken part in election campaigns, seeking office as a means of spreading socialist ideas and as a means of pursuing the socialist revolution. The Social Democratic parties which were the first Marxist parties (and which developed under Marx and Engels watchful eyes) saw revolution in terms of winning a majority within Parliamentary elections and using this political power to abolish capitalism (once this was done, the state would "wither away" as classes would no longer exist). In effect, these parties aimed to reproduce Marx's account of the forming of the Paris Commune on the level of the national Parliament. Marx in his justly famous work **The Civil War in France** reported how the Commune "*was formed of the municipal councillors*" who had been "*chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town*" in the municipal elections held on March 26th, 1871. This new Commune then issued a series of decrees which reformed the existing state (for example, by suppressing the standing army and replacing it with the armed people, and so on). This Marx summarised by stating that "*the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.*" [Marx and Engels, **Selected Works**, p. 287 and p. 285]

As Engels put it in a latter letter, it was "*simply a question of showing that the victorious proletariat must first refashion the old bureaucratic, administratively centralised state power before it can use it for its own purposes.*" [quoted by David P. Perrin, **The Socialist Party of Great Britain**, p. 64] He repeated this elsewhere, arguing that "*after the victory of the Proletariat, the only organisation the victorious working class finds **ready-made** for use is that of the State. It may require adaptation to the new functions. But to destroy that at such a moment would mean to destroy the only organism by means of which the victorious working class can exert its newly conquered power, keep down its capitalist enemies and carry out . . . economic revolution.*" [our emphasis, Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 173]

Bakunin, in contrast, argued that while the communists "*imagine they can attain their goal by the development and organisation of the political power of the working classes . . . aided by bourgeois radicalism*" anarchists "*believe they can succeed only through the development and organisation of the non-political or anti-political power of the working classes.*" The Communists "*believe it necessary to*

*organise the workers' forces in order to seize the political power of the State," while anarchists "organise for the purpose of destroying it." Bakunin saw this in terms of creating new organs of working class power in opposition to the state, organised "from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, starting with the associations, then going on to the communes, the region, the nations, and, finally, culminating in a great international and universal federation." [Bakunin on Anarchism, pp. 262-3 and p. 270] In other words, a system of workers' councils. As such, he constantly argued for workers, peasants and artisans to organise into unions and join the **International Workingmen's Association**, so becoming "a real force . . . which knows what to do and is therefore capable of guiding the revolution in the direction marked out by the aspirations of the people: a serious international organisation of workers' associations of all lands capable of replacing this departing world of states." [Op. Cit., p. 174]*

To Marx's argument that workers should organise politically, and send their representations to Parliament, Bakunin argued that when *"the workers . . . send common workers . . . to Legislative Assemblies . . . The worker-deputies, transplanted into a bourgeois environment, into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois ideas, will in fact cease to be workers and, becoming Statesmen, they will become bourgeois . . . For men do not make their situations; on the contrary, men are made by them."* [The **Basic Bakunin**, p. 108]

As far as history goes, the experience of Social Democracy confirmed Bakunin's analysis. A few years after Engels' death in 1895, German Social Democracy was racked by the "revisionism" debate. This debate did not spring from the minds of a few leaders, isolated from the movement, but rather expressed developments **within** the movement itself. In effect, the revisionists wanted to adjust the party rhetoric to what the party was actually doing and so the battle against the revisionists basically represented a battle between what the party said it was doing and its actual practice. As one of the most distinguished historians of this period put it, the *"distinction between the contenders remained largely a subjective one, a difference of ideas in the evaluation of reality rather than a difference in the realm of action."* [C. Schorske, **German Social Democracy**, p. 38] Even Rosa Luxemburg (one of the fiercest critics of revisionism) acknowledged in **Reform or Revolution** that it was *"the final goal of socialism [that] constitutes the only decisive factor distinguishing the social democratic movement from bourgeois democracy and bourgeois radicalism."* [Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p. 36] As such, the Marxist critics of "revisionism" failed to place the growth in revisionist ideas in the tactics being used, instead seeing it in terms of a problem in ideas. By the start of the First World War, the Social Democrats had become so corrupted by its activities in bourgeois institutions it supported its state (and ruling class) and voted for war credits rather than denounce the war as Imperialist slaughter for profits (see also [section J.2.6](#) for more discussion on the effect of electioneering on radical parties). Clearly, Bakunin was proved right.

However, we must stress that because Bakunin rejected participating in bourgeois politics, it did not mean that he rejected "politics" or "political struggle" in general (also see [section J.2.10](#)). As he put it, *"it is absolutely impossible to ignore political and philosophical questions" and "the proletariat itself will pose them"* in the International. He argued that political struggle will come from the class struggle, as *"[w]ho can deny that out of this ever-growing organisation of the militant solidarity of the proletariat*



*against bourgeois exploitation there will issue forth the political struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie?"* Anarchists simply thought that the "*policy of the proletariat*" should be "*the destruction of the State*" rather than working within it. [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 301, p. 302 and p. 276] As such, the people "*must organise their powers apart from and against the State.*" [The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 376]

As should be obvious by now, the difference between Marx and Bakunin on the nature of working class organisation in the struggle reflected these differences on political struggle. Bakunin clearly advocated what would later be termed a syndicalist strategy based on direct action (in particular strikes) and workers' unions which would "*bear in themselves the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old world. They are creating not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself.*" [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 255] This union movement would be complemented by a specific anarchist organisation which would work within it to influence it towards anarchist aims by the "*natural influence*" of its members (see [section J.3.7](#) for a fuller discussion of this). Marx argued for political parties, utilising elections, which, as the history of Social Democracy indicates, did not have quite the outcome Marx would have liked. [Section J.2](#) discusses direct action, electioneering and whether anarchist abstentionism implies disinterest in politics in more detail.

Which brings us to the second issue, namely the nature of the revolution itself. For Bakunin, a revolution meant a **social** revolution from below. This involved both the abolition of the state **and** the expropriation of capital. In his words, "*the revolution must set out from the first [to] radically and totally to destroy the State.*" The "*natural and necessary consequences*" of which will be the "*confiscation of all productive capital and means of production on behalf of workers' associations, who are to put them to collective use . . . the federative Alliance of all working men's associations . . . will constitute the Commune.*" There "*can no longer be any successful political . . . revolution unless the political revolution is transformed into social revolution.*" [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 170 and p. 171]

Which, incidentally, disproves Engels' claims that Bakunin considered "*the state as the main evil to be abolished.*" [Marx and Engels Reader, p. 728] Clearly, Engels' assertions misrepresent Bakunin's position, as Bakunin always stressed that economic and political transformation should occur at the same time during the revolutionary process. Given that Bakunin thought the state was the protector of capitalism, no economic change could be achieved until such time as it was abolished. This also meant that Bakunin considered a political revolution before an economic one to mean the continued slavery of the workers. As he argued, "*[t]o win political freedom first can signify no other thing but to win this freedom only, leaving for the first days at least economic and social relations in the same old state, -- that is, leaving the proprietors and capitalists with their insolent wealth, and the workers with their poverty.*" [The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 294] With capitalists' economic power intact, could the workers' **political** power remain strong? As such, "*every political revolution taking place prior to and consequently without a social revolution must necessarily be a bourgeois revolution, and a bourgeois revolution can only be instrumental in bringing about bourgeois Socialism -- that is, it is bound to end in a new, more hypocritical and more skilful, but no less oppressive, exploitation of the*

*proletariat by the bourgeois.*" [Op. Cit., p. 289]

Did Marx and Engels hold this position? Apparently so. Discussing the Paris Commune, Marx noted that it was *"the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour,"* and as the *"political rule of the producer cannot coexist with the perpetuation of his social slavery"* the Commune was to *"serve as a lever for uprooting the economic foundations upon which rests the existence of classes."* [Marx and Engels, **Selected Writings**, p. 290] Engels argued that the *"proletariat seizes the public power, and by means of this transforms the . . . means of production . . . into public property."* [The **Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 717] In the **Communist Manifesto** they argued that *"the first step in the revolution by the working class" is the "rais[ing] the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy."* The proletariat *"will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeois, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e. of the proletariat organised as the ruling class."* [**Manifesto of the Communist Party**, p. 52]

Similarly, when Marx discussed what the "dictatorship of the proletariat" meant, he argued (in reply to Bakunin's question of *"over whom will the proletariat rule"*) that it simply meant *"that so long as other classes continue to exist, the capitalist class in particular, the proletariat fights it (for with the coming of the proletariat to power, its enemies will not yet have disappeared), it must use measures of force, hence governmental measures; if it itself still remains a class and the economic conditions on which the class struggle and the existence of classes have not yet disappeared, they must be forcibly removed or transformed, and the process of their transformation must be forcibly accelerated."* [The **Marx-Engels Reader**, pp. 542-3] Note, "capitalists," not "former capitalists," so implying that the members of the proletariat are, in fact, still proletariats after the "socialist" revolution and so still subject to wage slavery by capitalists.

Clearly, then, Marx and Engels considered the seizing of state power as the key event and, later, the expropriation of the expropriators would occur. Thus the economic power of the capitalists would remain, with the proletariat utilising political power to combat and reduce it. Anarchists argue that if the proletariat did not hold economic power, its political power would at best be insecure and would in fact degenerate. Would the capitalists just sit and wait while their economic power was gradually eliminated by political action? And what of the proletariat during this period? Will they patiently obey their bosses, continue to be oppressed and exploited by them until such time as the end of their "social slavery" has been worked out (and by whom)? As the experience of the Russian Revolution showed, Marx and Engels position proved to be untenable.

As we discuss in more detail in the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#), the Russian workers initially followed Bakunin's path. After the February revolution, they organised factory committees and raised the idea and practice of workers self-management of production. The Russian anarchists supported this movement whole-heartedly, arguing that it should be pushed as far as it would go. In contrast, Lenin argued for *"workers' control over the capitalists."* [Will the **Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 52] This was, unsurprisingly, the policy applied immediately after the Bolshevik seizure of power. However, as one Leninist writer admits, *"[t]wo overwhelmingly powerful forces obliged the*

*Bolsheviks to abandon this 'reformist' course." One was the start of the civil war, the other "was the fact that the capitalists used their remaining power to make the system unworkable. At the end of 1917 the All Russian Congress of employers declared that those 'factories in which the control is exercised by means of active interference in the administration will be closed.' The workers' natural response to the wave of lockouts which followed was to demand that their [sic!] state nationalise the factories."* [John Rees, "In Defence of October", pp. 3-82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 42] By July 1918, only one-fifth of nationalised firms had been nationalised by the central government (which, incidentally, shows the unresponsiveness of centralised power). Clearly, the idea that a social revolution can come after a political was shown to be a failure -- the capitalist class used its powers to disrupt the economic life of Russia.

Faced with the predictable opposition by capitalists to their system of "control" the Bolsheviks nationalised the means of production. Sadly, **within** the nationalised workplace the situation of the worker remained essentially unchanged. Lenin had been arguing for one-man management (appointed from above and armed with "dictatorial" powers) since late April 1918. This aimed at replacing the capitalist managers with state managers, **not** workers self-management:

*"On three occasions in the first months of Soviet power, the [factory] committees leaders sought to bring their model [of workers' self-management of the economy] into being. At each point the party leadership overruled them. The Bolshevik alternative was to vest both managerial **and** control powers in organs of the state which were subordinate to the central authorities, and formed by them."* [Thomas F. Remington, **Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia**, p. 38]

Bakunin's fear of what would happen if a political revolution preceded a social one came true. The working class continued to be exploited and oppressed as before, first by the bourgeoisie and then by the new bourgeoisie of state appointed managers armed with all the powers of the old ones (plus a few more). Russia confirmed Bakunin's analysis that a revolution must immediately combine political and economic goals in order for it to be successful.

Which brings us to the "dictatorship of the proletariat." While many Marxists basically use this term to describe the defence of the revolution and so argue that anarchists do not see the need to defend a revolution, this is incorrect. Anarchists from Bakunin onwards have argued that a revolution would have to defend itself from counter revolution and yet we reject the term totally (see sections [H.2.1](#), [I.5.14](#) and [J.7.6](#) for a refutation of claims that anarchists think a revolution does not need defending). So why did Bakunin reject the concept? To understand why, we must provide some historical context -- namely the fact that at the time he was writing the proletariat was a minority of the working masses.

Simply put, anarchists in the nineteenth century rejected the idea of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" simply because the proletariat was a **minority** of working people at the time. As such, to argue for a dictatorship of the proletariat meant to argue for the dictatorship of a **minority** class, a class which excluded the majority of toiling people. When Marx and Engels wrote the **Communist Manifesto**, for

example, over 80% of the population of France and Germany were peasants or artisans -- what Marx termed the "petit-bourgeois" and his followers termed the "petty-bourgeois." This fact meant that the comment in the **Communist Manifesto** that the "*proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority*" was simply not true. Rather, for Marx's life-time (and for many decades afterwards) the proletarian movement was like "[a]ll previous movements," namely "*movements of minorities, or in the interests of minorities.*" [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 482]

Not that Marx and Engels were unaware of this. In the Manifesto they note that "*[i]n countries like France*" the peasants "*constitute far more than half of the population.*" In his famous 1875 work "Critique of the Gotha Program," Marx noted that "*the majority of the 'toiling people' in Germany consists of peasants, and not of proletarians.*" He stressed elsewhere around the same time that "*the peasant . . . forms a more or less considerable majority . . . in the countries of the West European continent.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 493, p. 536 and p. 543]

Clearly, then, Marx and Engels vision of proletarian revolution was one which involved a minority dictating to the majority. As such, Bakunin rejected the concept. He was simply pointing out the fact that a "dictatorship of the proletariat," at the time, actually meant a dictatorship by a **minority** of working people and so a "revolution" which excluded the majority of working people (i.e. artisans and peasants). As he argued in 1873:

*"If the proletariat is to be the ruling class . . . then whom will it rule? There must be yet another proletariat which will be subject to this new rule, this new state. It may be the peasant rabble . . . which, finding itself on a lower cultural level, will probably be governed by the urban and factory proletariat."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, pp. 177-8]

Bakunin continually stressed that the peasants "*will join cause with the city workers as soon as they become convinced that the latter do not pretend to impose their will or some political or social order invented by the cities for the greater happiness of the villages; they will join cause as soon as they are assured that the industrial workers will not take their lands away.*" As such, as noted above, while the Marxists aimed for the "*development and organisation of the political power of the working classes, and chiefly of the city proletariat,*" anarchists aimed for "*the social (and therefore anti-political) organisation and power of the working masses of the cities and villages.*" [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 401 and p. 300]

For Bakunin, to advocate the "dictatorship of the proletariat" in an environment where the vast majority of working people were peasants would be a disaster. It is only when we understand this social context that we can understand Bakunin's opposition to Marx's "dictatorship of the proletariat" -- it would be a dictatorship of a minority class over the rest of the working population (he took it as a truism that the capitalist and landlord classes should be expropriated and stopped from destroying the revolution!). For Bakunin, when the industrial working class was a minority, it was essential to "*[o]rganise the city proletariat in the name of revolutionary Socialism, and in doing this, unite it into one preparatory*

*organisation together with the peasantry. An uprising by the proletariat alone would not be enough; with that we would have only a political revolution which would necessarily produce a natural and legitimate reaction on the part of the peasants, and that reaction, or merely the indifference of the peasants, would strangle the revolution of the cities."* [Op. Cit., p. 378]

This explains why the anarchists at the St. Imier Congress argued that *"every political state can be nothing but organised domination for the benefit of one class, to the detriment of the masses, and that should the proletariat itself seize power, it would in turn become a new dominating and exploiting class."* As the proletariat was a minority class at the time, their concerns can be understood. For anarchists then, and now, a social revolution has to be truly popular and involve the majority of the population in order to succeed. Unsurprisingly, the congress stressed the role of the proletariat in the struggle for socialism, arguing that *"the proletariat of all lands . . . must create the solidarity of revolutionary action . . . independently of and in opposition to all forms of bourgeois politics."* Moreover, the aim of the workers' movement was *"free organisations and federations . . . created by the spontaneous action of the proletariat itself, [that is, by] the trade bodies and the autonomous communes."* [as cited in **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 438, p. 439 and p. 438]

Hence Bakunin's comment that *"the designation of the proletariat, the world of the workers, as **class** rather than as **mass**"* was *"deeply antipathetic to us revolutionary anarchists who unconditionally advocate full popular emancipation."* To do so, he argued, meant *"[n]othing more or less than a new aristocracy, that of the urban and industrial workers, to the exclusion of the millions who make up the rural proletariat and who . . . will in effect become subjects of this great so-called popular State."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 253-4]

Again, the experiences of the Russian Revolution tend to confirm Bakunin's worries. The Bolsheviks implemented the dictatorship of the city over the countryside, with disastrous results (see the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#) for more details).

One last point on this subject. While anarchists reject the "dictatorship of the proletariat" we clearly do not reject the key role the proletariat must play in any social revolution (see [section H.2.2](#) on why the Marxist assertion anarchists reject class struggle is false). We only reject the idea that the proletariat must dictate over other working people like peasants and artisans. We do not reject the need for working class people to defend a revolution, nor the need for them to expropriate the capitalist class nor for them to manage their own activities and so society.

Then there is the issue of whether, even if the proletariat **does** seize political power, whether the whole proletariat can actually exercise it. Bakunin raising the obvious questions:

*"For, even from the standpoint of that urban proletariat who are supposed to reap the sole reward of the seizure of political power, surely it is obvious that this power will never be anything but a sham? It is bound to be impossible for a few thousand, let alone tens or hundreds of thousands of men to wield that power effectively. It will have to be exercised*

*by proxy, which means entrusting it to a group of men elected to represent and govern them, which in turn will unfailingly return them to all the deceit and subservience of representative or bourgeois rule. After a brief flash of liberty or orgiastic revolution, the citizens of the new State will wake up slaves, puppets and victims of a new group of ambitious men."* [Op. Cit., pp. 254-5]

He repeated this argument in **Statism and Anarchy**, where he asked "[w]hat does it mean, 'the proletariat raised to a governing class?' Will the entire proletariat head the government? The Germans number about 40 million. Will all 40 millions be members of the government? The entire nation will rule, but no one will be ruled. Then there will be no government, no state; but if there is a state, there will also be those who are ruled, there will be slaves." Bakunin argued that Marxism resolves this dilemma "in a simple fashion. By popular government they mean government of the people by a small number of representatives elected by the people. So-called popular representatives and rulers of the state elected by the entire nation on the basis of universal suffrage -- the last word of the Marxists, as well as the democratic school -- is a lie behind which lies the despotism of a ruling minority is concealed, a lie all the more dangerous in that it represents itself as the expression of a sham popular will." [Statism and Anarchy, p. 178]

So where does Marx stand on this question. Clearly, the self-proclaimed followers of Marx support the idea of "socialist" governments (indeed, many, including Lenin and Trotsky, went so far as to argue that party dictatorship was essential for the success of a revolution -- see [next section](#)). Marx, however, is less clear. He argued, in reply to Bakunin's question if all Germans would be members of the government, that "[c]ertainly, because the thing starts with the self-government of the township." However, he also commented that "[c]an it really be that in a trade union, for example, the entire union forms its executive committee," suggesting that there **will** be a division of labour between those who govern and those who obey in the Marxist system of socialism. [The Marx-Engels Reader, p. 545 and p. 544] Elsewhere he talks about "a socialist government . . . com[ing] into power in a country." ["Letter to F. Domela-Nieuwenhuis," Eugene Schulkind (ed.), **The Paris Commune of 1871: The View from the Left**, p. 244]

As such, Bakunin's critique holds, as Marx and Engels clearly saw the "dictatorship of the proletariat" involving a socialist government having power. For Bakunin, like all anarchists, if a political party is the government, then clearly they are in power, not the mass of working people they claim to represent. Anarchists have, from the beginning, argued that Marx made a grave mistake confusing workers' power with the state. This is because the state is the means by which the management of people's affairs is taken from them and placed into the hands of a few. It signifies delegated **power**. As such, the so-called "workers' state" or "dictatorship of the proletariat" is a contradiction in terms. Instead of signifying the power of the working class to manage society it, in fact, signifies the opposite, namely the handing over of that power to a few party leaders at the top of a centralised structure. This is because "all State rule, all governments being by their very nature placed outside the people, must necessarily seek to subject it to customs and purposes entirely foreign to it. We therefore declare ourselves to be foes . . . of all State organisations as such, and believe that the people can be happy and free, when, organised from below upwards by means of its own autonomous and completely free associations, without the supervision of

*any guardians, it will create its own life.*" [Marxism, Freedom and the State, p. 63] Hence Bakunin's constant arguments for decentralised, federal system of workers councils organised from the bottom-up. Again, the transformation of the Bolshevik government into a dictatorship **over** the proletariat during the early stages of the Russian Revolution supports Bakunin's critique of Marxism.

Which brings us to the last issue, namely whether the revolution will be decentralised or centralised. For Marx, the issue is somewhat confused by his support for the Paris Commune and its federalist programme (written, we must note, by a follower of Proudhon). However, in 1850, Marx stood for extreme centralisation of power. As he put it, the workers *"must not only strive for a single and indivisible German republic, but also within this republic for the most determined centralisation of power in the hands of the state authority."* He argued that in a nation like Germany *"where there is so many relics of the Middle Ages to be abolished"* it *"must under no circumstances be permitted that every village, every town and every province should put a new obstacle in the path of revolutionary activity, which can proceed with full force from the centre."* He stressed that *"[a]s in France in 1793 so today in Germany it is the task of the really revolutionary party to carry through the strictest centralisation."* [The Marx-Engels Reader, p. 509-10] Lenin followed this aspect of Marx's ideas, arguing that *"Marx was a centralist"* and applying this perspective both in the party and once in power [The Essential Works of Lenin, p. 310]

Ironically, it is Engels note to the 1885 edition of Marx's work which shows the fallacy of this position. As he put it, *"this passage is based on a misunderstanding"* and it *"is now . . . [a] well known fact that throughout the whole revolution . . . the whole administration of the departments, arrondissements and communes consisted of authorities elected by the respective constituents themselves, and that these authorities acted with complete freedom . . . that precisely this provincial and local self-government . . . became the most powerful lever of the revolution."* [The Marx-Engels Reader, p. 510f] Marx's original comments imply the imposition of freedom by the centre on a population not desiring it (and in such a case, how could the centre be representative of the majority in such a case?). Moreover, how could a revolution be truly social if it was not occurring in the grassroots across a country? Unsurprisingly, local autonomy has played a key role in every real revolution.

As such, Bakunin has been proved right. Centralism has always killed a revolution and, as he always argued, real socialism can only be worked from below, by the people of every village, town, and city. The problems facing the world or a revolution cannot be solved by a few people at the top issuing decrees. They can only be solved by the active participation of the mass of working class people, the kind of participation centralism and government by their nature exclude. As such, this dove-tails into the question of whether the whole class exercises power under the "dictatorship of the proletariat." In a centralised system, obviously, power **has to be** exercised by a few (as Marx's argument in 1850 showed). Centralism, by its very nature excludes the possibility of extensive participation in the decision making process. Moreover, the decisions reached by such a body could not reflect the real needs of society. In the words of Bakunin:

*"What man, what group of individuals, no matter how great their genius, would dare to think themselves able to embrace and understand the plethora of interests, attitudes and*

*activities so various in every country, every province, locality and profession.*" [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 240]

He stressed that *"the revolution should be and should everywhere remain independent of the central point, which must be its expression and product -- not its source, guide and cause . . . the awakening of all local passions and the awakening of spontaneous life at all points, must be well developed in order for the revolution to remain alive, real and powerful."* [Op. Cit., pp. 179-80] This, we must stress, does not imply isolation. Bakunin always stressed the importance of federal organisation to co-ordinate struggle and defence of the revolution. As he put it, all revolutionary communes would need to federate in order *"to organise the necessary common services and arrangements for production and exchange, to establish the charter of equality, the basis of all liberty -- a charter utterly negative in character, defining what has to be abolished for ever rather than the positive forms of local life which can be created only by the living practice of each locality -- and to organise common defence against the enemies of the Revolution."* [Op. Cit., p. 179]

In short, anarchists should *"not accept, even in the process of revolutionary transition, either constituent assemblies, provisional governments or so-called revolutionary dictatorships; because we are convinced that revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses, and that when it is concentrated in those of a few ruling individuals it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction."* Rather, the revolution *"everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations . . . organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation."* [Op. Cit., p. 237 and p. 172]

Given Marx's support for the federal ideas of the Paris Commune, it can be argued that Marxism is not committed to a policy of strict centralisation (although Lenin, of course, argued that Marx **was** a firm supporter of centralisation). What is true is, to quote Daniel Guerin, that Marx's comments on the Commune differ *"noticeably from Marx's writings of before and after 1871"* while Bakunin's were *"in fact quite consistent with the lines he adopted in his earlier writings."* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 167] Indeed, as Bakunin himself noted, while the Marxists *"saw all their ideas upset by the uprising"* of the Commune, they *"found themselves compelled to take their hats off to it."* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 261] This modification of ideas by Marx was not limited just to federalism. Marx also praised the commune's system of mandating recallable delegates, a position which Bakunin had been arguing for a number of years previously. In 1868, for example, he was talked about a *"Revolutionary Communal Council"* composed of *"delegates . . . vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates."* [Op. Cit., pp. 170-1] As such, the Paris Commune was a striking confirmation of Bakunin's ideas on many levels, **not** Marx's (who adjusted his ideas to bring them in line with Bakunin's!).

In summary, Bakunin argued that decentralisation of power was essential for a real revolution that achieves more than changing who the boss is. A free society could only be created and run from below, by the active participation of the bulk of the population. Centralisation would kill this participation and so kill the revolution. Marx and Engels, on the other hand, while sometimes supporting federalism and



local self-government, had a centralist streak in their politics which Bakunin thought undermined the success of any revolution.

Since Bakunin, anarchists have deepened this critique of Marxism and, with the experience of Bolshevism, argue that he predicted key failures in Marx's ideas. Given that his followers, particularly Lenin and Trotsky, have emphasised (although, in many ways, changed them) the centralisation and "socialist government" aspects of Marx's thoughts, anarchists argue that Bakunin's critique is as relevant as ever. Real socialism can only come from below.

## H.1.2 What are the key differences between Anarchists and Marxists?

There are, of course, important similarities between anarchism and Marxism. Both are socialists, oppose capitalism and the current state, support and encourage working class organisation and action and see class struggle as the means of creating a social revolution which will transform society into a new one. However, the differences between these socialist theories are equally important. In the words of Errico Malatesta:

*"The important, fundamental dissension [between anarchists and Marxists] is [that] . . . [Marxist] socialists are authoritarians, anarchists are libertarians.*

*"Socialists want power . . . and once in power wish to impose their programme on the people. . . Anarchists instead maintain, that government cannot be other than harmful, and by its very nature it defends either an existing privileged class or creates a new one; and instead of inspiring to take the place of the existing government anarchists seek to destroy every organism which empowers some to impose their own ideas and interests on others, for they want to free the way for development towards better forms of human fellowship which will emerge from experience, by everyone being free and, having, of course, the economic means to make freedom possible as well as a reality." [Life and Ideas, p. 142]*

The other differences derive from this fundamental one. So while there are numerous ways in which anarchists and Marxists differ, their root lies in the question of power. Socialists seek power (in the name of the working class and usually hidden under rhetoric arguing that party and class power are the same). Anarchists seek to destroy hierarchical power in all its forms and ensure that everyone is free to manage their own affairs (both individually and collectively). From this comes the differences on the nature of a revolution, the way the working class movement such organise and the tactics it should apply and so on. A short list of these differences would include the question of the "dictatorship of the proletariat", the standing of revolutionaries in elections, centralisation versus federalism, the role and organisation of revolutionaries, whether socialism can only come "*from below*" or whether it is possible for it come "*from below*" and "*from above*" and a host of others (i.e. some of the differences we

indicated in the [last section](#) during our discussion of Bakunin's critique of Marxism). Indeed, there are so many it is difficult to address them all here. As such, we can only concentrate on a few in this and the following sections.

One of the key issues is on the issue of confusing party power with popular power. The logic of the anarchist case is simple. In any system of hierarchical and centralised power (for example, in a state or governmental structure) then those at the top are in charge (i.e. are in positions of power). It is **not** "the people," nor "the proletariat," nor "the masses," it is those who make up the government who have and exercise real power. As Malatesta argued, government means *"the delegation of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands of a few"* and *"if . . . , as do the authoritarians, one means government action when one talks of social action, then this is still the resultant of individual forces, but only of those individuals who form the government."* [**Anarchy**, p. 40 and p. 36] Therefore, anarchists argue, the replacement of party power for working class power is inevitable because of the nature of the state. In the words of Murray Bookchin:

*"Anarchist critics of Marx pointed out with considerable effect that any system of representation would become a statist interest in its own right, one that at best would work against the interests of the working classes (including the peasantry), and that at worst would be a dictatorial power as vicious as the worst bourgeois state machines. Indeed, with political power reinforced by economic power in the form of a nationalised economy, a 'workers' republic' might well prove to be a despotism (to use one of Bakunin's more favourite terms) of unparalleled oppression."*

He continues:

*"Republican institutions, however much they are intended to express the interests of the workers, necessarily place policy-making in the hands of deputies and categorically do not constitute a 'proletariat organised as a ruling class.' If public policy, as distinguished from administrative activities, is not made by the people mobilised into assemblies and confederally co-ordinated by agents on a local, regional, and national basis, then a democracy in the precise sense of the term does not exist. The powers that people enjoy under such circumstances can be usurped without difficulty. . . [I]f the people are to acquire real power over their lives and society, they must establish -- and in the past they have, for brief periods of time established -- well-ordered institutions in which they themselves directly formulate the policies of their communities and, in the case of their regions, elect confederal functionaries, revocable and strictly controllable, who will execute them. Only in this sense can a class, especially one committed to the abolition of classes, be mobilised as a class to manage society."* [**The Communist Manifesto: Insights and Problems**]

This is why anarchists stress direct democracy (self-management) in free federations of free associations. It is the only way to ensure that power remains in the hands of the people and is not turned

into an alien power above them. Thus Marxist support for statist forms of organisation will inevitably undermine the liberatory nature of the revolution.

Thus the **real** meaning of a workers state is simply that the **party** has the real power, not the workers. After all, that is nature of a state. Marxist rhetoric tends to hide this reality. As an example, we can point to Lenin's comments in October, 1921. In an essay marking the fourth anniversary of the 1917 October Revolution, Lenin stated that the Soviet system "*provides the maximum of democracy for the workers and peasants; at the same time, it marks a break with bourgeois democracy and the rise of a new, epoch-making type of democracy, namely, proletarian democracy, or the dictatorship of the proletariat.*" ["Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution," **Collected Works**, vol. 33, p. 55] Yet this was written years after Lenin had argued that "*[w]hen we are reproached with having established a dictatorship of one party . . . we say, 'Yes, it is a dictatorship of one party! This is what we stand for and we shall not shift from that position . . .'*" [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 29, p. 535] And, of course, they did not shift from that position! Indeed, Lenin's comments came just a few months after all opposition parties and factions within the Communist Party had been banned and after the Kronstadt rebellion and a wave of strikes calling for free soviet elections had been repressed. Clearly, the term "*proletarian democracy*" had a drastically different meaning to Lenin than to most people!

Indeed, the identification of party power and working class power reaches its height (or, more correctly, depth) in the works of Lenin and Trotsky. Lenin, for example, argued that "*the correct understanding of a Communist of his tasks*" lies in "*correctly gauging the conditions and the moment when the vanguard of the proletariat can successfully seize power, when it will be able during and after this seizure of power to obtain support from sufficiently broad strata of the working class and of the non-proletarian toiling masses, and when, thereafter, it will be able to maintain, consolidate, and extend its rule, educating, training and attracting ever broader masses of the toilers.*" Note, the vanguard (the party) seizes power, **not** the masses. Indeed, he stressed that the "*very presentation of the question -- 'dictatorship of the Party **or** dictatorship of the class, dictatorship (Party) of the leaders **or** dictatorship (Party) of the masses?' is evidence of the most incredible and hopeless confusion of mind*" and "*[t]o go so far . . . as to draw a contrast in general between the dictatorship of the masses and the dictatorship of the leaders, is ridiculously absurd and stupid.*" [**Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder**, p. 35, p. 27 and p. 25]

Lenin stressed this idea numerous times. For example, in 1920 he argued that "*the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of the class, because in all capitalist countries (and not only over here, in one of the most backward) the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts . . . that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard . . . Such is the basic mechanism of the dictatorship of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the essentials of transitions from capitalism to communism . . . for the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation.*" [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 21]

Trotsky agreed with this lesson and argued it to the end of his life:

*"The revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is for me not a thing that one can freely accept or reject: It is an objective necessity imposed upon us by the social realities -- the class struggle, the heterogeneity of the revolutionary class, the necessity for a selected vanguard in order to assure the victory. The dictatorship of a party belongs to the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we can not jump over this chapter, which can open (not at one stroke) genuine human history. . . The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution . . . Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the 'dictatorship' of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions. The reason for the revolution comes from the circumstance that capitalism does not permit the material and the moral development of the masses."* [Writings 1936-37, pp. 513-4]

This point is reiterated in his essay, "*Stalinism and Bolshevism*" (again, written in 1937) when he argued that:

*"Those who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."* [Stalinism and Bolshevism]

How soviet democracy can exist within the context of a party dictatorship is left to the imagination of the reader! Rather than the working class as a whole seizing power, it is the "vanguard" which takes power -- *"a revolutionary party, even after seizing power . . . is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* [Op. Cit.] Needless to say, he was just repeating the same arguments he had made while in power during the Russian Revolution (see ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#) for details). Nor was he the only one. Zinoviev, another leading Bolshevik, argued in 1920 along the same lines:

*"soviet rule in Russia could not have been maintained for three years -- not even three weeks -- without the iron dictatorship of the Communist Party. Any class conscious worker must understand that the dictatorship of the working class can be achieved only by the dictatorship of its vanguard, i.e., by the Communist Party . . . All questions of economic reconstruction, military organisation, education, food supply -- all these questions, on which the fate of the proletarian revolution depends absolutely, are decided in Russia before all other matters and mostly in the framework of the party organisations . . . Control by the party over soviet organs, over the trade unions, is the single durable guarantee that any measures taken will serve not special interests, but the interests of the entire proletariat."* [quoted by Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, pp. 239-40]

How these positions, clearly argued as inevitable for **any** revolution, can be reconciled with workers' democracy, power or freedom is not explained. As such, the idea that Leninism (usually considered as

mainstream Marxism) is inherently democratic or a supporter of power to the people is clearly flawed. The leading lights of Bolshevism argued that the dictatorship of the proletariat could only be achieved by the dictatorship of the party. Indeed, the whole rationale for party dictatorship came from the fundamental rationale for democracy, namely that any government should reflect the changing opinions of the masses. In the words of Trotsky:

*"The very same masses are at different times inspired by different moods and objectives. It is just for this reason that a centralised organisation of the vanguard is indispensable. Only a party, wielding the authority it has won, is capable of overcoming the vacillation of the masses themselves."* [**The Moralists and Sycophants**, p. 59]

This position has its roots in the uneven political development within the working class (i.e. that the working class contains numerous political perspectives within it). As the party (according to Leninist theory) contains the most advanced ideas (and, again according to Leninist theory, the working class cannot reach beyond a trade union consciousness by its own efforts), the party must take power to ensure that the masses do not make "mistakes" or "waver" ("vacillation") during a revolution. From such a perspective to the position of party dictatorship is not far (and a journey that all the leading Bolsheviks, including Lenin and Trotsky, we must note, did in fact take).

In contrast, anarchists argue that precisely because of political differences we need the fullest possible democracy and freedom to discuss issues and reach agreements. Only by discussion and self-activity can the political perspectives of those in struggle develop and change. In other words, the fact Bolshevism uses to justify its support for party power is the strongest argument against it. For anarchists, the idea of a revolutionary government is a contradiction. As Italian anarchist Malatesta put it, *"if you consider these worthy electors as unable to look after their own interests themselves, how is it that they will know how to choose for themselves the shepherds who must guide them? And how will they be able to solve this problem of social alchemy, of producing a genius from the votes of a mass of fools?"* [**Anarchy**, p. 53]

As such, anarchists think that power should be in the hands of the masses themselves. Only freedom or the struggle for freedom can be the school of freedom. That means that, to quote Bakunin, *"since it is the people which must make the revolution everywhere . . . the ultimate direction of it must at all times be vested in the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial organisations . . . organised from the bottom up through revolutionary delegation."* [**No God, No Masters**, vol. 1, pp. 155-6]

Clearly, then, the question of state/party power is one dividing anarchists and most Marxists. These arguments by leading Bolsheviks confirm Bakunin's fear that the Marxists aimed for *"a tyranny of the minority over a majority in the name of the people -- in the name of the stupidity of the many and the superior wisdom of the few."* [**Marxism, Freedom and the State**, p. 63] Again, though, we must stress that libertarian Marxists like the council communists agree with anarchists on this subject and reject the whole idea that dictatorship of a party equals the dictatorship of the working class. As such, the Marxist

tradition as a whole does not confuse this issue, although the majority of it does. We must stress that not all Marxists are Leninists. A few (council communists, situationists, autonomists, and so on) are far closer to anarchism. They also reject the idea of party power/dictatorship, the use of elections, for direct action, argue for the abolition of wage slavery by workers' self-management of production and so on. They represent the best in Marx's work and should not be lumped with the followers of Bolshevism. Sadly, they are in the minority.

Finally, we should indicate other important areas of difference. Some are summarised by Lenin in his work **The State and Revolution**:

*"The difference between the Marxists and the anarchists is this: 1) the former, while aiming at the complete abolition of the state, recognise that this aim can only be achieved after classes have been abolished by the socialist revolution, as the result of the establishment of socialism which leads to the withering away of the state. The latter want to abolish the state completely overnight, failing to understand the conditions under which the state can be abolished 2) the former recognise that after the proletariat has conquered political power it must utterly destroy the old state machine and substitute it for it a new one consisting of the organisation of armed workers, after the type of the Commune. The latter, while advocating the destruction of the state machine, have absolutely no idea of **what** the proletariat will put in its place and **how** it will use its revolutionary power; the anarchists even deny that the revolutionary proletariat should utilise its state power, its revolutionary dictatorship; 3) the former demand that the proletariat be prepared for revolution by utilising the present state; the latter reject this."* [Essential Works of Lenin, p. 358]

We will discuss each of these points in the next three sections. Point one will be discussed in [section H.1.3](#), the second in [section H.1.4](#) and the third and final one in [section H.1.5](#).

## H.1.3 Why do anarchists wish to abolish the state "overnight"?

As indicated at the end of the [last section](#), Lenin argued that while Marxists aimed "at the complete abolition of the state" they "recognise that this aim can only be achieved after classes have been abolished by the socialist revolution" while anarchists "want to abolish the state completely overnight." This issue is usually summarised by Marxists arguing that a new state is required to replace the destroyed bourgeois one. This new state is called by Marxists "the dictatorship of the proletariat" or a workers' state. Anarchists reject this transitional state while Marxists embrace it. Indeed, according to Lenin "a Marxist is one who **extends** the acceptance of the class struggle to the acceptance of the **dictatorship of the proletariat.**" [Essential Works of Lenin, p. 358 and p. 294]

So what does the "dictatorship of the proletariat" actually mean? Generally, Marxists seem to imply that this term simply means the defence of the revolution and so the anarchist rejection of the dictatorship of the proletariat means the rejection of the defence of a revolution. Anarchists, they argue, differ from

Marxist-communists in that we reject the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat, where the formerly oppressed use coercion to ensure that remnants of the oppressing classes do not resurrect the old society. This particular straw man was used by Lenin in **State and Revolution** when he quoted Marx to suggest that anarchists would "*lay down their arms*" after a successful revolution. Such a "*laying down of arms*" would mean the "*abolition of the state*" while defending the revolution by violence would mean "*giv[ing] the state a revolutionary and transitory form.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 315]

That such an argument can be made, never mind repeated, suggests a lack of honesty. It assumes that the Marxist and Anarchist definitions of "the state" are identical. They are not. As such, it is pretty meaningless to argue, as Lenin did, that when anarchists talk about abolishing the state they mean that they will not defend a revolution. As Malatesta put it, some "*seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of respect for the **freedom** of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas.*" [**Anarchy**, p. 41]

For anarchists the state, government, means "*the delegation of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands of a few.*" [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 40] For Marxists, the state is "*an organ of class **rule**, an organ for the **oppression** of one class by another.*" [Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 274] That these definitions are in conflict is clear and unless this difference is made explicit, anarchist opposition to the "dictatorship of the proletariat" cannot be clearly understood.

Anarchists, of course, agree that the current state is the means by which the bourgeois class enforces its rule over society. In Bakunin's words, "*the political state has no other mission but to protect the exploitation of the people by the economically privileged classes.*" [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 221] Under capitalism, as Malatesta succulently put, the state is "*the bourgeoisie's servant and **gendarme**.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 20] The reason why the state is marked by centralised power is due to its role as the protector of (minority) class rule. As such, a state cannot be anything but a defender of minority power as its centralised and hierarchical structure is designed for that purpose. If the working class really was running society, as Marxists claim they would be in the "dictatorship of the proletariat," then it would not be a state. As Bakunin argued, "*[w]here all rule, there are no more ruled, and there is no State.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 223]

As such, the idea that anarchists, by rejecting the "dictatorship of the proletariat," also reject defending a revolution is false. We do not equate the "dictatorship of the proletariat" with the need to defend a revolution or expropriating the capitalist class, ending capitalism and building socialism. Anarchists from Bakunin onwards have taken both of these necessities for granted (also see sections [H.2.1](#), [I.5.14](#) and [J.7.6](#)). As he stressed, "*the sole means of opposing the reactionary forces of the state*" was the "*organising of the revolutionary force of the people.*" This revolution involve "*the free construction of popular life in accordance with popular needs . . . from below upward, by the people themselves . . . [in] a voluntary alliance of agricultural and factory worker associations, communes, provinces, and nations.*" [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 156 and p. 33]

As we discuss this particular Marxist straw man in [section H.2.1](#), we will leave our comments at this. Clearly, then, anarchists do not reject defending a revolution. We argue that the state must be abolished "overnight" as any state is marked by hierarchical power and can only empower the few at the expense of the many. The state will not "wither away" as Marxists claim simply because it excludes, by its very nature, the active participation of the bulk of the population and ensures a new class division in society: those in power (the party) and those subject to it (the working class).

Georges Fontenis sums up anarchist concerns on this issue:

*"The formula 'dictatorship of the proletariat' has been used to mean many different things. If for no other reason it should be condemned as a cause of confusion. With Marx it can just as easily mean the centralised dictatorship of the party which claims to represent the proletariat as it can the federalist conception of the Commune.*

*"Can it mean the exercise of political power by the victorious working class? No, because the exercise of political power in the recognised sense of the term can only take place through the agency of an exclusive group practising a monopoly of power, separating itself from the class and oppressing it. And this is how the attempt to use a State apparatus can reduce the dictatorship of the proletariat to the dictatorship of the party over the masses.*

*"But if by dictatorship of the proletariat is understood collective and direct exercise of 'political power', this would mean the disappearance of 'political power' since its distinctive characteristics are supremacy, exclusivity and monopoly. It is no longer a question of exercising or seizing political power, it is about doing away with it all together!*

*"If by dictatorship is meant the domination of the majority by a minority, then it is not a question of giving power to the proletariat but to a party, a distinct political group. If by dictatorship is meant the domination of a minority by the majority (domination by the victorious proletariat of the remnants of a bourgeoisie that has been defeated as a class) then the setting up of dictatorship means nothing but the need for the majority to efficiently arrange for its defence its own social Organisation.*

[...]

*"The terms 'domination', 'dictatorship' and 'state' are as little appropriate as the expression 'taking power' for the revolutionary act of the seizure of the factories by the workers.*

*We reject then as inaccurate and causes of confusion the expressions 'dictatorship of the proletariat', 'taking political power', 'workers state', 'socialist state' and 'proletarian*



*state'.*" [**Manifesto of Libertarian Communism**, pp. 22-3]

In summary, anarchists argue that the state has to be abolished "overnight" simply because a state is marked by hierarchical power and the exclusion of the bulk of the population from the decision making process. It cannot be used to implement socialism simply because it is not designed that way. To extend and defend a revolution a state is not required. Indeed, it is a hindrance:

*"The mistake of authoritarian communists in this connection is the belief that fighting and organising are impossible without submission to a government; and thus they regard anarchists . . . as the foes of all organisation and all co-ordinated struggle. We, on the other hand, maintain that not only are revolutionary struggle and revolutionary organisation possible outside and in spite of government interference but that, indeed, that is the only effective way to struggle and organise, for it has the active participation of all members of the collective unit, instead of their passively entrusting themselves to the authority of the supreme leaders.*

*"Any governing body is an impediment to the real organisation of the broad masses, the majority. Where a government exists, then the only really organised people are the minority who make up the government; and . . . if the masses do organise, they do so against it, outside it, or at the very least, independently of it. In ossifying into a government, the revolution as such would fall apart, on account of its awarding that government the monopoly of organisation and of the means of struggle."* [Luigi Fabbri, "Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism", in **The Poverty of Statism**, pp. 13-49, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 27]

For anarchists, the abolition of the state does not mean rejecting the need to extend or defend a revolution (quite the reverse!). It means rejecting a system of organisation designed by and for minorities to ensure their rule. To create a state (even a "workers' state") means to delegate power away from the working class and eliminate their power in favour of party power. In place of a state anarchists' argue for a free federation of workers' organisations as the means of conducting a revolution (and the framework for its defence).

As we discuss in the [next section](#), anarchists see this federation of workers' associations and communes (the framework of a free society) as being based on the organisations working class people create in their struggle against capitalism. These self-managed organisations, by refusing to become part of a centralised state, will ensure the success of a revolution.

## **H.1.4 Do anarchists have "*absolutely no idea*" of what the proletariat will put in place of the state?**

Lenin's second claim is that anarchists, "*while advocating the destruction of the state machine, have*

*absolutely no idea of **what** the proletariat will put in its place"* and compares this to the Marxists who argue for a new state machine *"consisting of armed workers, after the type of the Commune."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 358] For anarchists, Lenin's assertion simply shows his unfamiliarity with anarchist literature and need not be taken seriously -- anyone familiar with anarchist theory would simply laugh at such comments. Sadly, most Marxists are **not** familiar with that theory, so we need to explain two things. Firstly, anarchists have very clear ideas on what to "replace" the state with (namely a federation of communes based on working class associations). Secondly, that this idea is based on the idea of armed workers, inspired by the Paris Commune (although predicted by Bakunin).

Moreover, for anarchists Lenin's comment seems somewhat incredulous. As George Barrett puts it, in reply to the question *"if you abolish government, what will you put in its place,"* this *"seems to an Anarchist very much as if a patient asked the doctor, 'If you take away my illness, what will you give me in its place?'"* *The Anarchist's argument is that government fulfils no useful purpose . . . It is the headquarters of the profit-makers, the rent-takers, and of all those who take from but who do not give to society. When this class is abolished by the people so organising themselves to run the factories and use the land for the benefit of their free communities, i.e. for their own benefit, then the Government must also be swept away, since its purpose will be gone. The only thing then that will be put in the place of government will be the free organisation of the workers. When Tyranny is abolished, Liberty remains, just as when disease is eradicated health remains."* [**Objections to Anarchism**]

However, Barrett's answer does contain the standard anarchist position on what will be the basis of a revolutionary society, namely that the *"only thing then that will be put in the place of government will be the free organisation of the workers."* This is a concise summary of anarchist theory and cannot be bettered. This vision, as we discussed in [section I.2.3](#) in some detail, can be found in the work of Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta and a host of other anarchist thinkers. Since anarchists from Bakunin onwards have stressed that a federation of workers' associations would constitute the framework of a free society, to assert otherwise is little more than a joke or a slander. To quote Bakunin:

*"the federative alliance of all working men's associations . . . [will] constitute the Commune . . . [the] Communal Council [will be] composed of . . . delegates . . . vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates. . . all provinces, communes and associations . . . by first reorganising on revolutionary lines . . . [will] constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces . . . [and] organise a revolutionary force capable defeating reaction . . . [and for] self-defence . . . [The] revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations . . . organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation. . ."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 170-2]

And:

*"The future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom up, by the free*

*association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal." [Op. Cit., p. 206]*

Similar ideas can easily be found in the works of other anarchists. While the actual names and specific details of these federations of workers' associations may change (for example, the factory committees and soviets in the Russian Revolution, the collectives in Spain, the section assemblies in the French Revolution are a few of them) the basic ideas are the same. Bakunin also pointed to the means of defence, a workers' militia (the people armed, as per the Paris Commune):

*"While it [the revolution] will be carried out locally everywhere, the revolution will of necessity take a federalist format. Immediately after established government has been overthrown, communes will have to reorganise themselves along revolutionary lines . . . In order to defend the revolution, their volunteers will at the same time form a communal militia. But no commune can defend itself in isolation. So it will be necessary for each of them to radiate outwards, to raise all its neighbouring communes in revolt . . . and to federate with them for common defence." [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 142]*

A major difference between anarchism and Marxism which Lenin points to is, clearly, false. Anarchists are well aware of what should "replace" the bourgeois state and have always been so. The **real** difference is simply that anarchists say what they mean while Lenin's "new" state did not, in fact, mean working class power but rather party power. We discussed this issue in more detail in [section H.1.2](#), so we will not do so here.

As for Lenin's comment that we have "*absolutely no ideas*" of how the working class "*will use its revolutionary power*" suggests more ignorance, as we have urged working people to expropriate the expropriators, reorganise production under workers' self-management and start to construct society from the bottom upwards (a quick glance at Kropotkin's **Conquest of Bread**, for example, would soon convince any reader of the inaccuracy of Lenin's comment). This summary by the anarchist Jura Federation (written in 1880) gives a flavour of anarchist ideas on this subject:

*"The bourgeoisie's power over the popular masses springs from economic privileges, political domination and the enshrining of such privileges in the laws. So we must strike at the wellsprings of bourgeois power, as well as its various manifestations.*

*"The following measures strike us as essential to the welfare of the revolution, every bit as much as armed struggle against its enemies:*

*"The insurgents must confiscate social capital, landed estates, mines, housing, religious and public buildings, instruments of labour, raw materials, gems and precious stones and manufactured products:*

*"All political, administrative and judicial authorities are to be abolished.*

*". . . What should the organisational measures of the revolution be?*

*"Immediate and spontaneous establishment of trade bodies: provisional assumption by those of . . . social capital . . . : local federation of a trades bodies and labour organisation:*

*"Establishment of neighbourhood groups and federations of same . . .*

*[. . .]*

*"[T]he federation of all the revolutionary forces of the insurgent Communes . . . Federation of Communes and organisation of the masses, with an eye to the revolution's enduring until such time as all reactionary activity has been completely eradicated.*

*[. . .]*

*"Once trade bodies have been have been established, the next step is to organise local life. The organ of this life is to be the federation of trades bodies and it is this local federation which is to constitute the future Commune." [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, pp. 246-7]*

Clearly, anarchists do have some ideas on what the working class will "replace" the state with and how it will use its "revolutionary power"!

Similarly, Lenin's statement that "the anarchists even deny that the revolutionary proletariat should utilise its state power, its revolutionary dictatorship" again distorts the anarchist position. As we argued in [section H.1.2](#), our objection to the "state power" of the proletariat is precisely **because** it cannot, by its very nature as a state, actually allow the working class to manage society directly (and, of course, it automatically excludes other sections of the working masses, such as the peasantry and artisans). We argued that, in practice, it would simply mean the dictatorship of a few party leaders. This position, we must stress, was one Lenin himself was arguing in the year after completing **State and Revolution**. Ironically, the leading Bolsheviks (as we have seen in [section H.1.2](#)) confirmed the anarchist argument that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" would, in fact, become a dictatorship **over** the proletariat by the party.

Italian anarchist Camillo Berneri sums up the differences well:

*"The Marxists . . . foresee the natural disappearance of the State as a consequence of the destruction of classes by the means of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat,' that is to say State Socialism, whereas the Anarchists desire the destruction of the classes by means of a*

*social revolution which eliminates, with the classes, the State. The Marxists, moreover, do not propose the armed conquest of the Commune by the whole proletariat, but the propose the conquest of the State by the party which imagines that it represents the proletariat. The Anarchists allow the use of direct power by the proletariat, but they understand by the organ of this power to be formed by the entire corpus of systems of communist administration-corporate organisations [i.e. industrial unions], communal institutions, both regional and national-freely constituted outside and in opposition to all political monopoly by parties and endeavouring to a minimum administrative centralisation.*" ["Dictatorship of the Proletariat and State Socialism", **Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review**, no. 4, p. 52]

Clearly, Lenin's assertions are little more than straw men.

## H.1.5 Why do anarchists reject "*utilising the present state*"?

Lastly, there is the question of Marxists demanding (in the words of Lenin) "*that the proletariat be prepared for revolution by utilising the present state*" while anarchists "*reject this.*" Today, of course, this has changed. Libertarian Marxists, such as council communists, also reject "*utilising the present state*" to train the proletariat for revolution (i.e. for socialists to stand for elections). For anarchists, the use of elections does not "prepare" the working class for revolution (i.e. managing their own affairs and society). Rather, it prepares them to follow leaders and let others act for them. In the words of Rudolf Rocker:

*"Participation in the politics of the bourgeois States has not brought the labour movement a hair's-breadth nearer to Socialism, but thanks to this method, Socialism has almost been completely crushed and condemned to insignificance. . . Participation in parliamentary politics has affected the Socialist Labour movement like an insidious poison. It destroyed the belief in the necessity of constructive Socialist activity, and, worse of all, the impulse to self-help, by inoculating people with the ruinous delusion that salvation always comes from above."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 49]

While electoral ("political") activity ensures that the masses become accustomed to following leaders and letting them act on their behalf, anarchists' support direct action as "*the best available means for preparing the masses to manage their own personal and collective interests; and besides, anarchists feel that even now the working people are fully capable of handling their own political and administrative interests.*" [Luigi Galleani, **The End of Anarchism?**, pp. 13-4]

Anarchists, therefore, argue that we need to reclaim the power which has been concentrated into the hands of the state. That is why we stress direct action. Direct action means action by the people themselves, that is action directly taken by those directly affected. Through direct action, the people dominate their own struggles, it is they who conduct it, organise it, manage it. They do not hand over to others their own acts and task of self-liberation. That way, we become accustomed to managing our own

affairs, creating alternative, libertarian, forms of social organisation which can become a force to resist the state, win reforms and, ultimately, become the framework of a free society. In other words, direct action creates organs of self-activity (such as community assemblies, factory committees, workers' councils, and so on) which, to use Bakunin's words, are "*creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself.*"

In other words, the idea that socialists standing for elections somehow prepares working class people for revolution is simply wrong. Utilising the state, standing in elections, only prepares people for following leaders -- it does not encourage the self-activity, self-organisation, direct action and mass struggle required for a social revolution. Moreover, as we noted in the [section H.1.1](#), use of elections has a corrupting effect on those who use it. The history of radicals using elections has been a long one of betrayal and the transformation of revolutionary parties into reformist ones (see [section J.2.6](#) for more discussion). Thus using the existing state ensures that the division at the heart of existing society (namely a few who govern and the many who obey) is reproduced in the movements trying to abolish it. It boils down to handing effective leadership to special people, to "leaders," just when the situation requires working people to solve their own problems and take matters into their own hands. Only the struggle for freedom (or freedom itself) can be the school for freedom, and by placing power into the hands of leaders, utilising the existing state ensures that socialism is postponed rather than prepared for.

Moreover, Marxist support for electioneering is somewhat at odds with their claims of being in favour of collective, mass action. There is nothing more isolated, atomised and individualistic than voting. It is the act of one person in a box by themselves. It is the total opposite of collective struggle. The individual is alone before, during and after the act of voting. Indeed, unlike direct action, which, by its very nature, throws up new forms of organisation in order to manage and co-ordinate the struggle, voting creates no alternative organs of working class self-management. Nor can it as it is not based on nor does it create collective action or organisation. It simply empowers an individual (the elected representative) to act on behalf of a collection of other individuals (the voters). Such delegation will hinder collective organisation and action as the voters expect their representative to act and fight for them -- if they did not, they would not vote for them in the first place!

Given that Marxists usually slander anarchists as "individualists" the irony is delicious!

If we look at the Poll-Tax campaign in the UK in the late 1980s and early 1990s, we can see what would happen to a mass movement which utilised electioneering. The various left-wing parties, particularly Militant (now the Socialist Party) spent a lot of time and effort lobbying Labour Councillors not to implement the tax (with no success). Let us assume they had succeeded and the Labour Councillors had refused to implement the tax (or "socialist" candidates had been elected to stop it). What would have happened? Simply that there would not have been a mass movement or mass organisation based on non-payment, nor self-organised direct action to resist warrant sales, nor community activism of any form. Rather, the campaign would have consisted to supporting the councillors in their actions, mass rallies in which the leaders would have informed us of their activities on our behalf and, perhaps, rallies and marches to protest any action the government had inflicted on them. The leaders may have called for

some form of mass action but this action would not have come from below and so not a product of working class self-organisation, self-activity and self-reliance. Rather, it would have been purely reactive and a case of follow the leader, without the empowering and liberating aspects of taking action by yourself, as a conscious and organised group. It would have replaced the struggle of millions with the actions of a handful of leaders.

Of course, even discussing this possibility indicates how remote it is from reality. The Labour Councillors were not going to act -- they were far too "practical" for that. Years of working within the system, of using elections, had taken their toll decades ago. Anarchists, of course, saw the usefulness of picketing the council meetings, of protesting against the Councillors and showing them a small example of the power that existed to resist them if they implemented the tax. As such, the picket would have been an expression of direct action, as it was based on showing the power of our direct action and class organisations. Lobbying, however, was building illusions in "leaders" acting for us to and based on pleading rather than defiance. But, then again, Militant desired to replace the current leaders with themselves and so would not object to such tactics.

Unfortunately, the Socialists never really questioned **why** they had to lobby the councillors in the first place -- if utilising the existing state **was** a valid radical or revolutionary tactic, why has it always resulted in a de-radicalising of those who use it? This would be the inevitable results of any movement which "complements" direct action with electioneering. The focus of the movement will change from the base to the top, from self-organisation and direct action from below to passively supporting the leaders. This may not happen instantly, but over time, just as the party degenerates by working within the system, the mass movement will be turned into an electoral machine for the party -- even arguing against direct action in case it harms the election chances of the leaders. Just as the trade union leaders have done again and again.

All in all, the history of socialists actually using elections has been a dismal failure. Rather than prepare the masses for revolution, it has done the opposite. As we argue in [section J.2](#), this is to be expected. That Lenin could still argue along these lines even after the betrayal of social democracy indicates a lack of desire to learn the lessons of history.

## **H.1.6 Why do anarchists try to "*build the new world in the shell of the old*"?**

Another key difference between anarchists and Marxists is on how the movement against capitalism should organise in the here and now. Anarchists argue that it should prefigure the society we desire -- namely it should be self-managed, decentralised, built and organised from the bottom-up in a federal structure. This perspective can be seen from the justly famous "*Circular of the Sixteen*":

*"The future society should be nothing but a universalisation of the organisation which the International will establish for itself. We must therefore take care to bring this*

*organisation as near as possible to our ideal . . . How could one expect an egalitarian and free society to grow out of an authoritarian organisation? That is impossible. The International, embryo of the future human society, must be, from now on, the faithful image of our principles of liberty and federation.*" [quoted by Marx, **Fictitious Splits in the International**]

This simply echoes Bakunin's argument that the *"organisation of the trade sections, their federation in the International, and their representation by the Chambers of Labour, not only create a great academy, in which the workers of the International, combining theory and practice, can and must study economic science, they also bear in themselves the living germs of the new social order, which is to replace the bourgeois world. They are creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself."* [quoted by Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 45] Anarchists apply this insight to all organisations they take part in, stressing that the only way we can create a self-managed society is by self-managing our own struggles and organisations today. In this way we turn our class organisations (indeed, the class struggle itself) into practical and effective *"schools of anarchism"* in which we learn to manage our own affairs without hierarchy and bosses.

Marxists reject this argument. Instead they stress the importance of centralisation and consider the anarchist argument as utopian. For effective struggle, strict centralisation is required as the capitalist class and state is also centralised. In other words, to fight for socialism there is a need to organise in a way which the capitalists have utilised -- to fight fire with fire. Unfortunately they forget to extinguish a fire you have to use water. Adding more flame will only increase the combustion, **not** put it out!

Of course, Marx misrepresented the anarchist position. He argued that the Paris Communards *"would not have failed if they had understood that the Commune was 'the embryo of the future human society' and had cast away all discipline and all arms -- that is, the things which must disappear when there are no more wars!"* [**Ibid.**] Needless to say this is simply a slander on the anarchist position. Anarchists, as the Circular makes clear, recognise that we cannot totally reflect the future and so the current movement can only be *"as near as possible to our ideal."* Thus we have to do things, such as fighting the bosses, rising in insurrection, smashing the state or defending a revolution, which we would not have to do in a socialist society. Such common sense, unfortunately, is lacking in Marx who instead decides to utter nonsense for a cheap polemical point. He never answered the basic point -- how do people become able to manage society if they do not directly manage their own organisations and struggles? How can a self-managed society come about unless people practice it in the here and now? Can people create a socialist society if they do not implement its basic ideas in their current struggles and organisations?

Ironically enough, given his own and his followers claims of his theory's proletarian core, it is Marx who was at odds with the early labour movement, **not** Bakunin and the anarchists. Historian Gwyn A. Williams notes in the early British labour movement there were *"to be no leaders"* and the organisations were *"consciously modelled on the civil society they wished to create."* [**Artisans and Sans-Culottes**, p. 72] Lenin, unsurprisingly, dismissed the fact that the British workers *"thought it was an indispensable sign of democracy for all the members to do all the work of managing the unions"* as *"primitive democracy"* and *"absurd."* He also complained about *"how widespread is the 'primitive' conception of*



*democracy among the masses of the students and workers*" in Russia. [**Essential Works of Lenin**, pp. 162-3] Clearly, the anarchist perspective reflects the ideas the workers' movement before it degenerates into reformism and bureaucracy while Marxism reflects it during this process of degeneration. Needless to say, the revolutionary nature of the early union movement compared to the reformism and bureaucratic control of the ones with "full-time professional officers" clearly shows who was correct!

Related to this is the fact that Marxists (particularly Leninists) favour centralisation while anarchists favour decentralisation within a federal organisation. As such, anarchists do not think that decentralisation implies isolation or narrow localism. We have always stressed the importance of **federalism** to co-ordinate decisions. Power would be decentralised, but federalism ensures collective decisions and action. Under centralised systems, anarchists argue, power is placed into the hands of a few leaders. Rather than the real interests and needs of the people being co-ordinated, centralism simply means the imposition of the will of a handful of leaders, who claim to "represent" the masses. Co-ordination, in other words, is replaced by coercion in the centralised system and the needs and interests of all are replaced by those of a few leaders at the centre.

Similarly, anarchists and Marxists disagree on the nature of the future economic and social system of socialism. While it is a commonplace assumption that anarchists and Marxists seek the same sort of society but disagree on the means, in actuality there are substantial differences in their vision of a socialist society. While both aim for a stateless communist society, the actual structure of that society is different. Anarchists see it as fundamentally decentralised and federal while Marxists tend to envision it as fundamentally centralised. Moreover, Marxists such as Lenin saw "socialism" as being compatible with one-man management of production by state appointed "directors," armed with "dictatorial" powers (see [section 10](#) of the appendix on "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)" for further discussion). As such, anarchists argue that the Bolshevik vision of "socialism" is little more than state capitalism -- with the state replacing the boss as exploiter and oppressor of the working class. As we discuss this issue in section [H.3.13](#), we will not do so here.

By failing to understand the importance of applying a vision of a free society to the current class struggle, Marxists help ensure that society never is created. By copying bourgeois methods within their "revolutionary" organisations (parties and unions) they ensure bourgeois ends (inequality and oppression).

## H.1.7 Haven't you read Lenin's "State and Revolution"?

This question is often asked of people who critique Marxism, particularly its Leninist form. Lenin's **State and Revolution** is often considered his most democratic work and Leninists are quick to point to it as proof that Lenin and those who follow his ideas are not authoritarian. As such, its an important question. So how do anarchists reply when people point them to Lenin's work as evidence of the democratic (even libertarian) nature of Marxism? Anarchists reply in two ways.

Firstly, we argue many of the essential features of Lenin's ideas are to be found in anarchist theory.

These features had been aspects of anarchism for decades **before** Lenin put pen to paper. Bakunin, for example, talked about mandated delegates from workplaces federating into workers' councils as the framework of a (libertarian) socialist society in the 1860s. In the same period he also argued for popular militias to defend a revolution. Hence Murray Bookchin:

*"much that passes for 'Marxism' in **State and Revolution** is pure anarchism -- for example, the substitution of revolutionary militias for professional armed bodies and the substitution of organs of self-management for parliamentary bodies. What is authentically Marxist in Lenin's pamphlet is the demand for 'strict centralism,' the acceptance of a 'new' bureaucracy, and the identification of soviets with a state."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 213]

That this is the case is hidden in Lenin's work as he deliberately distorts anarchist ideas in it (see sections [H.1.3](#) and [H.1.4](#) for examples). Therefore, when Marxists ask whether anarchists have read Lenin's **State and Revolution** we reply by arguing that most of Lenin's ideas were first expressed by anarchists (while Lenin hide this fact). All in all, Lenin's work just strikes anarchists as little more than a re-hash of many their own ideas but placed in a statist context which totally and utterly undermines them in favour of party rule.

Secondly, anarchists argue that regardless of what Lenin argued for in **State and Revolution**, he did not apply those ideas in practice (indeed, he did the exact opposite). Therefore, the question of whether we have read Lenin's work simply drives how the ideological nature and theoretical bankruptcy of Leninism in all its many forms. This is because the person asking this kind of question is asking you to evaluate their politics based on what they say rather than on what they do, like any politician.

To use an analogy, what would you say to a politician who has cut welfare spending by 50% and increased spending on the military and who argues that this act is irrelevant and that you should look at their manifesto which states that they were going to do the opposite? Simply put, you would consider this argument as laughable and them as liars as you would evaluate them by their actions, not by what they say. Yet supporters of Leninism cannot do this (and, ironically enough, often quote Marx's words that it is impossible to judge either parties or peoples by what they say or think about themselves, you have to look at what they do). Leninists, by urging you to read Lenin's "State and Revolution" are asking you to evaluate them by what their manifesto says and ignore what they did. Anarchists, on the other hand, ask you to evaluate the Leninist manifesto by comparing it to what they actually did in power. Such an evaluation is the only means by which we can judge the validity of Leninist claims and politics.

As we discuss the Russian Revolution in more depth in the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#), we will not provide a summary of Lenin's claims in his famous work **State and Revolution** and what he did in practice here. However, we will say here that the difference between reality and rhetoric was extremely large and, therefore, it is a damning indictment of Bolshevism. Simply put, if the **State and Revolution** is the manifesto of Bolshevism, then not a single promise in that work was kept by the Bolsheviks when they got into power. As such, Lenin's work cannot be used

to evaluate Bolshevism ideology as Bolshevism paid no attention to it once it had taken state power. While Lenin and his followers chant rhapsodies about the Soviet State (this 'highest and most perfect system of democracy") they quickly turned its democratic ideas into a fairy-tale, and an ugly fairy-tale at that, by simply ignoring it in favour of party power (and party dictatorship).

To state the obvious, to quote theory and not relate it to the practice of those who claim to follow it is a joke. It is little more than sophistry. If you look at the actions of the Bolsheviks after the October Russian Revolution you cannot help draw the conclusion that Lenin's **State and Revolution** has nothing to do with Bolshevik policy and presents a false image of what Leninists desire. As such, we must present a comparison between rhetoric and reality.

It will be objected in defence of Leninism that it is unfair to hold Lenin responsible for the failure to apply his ideas in practice. The terrible Civil War, in which Soviet Russia was attacked by numerous armies, and the resulting economic chaos meant that the objective circumstances made it impossible to implement his democratic ideas. This argument contains three flaws. Firstly, as we indicate in [section 3](#) of the appendix on "[What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?](#)", the undemocratic policies of the Bolsheviks started **before** the start of the Civil War (so suggesting that the hardships of the Civil War were not to blame). Secondly, Lenin at no time indicated in **State and Revolution** that it was impossible or inapplicable to apply those ideas during a revolution in Russia (quite the reverse!). Given that Marxists, including Lenin, argue that a "dictatorship of the proletariat" is required to defend the revolution against capitalist resistance it seems incredulous to argue that Lenin's major theoretical work on that regime was impossible to apply in precisely the circumstances it was designed for. Lastly, of course, Lenin himself in 1917 mocked those who argued that revolution was out of the question because "*the circumstances are exceptionally complicated.*" He noting that any revolution, "*in its development, would give rise to exceptionally complicated circumstances*" and that it was "*the sharpest, most furious, desperate class war and civil war. Not a single great revolution in history has escaped civil war. No one who does not live in a shell could imagine that civil war is conceivable without exceptionally complicated circumstances. If there were no exceptionally complicated circumstances there would be no revolution.*" [**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 80 and p. 81] As such, to blame difficult objective circumstances for the failure of Bolshevism to apply the ideas in **State and Revolution** means to argue that those ideas are inappropriate for a revolution (which, we must stress, is what the leading Bolsheviks actually **did** end up arguing by their support for party dictatorship).

All in all, discussing Lenin's **State and Revolution** without indicating that the Bolsheviks failed to implement its ideas (indeed, did the exact opposite) suggests a lack of honesty. It also suggests that the libertarian ideas Lenin appropriated in that work could not survive being grafted onto the statist ideas of mainstream Marxism. As such, **The State and Revolution** laid out the foundations and sketched out the essential features of an alternative to Leninist ideas -- namely anarchism. Only the pro-Leninist tradition has used Lenin's work, almost to quiet their conscience, because Lenin, once in power, ignored it totally. The Russian Revolution shows that a workers state, as anarchists have long argued, means minority power, not working class self-management of society. As such, Lenin's work indicates the contradictory nature of Marxism -- while claiming to support democratic/libertarian ideals they promote structures

(such as centralised states) which undermine those values in favour of party rule. The lesson is clear, only libertarian means can ensure libertarian ends and they have to be applied consistently within libertarian structures to work. To apply them to statist ones will simply fail.

# What happened during the Russian Revolution?

This appendix of the FAQ is not a full history of the Russian Revolution. The scope of such a work would simply be too large. Instead, this section will concentrate on certain key issues which matter in evaluating whether the Bolshevik revolution and regime were genuinely socialist or not. This is not all. Some Leninists acknowledge that that Bolshevik policies had little to do with socialism as such were the best that were available at the time. As such, this section will look at possible alternatives to Bolshevik policies and see whether they were, in fact, inevitable.

So for those seeking a comprehensive history of the revolution will have to look elsewhere. Here, we concentrate on those issues which matter when evaluating the socialist content of the revolution and of Bolshevism. In other words, the development of working class self-activity and self-organisation, workers' resistance to their bosses (whether capitalist or "red"), the activity of opposition groups and parties and the fate of working class organisations like trade unions, factory committees and soviets. Moreover, the role of the ruling party and its ideals also need to be indicated and evaluated somewhat (see ["How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?"](#) for a fuller discussion of the role of Bolshevik ideology in the defeat of the revolution).

This means that this section is about two things, what Alexander Berkman termed "*the Bolshevik Myth*" and what Voline called "*the Unknown Revolution*" (these being the titles of their respective books on the revolution). After his experiences in Bolshevik Russia, Berkman came to the conclusion that it was "*[h]igh time the truth about the Bolsheviks were told. The whited sepulchre must unmasked, the clay feet of the fetish beguiling the international proletariat to fatal will o' wisps exposed. The Bolshevik myth must be destroyed.*" By so doing, he aimed to help the global revolutionary movement learn from the experience of the Russian revolution. Given that "*[t]o millions of the disinherited and enslaved it became a new religion, the beacon of social salvation*" it was an "*imperative to unmask the great delusion, which otherwise might lead the Western workers to the same abyss as their brothers in Russia.*" Bolshevism had "*failed, utterly and absolutely*" and so it was "*incumbent upon those who have seen through the myth to expose its true nature . . . Bolshevism is of the past. The future belongs to man and his liberty.*" [**The Bolshevik Myth**, p. 318 and p. 342]

Subsequent events proved Berkman correct. Socialism became linked to Soviet Russia and as it fell into Stalinism, the effect was to discredit socialism, even radical change as such, in the eyes of millions. And quite rightly too, given the horrors of Stalinism. If more radicals had had the foresight of Berkman and the other anarchists, this association of socialism and revolution with tyranny would have been combated and an alternative, libertarian, form of socialism would have risen to take the challenge of combating capitalism in the name of a **genuine** socialism, rooted in the ideals of liberty, equality and solidarity.

However, in spite of the horrors of Stalinism many people seeking a radical change in society are drawn

to Leninism. This is partly to do with the fact that in many countries Leninist parties have a organised presence and many radicalised people come across them first. It is also partly to do with the fact that many forms of Leninism denounce Stalinism for what it was and raise the possibility of the "genuine" Leninism of the Bolshevik party under Lenin and Trotsky. This current of Leninism is usually called "Trotskyism" and has many offshoots. For some of these parties, the differences between Trotskyism and Stalinism is pretty narrow. The closer to orthodox Trotskyism you get, the more Stalinist it appears. As Victor Serge noted of Trotsky's "Fourth International" in the 1930s, *"in the hearts of the persecuted I encountered the same attitudes as in their persecutors [the Stalinists] . . . Trotskyism was displaying symptoms of an outlook in harmony with the very Stalinism against which it had taken its stand . . . any person in the circles of the 'Fourth International' who went so far as to object to [Trotsky's] propositions was promptly expelled and denounced in the same language that the bureaucracy had] employed against us in the Soviet Union."* [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 349] As we discuss in [section 3](#) of the appendix on ["Were any of the Bolshevik oppositions a real alternative?"](#), perhaps this is unsurprising given how much politically Trotsky's "Left Opposition" had shared with Stalinism.

Other Trotskyist parties have avoided the worse excesses of orthodox Trotskyism. Parties associated with the **International Socialists**, for example portray themselves as defending what they like to term *"socialism from below"* and the democratic promise of Bolshevik as expressed during 1917 and in the early months of Bolshevik rule. While anarchists are somewhat sceptical that Leninism can be called *"socialism from below"* (see [section H.3.3](#)), we need to address the claim that the period between February 1917 to the start of the Russian civil war at the end of May 1918 shows the real nature of Bolshevism. In order to do that we need to discuss what the Russian anarchist Voline called *"The Unknown Revolution."*

So what is the *"Unknown Revolution"*? Voline, an active participant in 1917 Russian Revolution, used that expression as the title of his classic account of the Russian revolution. He used it to refer to the rarely acknowledged independent, creative actions of the revolutionary people themselves. As Voline argued, *"it is not known how to study a revolution"* and most historians *"mistrust and ignore those developments which occur silently in the depths of the revolution . . . at best, they accord them a few words in passing . . . [Yet] it is precisely these hidden facts which are important, and which throw a true light on the events under consideration and on the period."* This section of the FAQ will try and present this *"unknown revolution,"* those movements *"which fought the Bolshevik power in the name of true liberty and of the principles of the Social Revolution which that power had scoffed at and trampled underfoot."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, p. 19 and p. 437] Voline gives the Kronstadt rebellion (see the appendix on ["What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?"](#)) and the Makhnovist movement (see the appendix on ["Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?"](#)) pride of place in his account. Here we discuss other movements and the Bolshevik response to them.

Leninist accounts of the Russian Revolution, to a surprising extent, fall into the official form of history -- a concern more with political leaders than with the actions of the masses. Indeed, the popular aspects of the revolution are often distorted to accord with a predetermined social framework of Leninism. Thus the role of the masses is stressed during the period before the Bolshevik seizure of power. Here the

typical Leninist would agree, to a large extent, with summarised history of 1917 we present in [section 1](#). They would undoubtedly disagree with the downplaying of the role of the Bolshevik party (although as we discuss in [section 2](#), that party was far from the ideal model of the vanguard party of Leninist theory and modern Leninist practice). However, the role of the masses in the revolution would be praised, as would the Bolsheviks for supporting it.

The real difference arises once the Bolsheviks seize power in November 1917 (October, according to the Old Style calendar then used). After that, the masses simply disappear and into the void steps the leadership of the Bolshevik party. For Leninism, the "*unknown revolution*" simply stops. The sad fact is that very little is known about the dynamics of the revolution at the grassroots, particularly after October. Incredible as it may sound, very few Leninists are that interested in the realities of "workers' power" under the Bolsheviks or the actual performance and fate of such working class institutions as soviets, factory committees and co-operatives. What is written is often little more than vague generalities that aim to justify authoritarian Bolshevik policies which either explicitly aimed to undermine such bodies or, at best, resulted in their marginalisation when implemented.

This section of the FAQ aims to make known the "*unknown revolution*" that continued under the Bolsheviks and, equally important, the Bolshevik response to it. As part of this process we need to address some of the key events of that period, such as the role of foreign intervention and the impact of the civil war. However, we do not go into these issues in depth here and instead cover them in depth in the appendix on "[What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?](#)". This is because most Leninists excuse Bolshevik authoritarianism on the impact of the civil war, regardless of the facts of the matter. As we discuss in the appendix on "[How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?](#)", the ideology of Bolshevism played its role as well -- something that modern day Leninists strenuously deny (again, regardless of the obvious). As we indicate in this section, the idea that Bolshevism came into conflict with the "*unknown revolution*" is simply not viable. Bolshevik ideology and practice made it inevitable that this conflict erupted, as it did **before** the start of the civil war (also see [section 3](#) of the appendix on "[What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?](#)").

Ultimately, the reason why Leninist ideas still have influence on the socialist movement is due to the apparent success of the Russian Revolution. Many Leninist groups, mainly Trotskyists and derivatives of Trotskyism, point to "Red October" and the creation of the first ever workers state as concrete examples of the validity of their ideas. They point to Lenin's **State and Revolution** as proving the "democratic" (even "libertarian") nature of Leninism while, at the same time, supporting the party dictatorship he created and, moreover, rationalising the utter lack of working class freedom and power under it. We will try to indicate the falseness of such claims. As will become clear from this section, the following summation of an anonymous revolutionary is totally correct:

***"Every notion about revolution inherited from Bolshevism is false."***

In this, they were simply repeating the conclusions of anarchists. As Kropotkin stressed in 1920:

*"It seems to me that this attempt to build a communist republic on the basis of a strongly centralised state, under the iron law of the dictatorship of one party, has ended in a terrible fiasco. Russia teaches us how not to impose communism."* [Peter Kropotkin, quoted by Guerin, **Anarchism**, p. 106]

Ultimately, the experience of Bolshevism was a disaster. And as the Makhnovists in the Ukraine proved, Bolshevik ideology and practice was **not** the only option available (see the appendix on ["Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?"](#)). There **were** alternatives, but Bolshevik ideology simply excluded using them (we will discuss some possibilities in this various subsections below). In other words, Bolshevik ideology is simply not suitable for a real revolutionary movement and the problems it will face. In fact, its ideology and practice ensures that any such problems will be magnified and made worse, as the Russian revolution proves.

Sadly many socialists cannot bring themselves to acknowledge this. While recognising the evils of the Stalinist bureaucracy, these socialists deny that this degeneration of Bolshevism was inevitable and was caused by outside factors (namely the Russian Civil War or isolation). While not denying that these factors did have an effect in the outcome of the Russian Revolution, the seeds for bureaucracy existed from the first moment of the Bolshevik insurrection. These seeds where from three sources: Bolshevik politics, the nature of the state and the post-October economic arrangements favoured and implemented by the ruling party.

As we will indicate, these three factors caused the new "workers' state" to degenerate long before the outbreak of the Civil war in May of 1918. This means that the revolution was **not** defeated primarily because of isolation or the effects of the civil war. The Bolsheviks had already seriously undermined it from within **long before** the effects of isolation or civil war had a chance to take hold. The civil war which started in the summer of 1918 did take its toll in what revolutionary gains survived, not least because it allowed the Bolsheviks to portray themselves and their policies as the lessor of two evils. However, Lenin's regime was already defending (state) capitalism against genuine socialist tendencies before the outbreak of civil war. The suppression of Kronstadt in March 1921 was simply the logical end result of a process that had started in the spring of 1918, at the latest. As such, isolation and civil war are hardly good excuses -- particularly as anarchists had predicted they would affect every revolution decades previously and Leninists are meant to realise that civil war and revolution are inevitable. Also, it must be stressed that Bolshevik rule was opposed by the working class, who took collective action to resist it and the Bolsheviks justified their policies in ideological terms and **not** in terms of measures required by difficult circumstances (see the appendix on ["What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?"](#)).

One last thing. We are sure, in chronicling the "excesses" of the Bolshevik regime, that some Leninists will say "they sound exactly like the right-wing." Presumably, if we said that the sun rises in the East and sets in the West we would also "sound like the right-wing." That the right-wing also points to certain **facts** of the revolution does not in any way discredit these facts. How these facts are used is what counts. The right uses the facts to discredit socialism and the revolution. Anarchists use them to argue for



libertarian socialism and support the revolution while opposing the Bolshevik ideology and practice which distorted it. Similarly, unlike the right we take into account the factors which Leninists urge us to use to excuse Bolshevik authoritarianism (such as civil war, economic collapse and so on). We are simply not convinced by Leninist arguments.

Needless to say, few Leninists apply their logic to Stalinism. To attack Stalinism by describing the facts of the regime would make one sound like the "right-wing." Does that mean socialists should defend one of the most horrific dictatorships that ever existed? If so, how does that sound to non-socialists? Surely they would conclude that socialism **is** about Stalinism, dictatorship, terror and so on? If not, why not? If "sounding like the right" makes criticism of Lenin's regime anti-revolutionary, then why does this not apply to Stalinism? Simply because Lenin and Trotsky were not at the head of the dictatorship as they were in the early 1920s? Does the individuals who are in charge override the social relations of a society? Does dictatorship and one-man management become less so when Lenin rules? The apologists for Lenin and Trotsky point to the necessity created by the civil war and isolation within international capitalism for their authoritarian policies (while ignoring the fact they started **before** the civil war, continued after it **and were justified at the time** in terms of Bolshevik ideology). Stalin could make the same claim.

Other objections may be raised. It may be claimed that we quote "bourgeois" (or even worse, **Menshevik**) sources and so our account is flawed. In reply, we have to state that you cannot judge a regime based purely on what it says about itself. As such, critical accounts are required to paint a full picture of events. Moreover, it is a sad fact that few, if any, Leninist accounts of the Russian Revolution actually discuss the class and social dynamics (and struggles) of the period under Lenin and Trotsky. This means we have to utilise the sources which **do**, namely those historians who do not identify with the Bolshevik regime. And, of course, any analysis (or defence) of the Bolshevik regime will have to account for critical accounts, either by refuting them or by showing their limitations. As will become obvious in our discussion, the reason why latter day Bolsheviks talk about the class dynamics post-October in the most superficial way is that it would be hard, even impossible, to maintain that Lenin's regime was remotely socialist or based on working class power. Simply put, from early 1918 (at the latest) conflict between the Bolsheviks and the Russian working masses was a constant feature of the regime. It is only when that conflict reached massive proportions that Leninists do not (i.e. cannot) ignore it. In such cases, as the Kronstadt rebellion proves, history is distorted in order to defend the Bolshevik state (see the appendix on ["What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?"](#) for details).

The fact that Leninists try to discredit anarchists by saying that we sound like the right is sad. In effect, it **blocks** any real discussion of the Russian Revolution and Bolshevism (as intended, probably). This ensures that Leninism remains above critique and so no lessons can be learnt from the Russian experience. After all, if the Bolsheviks had no choice then what lessons **are** there to learn? None. And if we are to learn no lessons (bar, obviously, mimic the Bolsheviks) we are doomed to repeat the same mistakes -- mistakes that are partly explained by the objective circumstances at the time and partly by Bolshevik politics. But given that most of the circumstances the Bolsheviks faced, such as civil war and isolation, are likely to reappear in any future revolution, modern-day Leninists are simply ensuring that Karl Marx was right -- history repeats itself, first time as tragedy, second time as farce.

Such a position is, of course, wonderful for the pro-Leninist. It allows them to quote Lenin and Trotsky and use the Bolsheviks as the paradigm of revolution while washing their hands of the results of that revolution. By arguing that the Bolsheviks were "*making a virtue of necessity*," (to use the expression of Leninist Donny Gluckstein [**The Tragedy of Bukharin**, p. 41]), they are automatically absolved of proving their arguments about the "democratic" essence of Bolshevism in power. Which is useful as, logically, no such evidence could exist and, in fact, there is a whole host of evidence pointing the other way which can, by happy co-incidence, be ignored. Indeed, from this perspective there is no point even discussing the revolution at all, beyond praising the activities and ideology of the Bolsheviks while sadly noting that "fate" (to quote Leninist Tony Cliff) ensured that they could not fulfil their promises. Which, of course, almost Leninist accounts **do** boil down to. Thus, for the modern Leninist, the Bolsheviks cannot be judged on what they did nor what they said while doing it (or even after). They can only be praised for what they said and did **before** they seized power.

However, anarchists have a problem with this position. It smacks more of religion than theory. Karl Marx was right to argue that you cannot judge people by what they say, only by what they do. It is in this revolutionary spirit that this section of the FAQ analyses the Russian revolution and the Bolshevik role within it. We need to analyse what they did when they held power as well as the election manifesto. As we will indicate in this section, neither was particularly appealing.

Finally, we should note that Leninists today have various arguments to justify what the Bolsheviks did once in power. We discuss these in the appendix on "[What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?](#)". We also discuss in the appendix on "[How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?](#)" the ideological roots of the counter-revolutionary role of the Bolsheviks during the revolution. That the politics of the Bolsheviks played its role in the failure of the revolution can be seen from the example of the anarchist influenced Makhnovist movement which applied basic libertarian principles in the same difficult circumstances of the Russian Civil War (see "[Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?](#)" on this important movement).

## **1 Can you give a short summary of what happened in 1917?**

## **2 How did the Bolsheviks gain mass support?**

## **3 Surely the Russian Revolution proves that vanguard parties work?**

No, far from it. Looking at the history of vanguardism we are struck by its failures, not its successes. Indeed, the proponents of "*democratic centralism*" can point to only one apparent success of their model, namely the Russian Revolution. However, we are warned by Leninists that failure to use the vanguard party will inevitably condemn future revolutions to failure:

*"The proletariat can take power only through its vanguard. . . Without the confidence of the class in the vanguard, without support of the vanguard by the class, there can be no talk of the conquest of power . . . The Soviets are the only organised form of the tie between the vanguard and the class. A revolutionary content can be given this form only by the party. This is proved by the positive experience of the October Revolution and by the negative experience of other countries (Germany, Austria, finally, Spain). No one has either shown in practice or tried to explain articulately on paper how the proletariat can seize power without the political leadership of a party that knows what it wants."* [Trotsky, **Stalinism and Bolshevism**]

To anarchist ears, such claims seem out of place. After all, did the Russian Revolution actually result in socialism or even a viable form of soviet democracy? Far from it. Unless you picture revolution as simply the changing of the party in power, you have to acknowledge that while the Bolshevik party **did** take power in Russian in November 1917, the net effect of this was **not** the stated goals that justified that action. Thus, if we take the term "*effective*" to mean "an efficient means to achieve the desired goals" then vanguardism has not been proven to be effective, quite the reverse (assuming that your desired goal is a socialist society, rather than party power). Needless to say, Trotsky blames the failure of the Russian Revolution on "*objective*" factors rather than Bolshevik policies and practice, an argument we address in detail in ["What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?"](#) and will not do so here.

So while Leninists make great claims for the effectiveness of their chosen kind of party, the hard facts of history are against their positive evaluation of vanguard parties. Ironically, even the Russian Revolution disproves the claims of Leninists. The fact is that the Bolshevik party in 1917 was very far from the "*democratic centralist*" organisation which supporters of "*vanguardism*" like to claim it is. As such, its success in 1917 lies more in its divergence from the principles of "*democratic centralism*" than in their application. The subsequent degeneration of the revolution and the party is marked by the increasing **application** of those principles in the life of the party.

Thus, to refute the claims of the "*effectiveness*" and "*efficiency*" of vanguardism, we need to look at its one and only success, namely the Russian Revolution. As the Cohen-Bendit brothers argue, "*far from leading the Russian Revolution forwards, the Bolsheviks were responsible for holding back the struggle of the masses between February and October 1917, and later for turning the revolution into a bureaucratic counter-revolution -- in both cases because of the party's very nature, structure and ideology.*" Indeed, "*[f]rom April to October, Lenin had to fight a constant battle to keep the Party leadership in tune with the masses.*" [**Obsolete Communism**, p. 183 and p. 187] It was only by continually violating its own "*nature, structure and ideology*" that the Bolshevik party played an important role in the revolution. Whenever the principles of "*democratic centralism*" were applied, the Bolshevik party played the role the Cohen-Bendit brothers subscribed to it (and once in power, the party's negative features came to the fore).

Even Leninists acknowledge that, to quote Tony Cliff, throughout the history of Bolshevism, "*a certain conservatism arose.*" Indeed, "*[a]t practically all sharp turning points, Lenin had to rely on the lower*

*strata of the party machine against the higher, or on the rank and file against the machine as a whole.*" [Lenin, vol. 2, p. 135] This fact, incidentally, refutes the basic assumptions of Lenin's party schema, namely that the broad party membership, like the working class, was subject to bourgeois influences so necessitating central leadership and control from above.

Looking at both the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, we are struck by how often this "*conservatism*" arose and how often the higher bodies were behind the spontaneous actions of the masses and the party membership. Looking at the 1905 revolution, we discover a classic example of the inefficiency of "democratic centralism." Facing in 1905 the rise of the soviets, councils of workers' delegates elected to co-ordinate strikes and other forms of struggle, the Bolsheviks did not know what to do. "*The Petersburg Committee of the Bolsheviks,*" noted Trotsky, "*was frightened at first by such an innovation as a non-partisan representation of the embattled masses, and could find nothing better to do than to present the Soviet with an ultimatum: immediately adopt a Social-Democratic program or disband. The Petersburg Soviet as a whole, including the contingent of Bolshevik workingmen as well ignored this ultimatum without batting an eyelash.*" [Stalin, vol. 1, p. 106] More than that, "[t]he party's Central Committee published the resolution on October 27, thereby making it the binding directive for all other Bolshevik organisations." [Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, p. 77] It was only the return of Lenin which stopped the Bolshevik's open attacks against the Soviet (also see [section 8](#) of the appendix on "[How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?](#)").

The rationale for these attacks is significant. The St. Petersburg Bolsheviks were convinced that "*only a strong party along class lines can guide the proletarian political movement and preserve the integrity of its program, rather than a political mixture of this kind, an indeterminate and vacillating political organisation such as the workers council represents and cannot help but represent.*" [quoted by Anweiler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 77] In other words, the soviets could not reflect workers' interests because they were elected by the workers! The implications of this perspective came clear in 1918, when the Bolsheviks gerrymandered and disbanded soviets to remain in power (see [section 6](#)). That the Bolshevik's position flowed naturally from Lenin's arguments in **What is to be Done?** is clear. Thus the underlying logic of Lenin's vanguardism ensured that the Bolsheviks played a negative role with regards the soviets which, combined with "democratic centralism" ensured that it was spread far and wide. Only by ignoring their own party's principles and staying in the Soviet did rank and file Bolsheviks play a positive role in the revolution. This divergence of top and bottom would be repeated in 1917.

Given this, perhaps it is unsurprising that Leninists started to rewrite the history of the 1905 revolution. Victor Serge, a "Left Oppositionist" and anti-Stalinist asserted in the late 1920s that in 1905 the Petrograd Soviet was "*led by Trotsky and inspired by the Bolsheviks.*" [**Year One of the Russian Revolution**, p. 36]. While the former claim is correct, the latter is not. As noted, the Bolsheviks were initially opposed the soviets and systematically worked to undermine them. Unsurprisingly, Trotsky at that time was a Menshevik, not a Bolshevik. After all, how could the most revolutionary party that ever existed have messed up so badly? How could democratic centralism faired so badly in practice? Best, then, to suggest that it did not and give the Bolsheviks a role better suited to the rhetoric of Bolshevism than its reality.

Trotsky was no different. He, needless to say, denied the obvious implications of these events in 1905. While admitting that the Bolsheviks "*adjusted themselves more slowly to the sweep of the movement*" and that the Mensheviks "*were preponderant in the Soviet,*" he tries to save vanguardism by asserting that "*the general direction of the Soviet's policy proceeded in the main along Bolshevik lines.*" So, in spite of the lack of Bolshevik influence, in spite of the slowness in adjusting to the revolution, Bolshevism was, in fact, the leading set of ideas in the revolution! Ironically, a few pages later, he mocks the claims of Stalinists that Stalin had "*isolated the Mensheviks from the masses*" by noting that the "*figures hardly bear [the claims] out.*" [Op. Cit., p. 112 and p. 117] Shame he did not apply this criteria to his own claims.

Of course, every party makes mistakes. The question is, how did the "*most revolutionary party of all time*" fare in 1917. Surely that revolution proves the validity of vanguardism and "democratic centralism"? After all, there was a successful revolution, the Bolshevik party did seize power. However, the apparent success of 1917 was not due to the application of "democratic centralism," quite the reverse. While the myth of 1917 is that a highly efficient, democratic centralist vanguard party ensured the overthrow of the Provisional Government in November 1917 in favour of the Soviets (or so it seemed at the time) the facts are somewhat different. Rather, the Bolshevik party throughout 1917 was a fairly loose collection of local organisations (each more than willing to ignore central commands and express their autonomy), with much internal dissent and infighting and no discipline beyond what was created by common loyalty. The "democratic centralist" party, as desired by Lenin, was only created in the course of the Civil War and the tightening of the party dictatorship. In other words, the party became more like a "democratic centralist" one as the revolution degenerated. As such, the various followers of Lenin (Stalinists, Trotskyists and their multitude of offshoots) subscribe to a myth, which probably explains their lack of success in reproducing a similar organisation since. So assuming that the Bolsheviks did play an important role in the Russian revolution, it was because it was **not** the centralised, disciplined Bolshevik party of Leninist myth. Indeed, when the party **did** operate in a vanguardist manner, failure was soon to follow.

This claim can be proven by looking at the history of the 1917 revolution. The February revolution started with a spontaneous protests and strikes. As Murray Bookchin notes, "*the Petrograd organisation of the Bolsheviks opposed the calling of strikes precisely on the eve of the revolution which was destined to overthrow the Tsar. Fortunately, the workers ignored the Bolshevik 'directives' and went on strike anyway. In the events which followed, no one was more surprised by the revolution than the 'revolutionary' parties, including the Bolsheviks.*" [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, p. 194] Trotsky quotes one of the Bolshevik leaders at the time:

*"Absolutely no guiding initiative from the party centres was felt . . . the Petrograd Committee had been arrested and the representative of the Central Committee . . . was unable to give any directives for the coming day."* [quoted by Trotsky, **History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 147]

Not the best of starts. Of course rank and file Bolsheviks took part in the demonstrations, street fights

and strikes and so violated the principles their party was meant to be based on. As the revolution progressed, so did the dual nature of the Bolshevik party (i.e. its practical divergence from "democratic centralism" in order to be effective and attempts to force it back into that schema which handicapped the revolution). However, during 1917, "democratic centralism" was ignored in order to ensure the the Bolsheviks played any role at all in the revolution. As one historian of the party makes clear, in 1917 and until the outbreak of the Civil War, the party operated in ways that few modern "vanguard" parties would tolerate:

*"The committees were a law unto themselves when it came to accepting orders from above. Democratic centralism, as vague a principle of internal administration as there ever has been, was commonly held at least to enjoin lower executive bodies that they should obey the behests of all higher bodies in the organisational hierarchy. But town committees in practice had the devil's own job in imposing firm leadership . . . Insubordination was the rule of the day whenever lower party bodies thought questions of importance were at stake.*

*"Suburb committees too faced difficulties in imposing discipline. Many a party cell saw fit to thumb its nose at higher authority and to pursue policies which it felt to be more suited to local circumstances or more desirable in general. No great secret was made of this. In fact, it was openly admitted that hardly a party committee existed which did not encounter problems in enforcing its will even upon individual activists."* [Robert Service, **The Bolshevik Party in Revolution 1917-1923**, pp. 51-2]

So while Lenin's ideal model of a disciplined, centralised and top-down party had been expounded since 1902, the operation of the party never matched his desire. As Service notes, *"a disciplined hierarchy of command stretching down from the regional committees to party cells"* had *"never existed in Bolshevik history."* In the heady days of the revolution, when the party was flooded by new members, the party ignored what was meant to be its guiding principles. As Service constantly stresses, Bolshevik party life in 1917 was the exact opposite of that usually considered (by both opponents and supporters of Bolshevism) as its normal mode of operation. *"Anarchist attitudes to higher authority,"* he argues, *"were the rule of the day"* and *"no Bolshevik leader in his right mind could have contemplated a regular insistence upon rigid standards of hierarchical control and discipline unless he had abandoned all hope of establishing a mass socialist party."* This meant that *"in the Russia of 1917 it was the easiest thing in the world for lower party bodies to rebut the demands and pleas by higher authority."* He stresses that *"[s]uburb and town committees . . . often refused to go along with official policies . . . they also . . . sometimes took it into their heads to engage in active obstruction."* [Op. Cit., p. 80, p. 62 p. 56 and p. 60]

This worked both ways, of course. Town committees did *"snub their nose at lower-echelon viewpoints in the time before the next election. Try as hard as they might, suburb committees and ordinary cells could meanwhile do little to rectify matters beyond telling their own representative on their town committee to speak on their behalf. Or, if this too failed, they could resort to disruptive tactics by criticising it in public and refusing it all collaboration."* [Op. Cit., pp. 52-3] Even by early 1918, the

Bolshevik party bore little resemblance to the "democratic centralist" model desired by Lenin:

*"The image of a disciplined hierarchy of party committees was therefore but a thin, artificial veneer which was used by Bolshevik leaders to cover up the cracked surface of the real picture underneath. Cells and suburb committees saw no reason to kow-tow to town committees; nor did town committees feel under compulsion to show any greater respect to their provincial and regional committees than before."* [Op. Cit., p. 74]

It is this insubordination, this local autonomy and action in spite of central orders which explains the success of the Bolsheviks in 1917. Rather than a highly centralised and disciplined body of "professional" revolutionaries, the party in 1917 saw a *"significant change . . . within the membership of the party at local level . . . From the time of the February revolution requirements for party membership had been all but suspended, and now Bolshevik ranks swelled with impetuous recruits who knew next to nothing about Marxism and who were united by little more than overwhelming impatience for revolutionary action."* [Alexander Rabinowitch, **Prelude to Revolution**, p. 41]

This mass of new members (many of whom were peasants who had just recently joined the industrial workforce) had a radicalising effect on the party's policies and structures. As even Leninist commentators argue, it was this influx of members who allowed Lenin to gain support for his radical revision of party aims in April. However, in spite of this radicalisation of the party base, the party machine still was at odds with the desires of the party. As Trotsky acknowledged, the situation *"called for resolute confrontation of the sluggish Party machine with masses and ideas in motion."* He stressed that *"the masses were incomparably more revolutionary than the Party, which in turn was more revolutionary than its committeemen."* Ironically, given the role Trotsky usually gave the party, he admits that *"[w]ithout Lenin, no one had known what to make of the unprecedented situation."* [Stalin, vol. 1, p. 301, p. 305 and p. 297]

Which is significant in itself. The Bolshevik party is usually claimed as being the most "revolutionary" that ever existed, yet here is Trotsky admitting that its leading members did not have a clue what to do. He even argued that *"[e]very time the Bolshevik leaders had to act without Lenin they fell into error, usually inclining to the Right."* [Op. Cit., p. 299] This negative opinion of the Bolsheviks applied even to the *"left Bolsheviks, especially the workers"* whom we are informed *"tried with all their force to break through this quarantine"* created by the Bolshevik leaders policy *"of waiting, of accommodation, and of actual retreat before the Compromisers"* after the February revolution and before the arrival of Lenin. Trotsky argues that *"they did not know how to refute the premise about the bourgeois character of the revolution and the danger of an isolation of the proletariat. They submitted, gritting their teeth, to the directions of their leaders."* [History of the Russian Revolution, vol. 1, p. 273] It seems strange, to say the least, that without one person the whole of the party was reduced to such a level given that the aim of the "revolutionary" party was to develop the political awareness of its members.

Lenin's arrival, according to Trotsky, allowed the influence of the more radical rank and file to defeat the conservatism of the party machine. By the end of April, Lenin had managed to win over the majority of

the party leadership to his position. However, as Trotsky argues, this *"April conflict between Lenin and the general staff of the party was not the only one of its kind. Throughout the whole history of Bolshevism . . . all the leaders of the party at all the most important moments stood to the right of Lenin."* [Op. Cit., p. 305] As such, if "democratic centralism" had worked as intended, the whole party would have been arguing for incorrect positions the bulk of its existence (assuming, of course, that Lenin was correct most of the time).

For Trotsky, *"Lenin exerted influence not so much as an individual but because he embodied the influence of the class on the Party and of the Party on its machine."* [Stalin, vol. 1, p. 299] Yet, this was the machine which Lenin had forged, which embodied his vision of how a "revolutionary" party should operate and was headed by him. In other words, to argue that the party machine was behind the party membership and the membership behind the class shows the bankruptcy of Lenin's organisational scheme. This *"backwardness,"* moreover, indicates an independence of the party bureaucracy from the membership and the membership from the masses. As Lenin's constantly repeated aim was for the party to seize power (based on the dubious assumption that class power would only be expressed, indeed was identical to, party power) this independence held serious dangers, dangers which became apparent once this goal was achieved.

Trotsky asks the question *"by what miracle did Lenin manage in a few short weeks to turn the Party's course into a new channel?"* Significantly, he answers as follows: *"Lenin's personal attributes and the objective situation."* [Ibid.] No mention is made of the democratic features of the party organisation, which suggests that without Lenin the rank and file party members would not have been able to shift the weight of the party machine in their favour. Trotsky seems close to admitting this:

*"As often happens, a sharp cleavage developed between the classes in motion and the interests of the party machines. Even the Bolshevik Party cadres, who enjoyed the benefit of exceptional revolutionary training, were definitely inclined to disregard the masses and to identify their own special interests and the interests of the machine on the very day after the monarchy was overthrown."* [Stalin, vol. 1, p. 298]

Thus the party machine, which embodied the principles of "democratic centralism" proved less than able to the task assigned it in practice. Without Lenin, it is doubtful that the party membership would have over come the party machine:

*"Lenin was strong not only because he understood the laws of the class struggle but also because his ear was faultlessly attuned to the stirrings of the masses in motion. He represented not so much the Party machine as the vanguard of the proletariat. He was definitely convinced that thousands from among those workers who had borne the brunt of supporting the underground Party would now support him. The masses at the moment were more revolutionary than the Party, and the Party more revolutionary than its machine. As early as March the actual attitude of the workers and soldiers had in many cases become stormily apparent, and it was widely at variance with the instructions issued*



*by all the parties, including the Bolsheviks.*" [Op. Cit., p. 299]

Little wonder the local party groupings ignored the party machine, practising autonomy and initiative in the face of a party machine inclined to conservatism, inertia, bureaucracy and remoteness. This conflict between the party machine and the principles it was based on and the needs of the revolution and party membership was expressed continually throughout 1917:

*"In short, the success of the revolution called for action against the 'highest circles of the party,' who, from February to October, utterly failed to play the revolutionary role they ought to have taken in theory. The masses themselves made the revolution, with or even against the party -- this much at least was clear to Trotsky the historian. But far from drawing the correct conclusion, Trotsky the theorist continued to argue that the masses are incapable of making a revolution without a leader."* [Daniel & Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, Op. Cit., p. 188]

Looking at the development of the revolution from April onwards, we are struck by the sluggishness of the party hierarchy. At every revolutionary upsurge, the party simply was not to the task of responding to the needs of masses and the local party groupings closest to them. This can be seen in June, July and October itself. At each turn, the rank and file groupings or Lenin had to constantly violate the principles of their own party in order to be effective. The remoteness and conservatism of the party even under Lenin can be constantly seen.

For example, when discussing the cancellation by the central committee of a demonstration planned for June 10th by the Petrograd Bolsheviks, the unresponsiveness of the party hierarchy can be seen. The *"speeches by Lenin and Zinoviev [justifying their actions] by no means satisfied the Petersburg Committee. If anything, it appears that their explanations served to strengthen the feeling that at best the party leadership had acted irresponsibly and incompetently and was seriously out of touch with reality."* Indeed, many *"blamed the Central Committee for taking so long to respond to Military Organisation appeals for a demonstration."* [Rabinowitch, Op. Cit., p. 88 and p. 92]

During the discussions in late June, 1917, on whether to take direct action against the Provisional Government there was a *"wide gulf"* between lower organs evaluations of the current situation and that of the Central Committee. [Rabinowitch, Op. Cit., p. 129] Indeed, among the delegates from the Bolshevik military groups, only Lashevich (an old Bolshevik) spoke in favour of the Central Committee position and he noted that *"[f]requently it is impossible to make out where the Bolshevik ends and the Anarchist begins."* [quoted by Rabinowitch, Op. Cit., p. 129]

In the July days, the breach between the local party groups and the central committee increased. As we noted in the [section 1](#), this spontaneous uprising was opposed to by the Bolshevik leadership, in spite of the leading role of their own militants (along with anarchists) in fermenting it. While calling on their own militants to restrain the masses, the party leadership was ignored by the rank and file membership who played an active role in the event. Sickened by being asked to play the role of *"fireman,"* the party

militants rejected party discipline in order to maintain their credibility with the working class. Rank and file activists, pointing to the snowballing of the movement, showed clear dissatisfaction with the Central Committee. One argued that it *"was not aware of the latest developments when it made its decision to oppose the movement into the streets."* Ultimately, the Central Committee appeal *"for restraining the masses . . . was removed from . . . Pravda . . . and so the party's indecision was reflected by a large blank space on page one."* [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 150, p. 159 and P. 175] Ultimately, the indecisive nature of the leadership can be explained by the fact it did not think it could seize state power for itself. As Trotsky noted, *"the state of popular consciousness . . . made impossible the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in July."* [**History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 2, p. 81]

The indecision of the party hierarchy did have an effect, of course. While the anarchists at Kronstadt looked at the demonstration as the start of an uprising, the Bolsheviks there were *"wavering indecisively in the middle"* between them and the Left-Social Revolutionaries who saw it as a means of applying pressure on the government. This was because they were *"hamstrung by the indecision of the party Central Committee."* [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 187] Little wonder so many Bolshevik party organisations developed and protected their own autonomy and ability to act!

Significantly, one of the main Bolshevik groupings which helped organise and support the July uprising, the Military Organisation, started their own paper after the Central Committee had decreed after the failed revolt that neither it, nor the Petersburg Committee, should be allowed to have one. It *"angrily insisted on what it considered its just prerogatives"* and in *"no uncertain terms it affirmed its right to publish an independent newspaper and formally protested what is referred to as 'a system of persecution and repression of an extremely peculiar character which had begun with the election of the new Central Committee.'"* [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 227] The Central Committee backed down, undoubtedly due to the fact it could not enforce its decision.

As the Cohn-Bendit brothers argue, *"five months after the Revolution and three months before the October uprising, the masses were still governing themselves, and the Bolshevik vanguard simply had to toe the line."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 186] Within that vanguard, the central committee proved to be out of touch with the rank and file, who ignored it rather than break with their fellow workers.

Even by October, the party machine still lagged behind the needs of the revolution. In fact, Lenin could only impose his view by going over the head of the Central Committee. According to Trotsky's account, *"this time he [wa]s not satisfied with furious criticism"* of the *"ruinous Fabianism of the Petrograd leadership"* and *"by way of protest he resign[ed] from the Central Committee."* [**History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 3, p. 131] Trotsky quotes Lenin as follows:

*"I am compelled to request permission to withdraw from the Central Committee, which I hereby do, and leave myself freedom of agitation in the lower ranks of the party and at the party congress."* [quoted by Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 131]

Thus the October revolution was precipitated by a blatant violation of the principles Lenin spent his life

advocating. Indeed, if someone else other than Lenin had done this we are sure that Lenin, and his numerous followers, would have dismissed it as the action of a *"petty-bourgeois intellectual"* who cannot handle party *"discipline."* This is itself significant, as is the fact that he decided to appeal to the *"lower ranks"* of the party. Simply put, rather than being *"democratic"* the party machine effectively blocked communication and control from the bottom-up. Looking at the more radical party membership, he *"could only impose his view by going over the head of his Central Committee."* [Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, **Op. Cit.**, p. 187] He made sure to send his letter of protest to *"the Petrograd and Moscow committees"* and also made sure that *"copies fell into the hands of the more reliable party workers of the district locals."* By early October (and *"over the heads of the Central Committee"*) he wrote *"directly to the Petrograd and Moscow committees"* calling for insurrection. He also *"appealed to a Petrograd party conference to speak a firm word in favour of insurrection."* [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 131 and p. 132]

In October, Lenin had to fight what he called *"a wavering"* in the *"upper circles of the party"* which led to a *"sort of dread of the struggle for power, an inclination to replace this struggle with resolutions protests, and conferences."* [quoted by Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 132] For Trotsky, this represented *"almost a direct pitting of the party against the Central Committee,"* required because *"it was a question of the fate of the revolution"* and so *"all other considerations fell away."* [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 132-3] On October 8th, when Lenin addressed the Bolshevik delegates of the forthcoming Northern Congress of Soviets on this subject, he did so *"personally"* as there *"was no party decision"* and the *"higher institutions of the party had not yet expressed themselves."* [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 133] Ultimately, the Central Committee came round to Lenin's position but they did so under pressure of means at odds with the principles of the party.

This divergence between the imagine and reality of the Bolsheviks explains their success. If the party had applied or had remained true to the principles of *"democratic centralism"* it is doubtful that it would have played an important role in the movement. As Alexander Rabinowitch argues, Bolshevik organisational unity and discipline is *"vastly exaggerated"* and, in fact, Bolshevik success in 1917 was down to *"the party's internally relatively democratic, tolerant, and decentralised structure and method of operation, as well as its essentially open and mass character -- in striking contrast to the traditional Leninist model."* In 1917, he goes on, *"subordinate party bodies with the Petersburg Committee and the Military Organisation were permitted considerable independence and initiative . . . Most importantly, these lower bodies were able to tailor their tactics and appeals to suit their own particular constituencies amid rapidly changing conditions. Vast numbers of new members were recruited into the party . . . The newcomers included tens of thousands of workers and soldiers . . . who knew little, if anything, about Marxism and cared nothing about party discipline."* For example, while the slogan *"All Power to the Soviets"* was *"officially withdrawn by the Sixth [Party] Congress in late July, this change did not take hold at the local level."* [**The Bolsheviks Come to Power**, p. 311, p. 312 and p. 313]

It is no exaggeration to argue that if any member of a current vanguard party acted as the Bolshevik rank and file did in 1917, they would quickly be expelled (this probably explains why no such party has been remotely successful since). However, this ferment from below was quickly undermined within the party with the start of the Civil War. It is from this period when *"democratic centralism"* was actually applied within the party and clarified as an organisational principle:

*"It was quite a turnabout since the anarchic days before the Civil War. The Central Committee had always advocated the virtues of obedience and co-operation; but the rank-and-filers of 1917 had cared little about such entreaties as they did about appeals made by other higher authorities. The wartime emergency now supplied an opportunity to expatiate on this theme at will."* [Service, **Op. Cit.**, p. 91]

Service stresses that *"it appears quite remarkable how quickly the Bolsheviks, who for years had talked idly about a strict hierarchy of command inside the party, at last began to put ideas into practice."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 96]

In other words, the conversion of the Bolshevik party into a fully fledged *"democratic centralist"* party occurred during the degeneration of the Revolution. This was both a consequence of the rising authoritarianism within the party and society as well as one of its causes. As such, it is quite ironic that the model used by modern day followers of Lenin is that of the party during the decline of the revolution, not its peak. This is not surprising. Once in power, the Bolshevik party imposed a state capitalist regime onto the Russian people. Can it be surprising that the party structure which it developed to aid this process was also based on bourgeois attitudes and organisation? Simply put, the party model advocated by Lenin may not have been very effective during a revolution but it was exceedingly effective at prompting hierarchy and authority in the post-revolutionary regime. It simply replaced the old ruling elite with another, made up of members of the radical intelligentsia and odd ex-worker or ex-peasant.

This was due to the hierarchical and top-down nature of the party Lenin had created. While the party base was largely working class, the leadership was not. Full-time revolutionaries, they were either middle-class intellectuals or (occasionally) ex-workers and (even rarer) ex-peasants who had left their class to become part of the party machine. Even the delegates at the party congresses did not truly reflect class basis of the party membership. For example, the number of delegates was still dominated by white-collar or others (59.1% to 40.9%) at the sixth party congress at the end of July 1917. [Cliff, **Lenin**, vol. 2, p. 160] So while the party gathered more working class members in 1917, it cannot be said that this was reflected in the party leadership which remained dominated by non-working class elements. Rather than being a genuine working class organisation, the Bolshevik party was a hierarchical group headed by non-working class elements whose working class base could not effectively control them even during the revolution in 1917. It was only effective because these newly joined and radicalised working class members ignored their own party structure and its defining ideology.

After the revolution, the Bolsheviks saw their membership start to decrease. Significantly, *"the decline in numbers which occurred from early 1918 onwards"* started happening *"contrary to what is usually assumed, some months before the Central Committee's decree in midsummer that the party should be purged of its 'undesirable' elements."* These lost members reflected two things. Firstly, the general decline in the size of the industrial working class. This meant that the radicalised new elements from the countryside which had flocked to the Bolsheviks in 1917 returned home. Secondly, the lost of popular support the Bolsheviks were facing due to the realities of their regime. This can be seen from the fact

that while the Bolsheviks were losing members, the Left SRS almost doubled in size to 100,000 (the Mensheviks claimed to have a similar number). Rather than non-proletarians leaving, "*[i]t is more probable by far that it was industrial workers who were leaving in droves. After all, it would have been strange if the growing unpopularity of Sovnarkom in factory milieu had been confined exclusively to non-Bolsheviks.*" Unsurprisingly, given its position in power, "*[a]s the proportion of working-class members declined, so that of entrants from the middle-class rose; the steady drift towards a party in which industrial workers no longer numerically predominated was under way.*" By late 1918 membership started to increase again but "*[m]ost newcomers were not of working-class origin . . . the proportion of Bolsheviks of working-class origin fell from 57 per cent at the year's beginning to 48 per cent at the end.*" It should be noted that it was not specified how many were classed as having working-class origin were still employed in working-class jobs. [Robert Service, **Op. Cit.**, p. 70, pp. 70-1 and p. 90] A new ruling elite was thus born, thanks to the way vanguard parties are structured and the application of vanguardist principles which had previously been ignored.

In summary, the experience of the Russian Revolution does not, in fact, show the validity of the "vanguard" model. The Bolshevik party in 1917 played a leading role in the revolution only insofar as its members violated its own organisational principles (Lenin included). Faced with a real revolution and an influx of more radical new members, the party had to practice anarchist ideas of autonomy, local initiative and the ignoring of central orders which had no bearing to reality on the ground. When the party did try to apply the top-down and hierarchical principles of "democratic centralism" it failed to adjust to the needs of the moment. Moreover, when these principles were finally applied they helped ensure the degeneration of the revolution. As we discussed in [section H.5](#), this was to be expected.

## 4 Was Lenin's "State and Revolution" applied after October?

In a nutshell, no. In fact the opposite was the case. Post-October, the Bolsheviks not only failed to introduce the ideas of Lenin's **State and Revolution**, they in fact introduced the exact opposite. As one historian puts it:

*"To consider 'State and Revolution' as the basic statement of Lenin's political philosophy -- which non-Communists as well as Communists usually do -- is a serious error. Its argument for a utopian anarchism never actually became official policy. The Leninism of 1917 . . . came to grief in a few short years; it was the revived Leninism of 1902 which prevailed as the basis for the political development of the USSR."* [Robert V. Daniels, **The Conscience of the Revolution**, pp. 51-2]

Daniels is being far too lenient with the Bolsheviks. It was not, in fact, "*a few short years*" before the promises of 1917 were forgotten. In some cases, it was a few short hours. In others, a few short months. However, in a sense Daniels is right. It did take until 1921 before all hope for saving the Russian Revolution finally ended. With the crushing of the Kronstadt rebellion, the true nature of the regime became obvious to all with eyes to see. Moreover, the banning of factions within the party at the same time did mark a return to the pattern of "*What is to be Done?*" rather than the more fluid practice

Bolshevism exhibited in, say, 1917 (see [section 3](#)). However, as we discuss in the appendix "[Were any of the Bolshevik oppositions a real alternative?](#)", the various Bolshevik oppositions were, in their own way, just as authoritarian as the mainstream of the party.

In order to show that this is the case, we need to summarise the main ideas contained in Lenin's work. Moreover, we need to indicate what the Bolsheviks did, in fact, do. Finally, we need to see if the various rationales justifying these actions hold water.

So what did Lenin argue for in **State and Revolution**? Writing in the mid-1930s, anarchist Camillo Berneri summarised the main ideas of that work as follows:

*"The Leninist programme of 1917 included these points: the discontinuance of the police and standing army, abolition of the professional bureaucracy, elections for all public positions and offices, revocability of all officials, equality of bureaucratic wages with workers' wages, the maximum of democracy, peaceful competition among the parties within the soviets, abolition of the death penalty."* [*"The Abolition and Extinction of the State," Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review*, no. 4, p. 50]

As he noted, "[n]ot a single one of the points of this programme has been achieved." This was, of course, under Stalinism and most Leninists will concur with Berneri. However what Leninists tend not to mention is that in the 7 month period from November 1917 to May 1918 none of these points was achieved. So, as an example of what Bolshevism "really" stands for it seems strange to harp on about a work which was never implemented when the its author was in a position to do so (i.e. before the onslaught of a civil war Lenin thought was inevitable anyway!).

To see that Berneri's summary is correct, we need to quote Lenin directly. Obviously the work is a wide ranging defence of Lenin's interpretation of Marxist theory on the state. As it is an attempt to overturn decades of Marxist orthodoxy, much of the work is quotes from Marx and Engels and Lenin's attempts to enlist them for his case (we discuss this issue in [section H.3.10](#)). Equally, we need to discount the numerous straw men arguments about anarchism Lenin inflicts on his reader (see sections [H.1.3](#), [H.1.4](#) and [H.1.5](#) for the truth about his claims). Here we simply list the key points as regards Lenin's arguments about his "workers' state" and how the workers would maintain control of it:

1) Using the Paris Commune as a prototype, Lenin argued for the abolition of "*parliamentarianism*" by turning "*representative institutions from mere 'talking shops' into working bodies.*" This would be done by removing "*the division of labour between the legislative and the executive.*" [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 304 and p. 306]

2) "*All officials, without exception, to be elected and subject to recall at any time*" and so "*directly responsible to their constituents.*" "*Democracy means equality.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 302, p. 306 and p. 346]

- 3) The *"immediate introduction of control and superintendence by all, so that all shall become 'bureaucrats' for a time and so that, therefore, no one can become a 'bureaucrat'."* Proletarian democracy would *"take immediate steps to cut bureaucracy down to the roots . . . to the complete abolition of bureaucracy"* as the *"essence of bureaucracy"* is officials becoming transformed *"into privileged persons divorced from the masses and superior to the masses."* [Op. Cit., p. 355 and p. 360]
- 4) There should be no *"special bodies of armed men"* standing apart from the people *"since the majority of the people itself suppresses its oppressors, a 'special force' is no longer necessary."* Using the example of the Paris Commune, Lenin suggested this meant *"abolition of the standing army."* Instead there would be the *"armed masses."* [Op. Cit., p. 275, p. 301 and p. 339]
- 5) The new (workers) state would be *"the organisation of violence for the suppression of . . . the exploiting class, i.e. the bourgeoisie. The toilers need a state only to overcome the resistance of the exploiters"* who are *"an insignificant minority,"* that is *"the landlords and the capitalists."* This would see *"an immense expansion of democracy . . . for the poor, democracy for the people"* while, simultaneously, imposing *"a series of restrictions on the freedom of the oppressors, the exploiters, the capitalists. . . their resistance must be broken by force: it is clear that where is suppression there is also violence, there is no freedom, no democracy."* [Op. Cit., p. 287 and pp. 337-8]

This would be implemented after the current, bourgeois, state had been smashed. This would be the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* and be *"the introduction of complete democracy for the people."* [Op. Cit., p. 355] However, the key practical ideas on what the new "semi-state" would be are contained in these five points. He generalised these points, considering them valid not only for Russia in 1917 but in all countries. In this his followers agree. Lenin's work is considered valid for today, in advanced countries as it was in revolutionary Russia.

Three things strike anarchist readers of Lenin's work. Firstly, as we noted in [section H.1.7](#), much of it is pure anarchism. Bakunin had raised the vision of a system of workers' councils as the framework of a free socialist society in the 1860s and 1870s. Moreover, he had also argued for the election of mandated and recallable delegates as well as for using a popular militia to defend the revolution (see [section H.2.1](#)). What is not anarchist is the call for centralisation, equating the council system with a state and the toleration of a "new" officialdom. Secondly, the almost utter non-mention of the role of the party in the book is deeply significant. Given the emphasis that Lenin had always placed on the party, it's absence is worrying. Particularly (as we indicate in [section 5](#)) he had been calling for the party to seize power all through 1917. When he does mention the party he does so in an ambiguous way which suggests that it, not the class, would be in power. As subsequent events show, this was indeed what happened in practice. And, finally, the anarchist reader is struck by the fact that every one of these key ideas were not implemented under Lenin. In fact, the opposite was done. This can be seen from looking at each point in turn.

The first point as the creation of "working bodies", the combining of legislative and executive bodies. The first body to be created by the Bolshevik revolution was the "Council of People's

Commissars" (CPC) This was a government separate from and above the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the soviets congress. It was an executive body elected by the soviet congress, but the soviets themselves were not turned into "working bodies." Thus the promises of Lenin's **State and Revolution** did not last the night.

As indicated in [section 5](#), the Bolsheviks clearly knew that the Soviets had alienated their power to this body. However, it could be argued that Lenin's promises were kept as this body simply gave itself legislative powers four days later. Sadly, this is not the case. In the Paris Commune the delegates of the people took executive power into their own hands. Lenin reversed this. His executive took legislative power from the hands of the people's delegates. In the former case, power was decentralised into the hands of the population. In the latter case, it was centralised into the hands of a few. This concentration of power into executive committees occurred at all levels of the soviet hierarchy (see [section 6](#) for full details). Simply put, legislative and executive power was taken **from** the soviets assemblies and handed to Bolshevik dominated executive committees.

What of the next principle, namely the election and recall of all officials? This lasted slightly longer, namely around 5 months. By March of 1918, the Bolsheviks started a systematic campaign against the elective principle in the workplace, in the military and even in the soviets. In the workplace, Lenin was arguing for appointed one-man managers "*vested with dictatorial powers*" by April 1918 (see [section 10](#)). In the military, Trotsky simply decreed the end of elected officers in favour of appointed officers (see [section 14](#)). And as far as the soviets go, the Bolsheviks were refusing to hold elections because they "*feared that the opposition parties would show gains.*" When elections were held, "*Bolshevik armed force usually overthrew the results*" in provincial towns. Moreover, the Bolsheviks "*pack[ed] local soviets*" with representatives of organisations they controlled "*once they could not longer count on an electoral majority.*" [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 22, p. 24 and p. 33] This gerrymandering was even practised at the all-Russian soviet congress (see [section 6](#) for full details of this Bolshevik onslaught against the soviets). So much for competition among the parties within the soviets! And as far as the right of recall went, the Bolsheviks only supported this when the workers were recalling the opponents of the Bolsheviks, not when the workers were recalling them.

In summary, in under six months the Bolsheviks had replaced election of "*all officials*" by appointment from above in many areas of life. Democracy had simply being substituted by appointed from above (see [section 4](#) of the appendix on "[How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?](#)" for the deeply undemocratic reasoning used to justify this top-down and autocratic system of so-called democracy). The idea that different parties could compete for votes in the soviets (or elsewhere) was similarly curtailed and finally abolished.

Then there was the elimination of bureaucracy. As we show in [section 7](#) of the appendix on "[How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?](#)", a new bureaucratic and centralised system quickly emerged. Rather than immediately cutting the size and power of the bureaucracy, it steadily grew. It soon became the real power in the state (and, ultimately, in the 1920s became the social



base for the rise of Stalin). Moreover, with the concentration of power in the hands of the Bolshevik government, the "essence" of bureaucracy remained as the party leaders became "*privileged persons divorced from the masses and superior to the masses.*" They were, for example, more than happy to justify their suppression of military democracy in terms of them knowing better than the general population what was best for them (see [section 4](#) of the appendix on "[How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?](#)" for details).

Then there is the fourth point, namely the elimination of the standing army, the suppression of "*special bodies of armed men*" by the "*armed masses.*" This promise did not last two months. On the 20th of December, 1917, the Council of People's Commissars decreed the formation of a political (secret) police force, the "*Extraordinary Commission to Fight Counter-Revolution.*" This was more commonly known by the Russian initials of the first two terms of its official name: The Cheka. Significantly, its founding decree stated it was to "*watch the press, saboteurs, strikers, and the Socialist-Revolutionaries of the Right.*" [contained in Robert V. Daniels, **A Documentary History of Communism**, vol. 1, p. 133]

While it was initially a small organisation, as 1918 progressed it grew in size and activity. By April 1918, it was being used to break the anarchist movement across Russia (see [section 23](#) for details). The Cheka soon became a key instrument of Bolshevik rule, with the full support of the likes of Lenin and Trotsky. The Cheka was most definitely a "*special body of armed men*" and not the same as the "*armed workers.*" In other words, Lenin's claims in **State and Revolution** did not last two months and in under six months the Bolshevik state had a mighty group of "*armed men*" to impose its will.

This is not all. The Bolsheviks also conducted a sweeping transformation of the military within the first six months of taking power. During 1917, the soldiers and sailors (encouraged by the Bolsheviks and other revolutionaries) had formed their own committees and elected officers. In March 1918, Trotsky simply abolished all this by decree and replaced it with appointed officers (usually ex-Tsarist ones). In this way, the Red Army was turned from a workers' militia (i.e. an armed people) into a "*special body*" separate from the general population (see [section 15](#) for further discussion on this subject).

So instead of eliminating a "*special force*" above the people, the Bolsheviks did the opposite by creating a political police force (the Cheka) and a standing army (in which elections were a set aside by decree). These were special, professional, armed forces standing apart from the people and unaccountable to them. Indeed, they were used to repress strikes and working class unrest, a topic we now turn to.

Then there is the idea of that Lenin's "workers' state" would simple be an instrument of violence directed at the exploiters. This was not how it turned out in practice. As the Bolsheviks lost popular support, they turned the violence of the "worker's state" against the workers (and, of course, the peasants). As noted above, when the Bolsheviks lost soviet elections they used force to disband them (see [section 6](#) for further details). Faced with strikes and working class protest during this period, the Bolsheviks responded with state violence (see [section 5](#) of the appendix on "[What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?](#)" for details). We will discuss the implications of this for Lenin's theory below. So, as regards the claim that the new ("workers") state would repress only the exploiters, the truth was that it

was used to repress whoever opposed Bolshevik power, including workers and peasants.

As can be seen, after the first six months of Bolshevik rule not a single measure advocated by Lenin in **State and Revolution** existed in "revolutionary" Russia. Some of the promises were broken in quiet quickly (overnight, in one case). Most took longer. For example, the democratisation of the armed forces had been decreed in late December 1917. However, this was simply acknowledging the existing revolutionary gains of the military personnel. Similarly, the Bolsheviks passed a decree on workers' control which, again, simply acknowledged the actual gains by the grassroots (and, in fact, limited them for further development -- see [section 9](#)). This cannot be taken as evidence of the democratic nature of Bolshevism as most governments faced with a revolutionary movement will acknowledge and "legalise" the facts on the ground (until such time as they can neutralise or destroy them). For example, the Provisional Government created after the February Revolution also legalised the revolutionary gains of the workers (for example, legalising the soviets, factory committees, unions, strikes and so forth). The real question is whether Bolshevism continued to encourage these revolutionary gains once it had consolidated its power. Which they did not. Indeed, it can be argued that the Bolsheviks simply managed to do what the Provisional Government it replaced had failed to do, namely destroy the various organs of popular self-management created by the revolutionary masses. So the significant fact is not that the Bolsheviks recognised the gains of the masses but that their toleration of the application of what their followers say were their real principles did not last long and was quickly ended. Moreover, when the leading Bolsheviks looked back at this abolition they did not consider it in any way in contradiction to the principles of "communism" (see [section 14](#)).

We have stressed this period for a reason. This was the period **before** the out-break of major Civil War and thus the policies applied show the actual nature of Bolshevism, it's essence if you like. This is a significant date as most Leninists blame the failure of Lenin to live up to his promises on this even. In reality, the civil war was **not** the reason for these betrayals -- simply because it had not started yet (see [section 16](#) on when the civil war started and its impact). Each of the promises were broken in turn months before the civil war happened. "*All Power to the Soviets*" became, very quickly, "*All Power to the Bolsheviks.*" In the words of historian Marc Ferro:

*"In a way, **The State and Revolution** even laid the foundations and sketched out the essential features of an alternative to Bolshevik power, and only the pro-Leninist tradition has used it, almost to quieten its conscience, because Lenin, once in power, ignored its conclusions. The Bolsheviks, far from causing the state to wither away, found endless reasons for justifying its enforcement."* [**October 1917**, pp. 213-4]

Where does that leave Lenin's **State and Revolution**? Well, modern-day Leninists still urge us to read it, considering it his greatest work and the best introduction to what Leninism really stands for. For example, we find Leninist Tony Cliff calling that book "*Lenin's real testament*" while, at the same time, acknowledging that its "*message . . . which was the guide for the first victorious proletarian revolution, was violated again and again during the civil war.*" Not a very good "*guide*" or that convincing a "*message*" if it was not applicable in the very circumstances it was designed to be applied in (a bit like

saying you have an excellent umbrella but it only works when it is not raining). Moreover, Cliff is factually incorrect. The Bolsheviks "*violated*" that "*guide*" before the civil war started (i.e. when "*the victories of the Czechoslovak troops over the Red Army in June 1918, that threatened the greatest danger to the Soviet republic,*" to quote Cliff). Similarly, much of the economic policies implemented by the Bolsheviks had their roots in that book and the other writings by Lenin from 1917 (see [section 5](#) of the appendix on "[How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?](#)"). [Lenin, vol. 3, p. 161 and p. 18]

Given this, what use is Lenin's **State and Revolution**? If this really was the "*guide*" it is claimed to be, the fact that it proved totally impractical suggests it should simply be ignored. Simply put, if the side effects of a revolution (such as civil war) require it to be ripped up then modern Leninists should come clean and admit that revolution and workers' democracy simply do not go together. This was, after all, the conclusion of Lenin and Trotsky (see [section H.3.8](#)). As such, they should not recommend Lenin's work as an example of what Bolshevism aims for. If, however, the basic idea of workers' democracy and freedom are valid and considered the only way of achieving socialism then we need to wonder **why** the Bolsheviks did not apply them when they had the chance, particularly when the Makhnovists in the Ukraine did. Such an investigation would only end up by concluding the validity of anarchism, **not** Leninism.

This can be seen from the trajectory of Bolshevik ideology post-October. Simply put, it was not bothered by the breaking of the promises of **State and Revolution** and 1917 in general. As such, Cliff is just wrong to assert that while the message of **State and Revolution** was "*violated again and again*" it "*was also invoked again and again against bureaucratic degeneration.*" [Cliff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 161] Far from it. Lenin's **State and Revolution** was rarely invoked against degeneration by the mainstream Bolshevik leadership. Indeed, they happily supported party dictatorship and one-man management. Ironically for Cliff, it **was** famously invoked against the state capitalist policies being implemented in early 1918. This was done by the "Left Communists" around Bukharin in their defence of workers' self-management against Lenin's policy! Lenin told them to reread it (along with his other 1917 works) to see that "state capitalism" was his aim all along! Not only that, he quoted from **State and Revolution**. He argued that "*accounting and control*" was required "*for the proper functioning of the first stage of communist society.*" "*And this control,*" he continued, "*must be established not only over 'the insignificant capitalist minority, over the gentry . . . ', but also over the workers who 'have been thoroughly corrupted by capitalism . . . '*" He ended by saying it was "*significant that Bukharin did not emphasise this.*" [**Collected Works**, vol. 27, pp. 353-4] Needless to say, the Leninists who urge us to read Lenin's work do not emphasise that either.

As the Bolsheviks lost more and more support, the number of workers "*thoroughly corrupted by capitalism*" increased. How to identify them was easy: they did not support the party. As historian Richard summarises, a "*lack of identification with the Bolshevik party was treated as the absence of political consciousness altogether.*" [**Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 94] This is the logical conclusion of vanguardism, of course (see [section H.5.3](#)). However, to acknowledge that state violence was also required to "control" the working class totally undermines the argument of **State and Revolution**.

This is easy to see and to prove theoretically. For example, by 1920, Lenin was more than happy to admit that the "workers' state" used violence against the masses. At a conference of his political police, the Cheka, Lenin argued as follows:

*"Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the other hand, revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 42, p. 170]

This was simply summarising Bolshevik practice from the start. However, in **State and Revolution** Lenin had argued for imposing "a series of restrictions on the freedom of the oppressors, the exploiters, the capitalists." In 1917 he was "clear that where is suppression there is also violence, there is no freedom, no democracy." [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 337-8] So if violence is directed against the working class then, obviously, there can be "no freedom, no democracy" for that class. And who identifies who the "wavering and unstable" elements are? Only the party. Thus any expression of workers' democracy which conflicts with the party is a candidate for "revolutionary coercion." So it probably just as well that the Bolsheviks had eliminated military democracy in March, 1918.

Trotsky expands on the obvious autocratic implications of this in 1921 when he attacked the Workers' Opposition's ideas on economic democracy:

*"The Party . . . is . . . duty bound to retain its dictatorship, regardless of the temporary vacillations of the amorphous masses, regardless of the temporary vacillations even of the working class. This awareness is essential for cohesion; without it the Party is in danger of perishing . . . At any given moment, the dictatorship does not rest on the formal principle of workers' democracy . . . if we look upon workers' democracy as something unconditional . . . then . . . every plant should elect its own administrative organs and so on . . . From a formal point of view this is the clearest link with workers' democracy. But we are against it. Why? . . . Because, in the first place, we want to retain the dictatorship of the Party, and, in the second place, because we think that the [democratic] way of managing important and essential plants is bound to be incompetent and prove a failure from an economic point of view . . ."* [quoted by Jay B. Sorenson, **The Life and Death of Soviet Trade Unionism**, p. 165]

Thus the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik regime confirmed anarchist theory and predictions about state socialism. In the words of Luigi Fabbri:

*"It is fairly certain that between the capitalist regime and the socialist there will be an intervening period of struggle, during which proletariat revolutionary workers will have to work to uproot the remnants of bourgeois society . . . But if the object of this struggle and this organisation is to free the proletariat from exploitation and state rule, then the role of guide, tutor or director cannot be entrusted to a new state, which would have an*

*interest in pointing the revolution in a completely opposite direction. . .*

*"The outcome would be that a new government - battenning on the revolution and acting throughout the more or less extended period of its 'provisional' powers - would lay down the bureaucratic, military and economic foundations of a new and lasting state organisation, around which a compact network of interests and privileges would, naturally, be woven. Thus in a short space of time what one would have would not be the state abolished, but a state stronger and more energetic than its predecessor and which would come to exercise those functions proper to it - the ones Marx recognised as being such - 'keeping the great majority of producers under the yoke of a numerically small exploiting minority.'*

*"This is the lesson that the history of all revolutions teaches us, from the most ancient down to the most recent; and it is confirmed . . . by the day-to-day developments of the Russian revolution . . .*

*"Certainly, [state violence] starts out being used against the old power . . . But as the new power goes on consolidating its position . . . ever more frequently and ever more severely, the mailed fist of dictatorship is turned against the proletariat itself in whose name that dictatorship was set up and is operated! . . . the actions of the present Russian government [of Lenin and Trotsky] have shown that in real terms (and it could not be otherwise) the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' means police, military, political and economic dictatorship exercised over the broad mass of the proletariat in city and country by the few leaders of the political party.*

*"The violence of the state always ends up being used AGAINST ITS SUBJECTS, of whom the vast majority are always proletarians . . . The new government will be able to expropriate the old ruling class in whole or in part, but only so as to establish a new ruling class that will hold the greater part of the proletariat in subjection.*

*"That will come to pass if those who make up the government and the bureaucratic, military and police minority that upholds it end up becoming the real owners of wealth when the property of everyone is made over exclusively to the state. In the first place, the failure of the revolution will be self evident. In the second, in spite of the illusions that many people create, the conditions of the proletariat will always be those of a subject class." ["Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism", in **The Poverty of Statism**, pp. 13-49, Albert Meltzer (ed.), pp. 26-31]*

The standard response by most modern Leninists to arguments like this about Bolshevism is simply to downplay the authoritarianism of the Bolsheviks by stressing the effects of the civil war on shaping their ideology and actions. However, this fails to address the key issue of why the reality of Bolshevism (even before the civil war) was so different to the rhetoric. Anarchists, as we discuss in ["How did Bolshevik](#)

[ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?](#)", can point to certain aspects of Bolshevik ideology and the social structures its favoured which can explain it. The problems facing the revolution simply brought to the fore the limitations and dangers inherent in Leninism and, moreover, shaping them in distinctive ways. We draw the conclusion that a future revolution, as it will face similar problems, would be wise to avoid applying Leninist ideology and the authoritarian practices it allows and, indeed, promotes by its support of centralisation, confusion of party power with class power, vanguardism and equation of state capitalism with socialism. Leninists, in contrast, can only stress the fact that the revolution was occurring in difficult circumstances and hope that "fate" is more kind to them next time -- as if a revolution, as Lenin himself noted in 1917, would not occur during nor create "difficult" circumstances! Equally, they can draw no lessons (bar repeat what the Bolsheviks did in 1917 and hope for better objective circumstances!) from the Russian experience simply because they are blind to the limitations of their politics. They are thus doomed to repeat history rather than make it.

So where does this analysis of Lenin's **State and Revolution** and the realities of Bolshevik power get us? The conclusions of dissent Marxist Samuel Farber seem appropriate here. As he puts it, *"the very fact that a Sovnarkom had been created as a separate body from the CEC [Central Executive Committee] of the soviets clearly indicates that, Lenin's **State and Revolution** notwithstanding, the separation of at least the top bodies of the executive and the legislative wings of the government remained in effect in the new Soviet system."* This suggests *"that **State and Revolution** did not play a decisive role as a source of policy guidelines for 'Leninism in power.'" After all, "immediately after the Revolution the Bolsheviks established an executive power . . . as a clearly separate body from the leading body of the legislature. . . Therefore, some sections of the contemporary Left appear to have greatly overestimated the importance that **State and Revolution** had for Lenin's government. I would suggest that this document . . . can be better understood as a distant, although doubtless sincere [!], socio-political vision . . . as opposed to its having been a programmatic political statement, let alone a guide to action, for the period immediately after the successful seizure of power."* [Farber, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 20-1 and p. 38]

That is **one** way of looking at it. Another would be to draw the conclusion that a *"distant . . . socio-political vision"* drawn up to sound like a *"guide to action"* which was then immediately ignored is, at worse, little more than a deception, or, at best, a theoretical justification for seizing power in the face of orthodox Marxist dogma. Whatever the rationale for Lenin writing his book, one thing is true -- it was never implemented. Strange, then, that Leninists today urge use to read it to see what "Lenin really wanted." Particularly given that so few of its promises were actually implemented (those that were just recognised the facts on the ground) and **all** of were no longer applied in less than six months after the seizure of power.

The best that can be said is that Lenin did want this vision to be applied but the realities of revolutionary Russia, the objective problems facing the revolution, made its application impossible. This is the standard Leninist account of the revolution. They seem unconcerned that they have just admitted that Lenin's ideas were utterly impractical for the real problems that any revolution is most likely to face. This was the conclusion Lenin himself drew, as did the rest of the Bolshevik leadership. This can be seen from the actual practice of "Leninism in power" and the arguments it used. And yet, for some

reason, Lenin's book is still recommended by modern Leninists!

## 5 Did the Bolsheviks really aim for Soviet power?

It seems a truism for modern day Leninists that the Bolsheviks stood for "soviet power." For example, they like to note that the Bolsheviks used the slogan "*All Power to the Soviets*" in 1917 as evidence. However, for the Bolsheviks this slogan had a radically different meaning to what many people would consider it to mean.

As we discuss in [section 25](#), it was the anarchists (and those close to them, like the SR-Maximalists) who first raised the idea of soviets as the means by which the masses could run society. This was during the 1905 revolution. At that time, neither the Mensheviks nor the Bolsheviks viewed the soviets as the possible framework of a socialist society. This was still the case in 1917, until Lenin returned to Russia and convinced the Bolshevik Party that the time was right to raise the slogan "*All Power to the Soviets*."

However, as well as this, Lenin also advocated a somewhat different vision of what a Bolshevik revolution would result in. Thus we find Lenin in 1917 continually repeating the basic idea: "*The Bolsheviks must assume power*." The Bolsheviks "*can and **must** take state power into their own hands*." He raised the question of "*will the Bolsheviks dare take over full state power alone?*" and answered it: "*I have already had occasion . . . to answer this question in the affirmative*." Moreover, "*a political party . . . would have no right to exist, would be unworthy of the name of party . . . if it refused to take power when opportunity offers*." [**Selected Works**, vol. 2, p 328, p. 329 and p. 352]

He equated party power with popular power: "*the power of the Bolsheviks -- that is, the power of the proletariat*." Moreover, he argued that Russia "*was ruled by 130,000 landowners . . . and they tell us that Russia will not be able to be governed by the 240,000 members of the Bolshevik Party -- governing in the interest of the poor and against the rich*." He stresses that the Bolsheviks "*are not Utopians. We know that just any labourer or any cook would be incapable of taking over immediately the administration of the State*." Therefore they "*demand that the teaching should be conducted by the class-consciousness workers and soldiers, that this should be started immediately*." Until then, the "*conscious workers must be in control*." [**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?** p. 102, pp. 61-62, p. 66 and p. 68]

As such, given this clear and unambiguous position throughout 1917 by Lenin, it seems incredulous, to say the least, for Leninist Tony Cliff to assert that "*[t]o start with Lenin spoke of the **proletariat**, the **class** -- not the Bolshevik Party -- assuming state power*." [**Lenin**, vol. 3, p. 161] Surely the title of one of Lenin's most famous pre-October essays, usually translated as "*Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?*", should have given the game away? As would, surely, quoting numerous calls by Lenin for the Bolsheviks to seize power? Apparently not.

This means, of course, Lenin is admitting that the working class in Russia would **not** have power under the Bolsheviks. Rather than "the poor" governing society directly, we would have **the Bolsheviks** governing in their interests. Thus, rather than soviet power as such, the Bolsheviks aimed for "party

power through the soviets" -- a radically different position. And as we discuss in the [next section](#), when soviet power clashed with party power the former was always sacrificed to ensure the latter. As we indicate in [section H.1.2](#), this support for party power before the revolution was soon transformed into a defence for party dictatorship after the Bolsheviks had seized power. However, we should not forget, to quote one historian, that the Bolshevik leaders "*anticipated a 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' and that concept was a good deal closer to a party dictatorship in Lenin's 1917 usage than revisionist scholars sometimes suggest.*" [Sheila Fitzpatrick, "*The Legacy of the Civil War*," pp. 385-398, **Party, State, and Society in the Russian Civil War**, Diane P. Koenker, William G. Rosenberg and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.), p. 388]

While modern-day Leninists tend to stress the assumption of power by the soviets as the goal of the Bolshevik revolution, the Bolsheviks themselves were more honest about it. For example, Trotsky quotes Lenin at the first soviet congress stating that it was "*not true to say that no party exists which is ready to assume power; such a party exists: this is our party.*" Moreover, "*[o]ur party is ready to assume power.*" As the Second Congress approached, Lenin "*rebuked those who connected the uprising with the Second Congress of the Soviets.*" He protested against Trotsky's argument that they needed a Bolshevik majority at the Second Congress, arguing (according to Trotsky) that "*[w]e have to win power and not tie ourselves to the Congress. It was ridiculous and absurd to warn the enemy about the date of the rising . . . First the party must seize power, arms in hand, and then we could talk about the Congress.*" [**On Lenin**, p. 71, p. 85]

Trotsky argued that "*the party could not seize power by itself, independently of the Soviets and behind its back. This would have been a mistake . . . [as the] soldiers knew their delegates in the Soviet; it was through the Soviet that they knew the party. If the uprising had taken place behind the back of the Soviet, independently of it, without its authority . . . there might have been a dangerous confusion among the troops.*" Significantly, Trotsky made no mention of the proletariat. Finally, Lenin came over to Trotsky's position, saying "*Oh, all right, one can proceed in this fashion as well, provided we seize power.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 86 and p. 89]

Trotsky made similar arguments in his **History of the Russian Revolution** and his article **Lessons of October**. Discussing the July Days of 1917, for example, Trotsky discusses whether (to quote the title of the relevant chapter) "*Could the Bolsheviks have seized the Power in July?*" and noted, in passing, the army "*was far from ready to raise an insurrection in order to give the power to the Bolshevik Party.*" As far as the workers were concerned, although "*inclining toward the Bolsheviks in its overwhelming majority, had still not broken the umbilical cord attaching it to the Compromisers*" and so the Bolsheviks could not have "*seized the helm in July.*" He then lists other parts of the country where the soviets were ready to take power. He states that in "*a majority of provinces and county seats, the situation was incomparably less favourable*" simply because the Bolsheviks were not as well supported. Later he notes that "*[m]any of the provincial soviets had already, before the July days, become organs of power.*" Thus Trotsky was only interested in whether the workers could have put the Bolsheviks in power or not rather than were the soviets able to take power themselves. Party power was the decisive criteria. [**History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 2, p. 78, p. 77, p. 78, p. 81 and p. 281]



This can be seen from the October insurrection. Trotsky again admits that the *"Bolsheviks could have seized power in Petrograd at the beginning of July"* but *"they could not have held it."* However, by September the Bolsheviks had gained majorities in the Petrograd and Moscow soviets. The second Congress of Soviets was approaching. The time was considered appropriate to think of insurrection. By in whose name and for what end? Trotsky makes it clear. *"A revolutionary party is interested in legal coverings,"* he argued and so the party could use the defending the second Congress of Soviets as the means to justify its seizure of power. He raises the question: *"Would it not have been simpler . . . to summon the insurrection directly in the name of the party?"* and answers it in the negative. *"It would be an obvious mistake,"* he argued, *"to identify the strength of the Bolshevik party with the strength of the soviets led by it. The latter was much greater than the former. However, without the former it would have been mere impotence."* He then quotes numerous Bolshevik delegates arguing that the masses would follow the soviet, not the party. Hence the importance of seizing power in the name of the soviets, regardless of the fact it was the Bolshevik party who would in practice hold *"all power."* Trotsky quotes Lenin as asking *"Who is to seize power?"* *"That is now of no importance,"* argued Lenin. *"Let the Military Revolutionary Committee take it, or 'some other institution,' which will declare that it will surrender the power only to the genuine representatives of the interests of the people."* Trotsky notes that *"some other institution"* was a *"conspirative designation for the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks."* And who turned out to be the *"genuine representatives of the interests of the people"*? By amazing co-incidence the Bolsheviks, the members of whose Central Committee formed the first "soviet" government. [Op. Cit., vol. 3, p. 265, p. 259, p. 262, p. 263 and p. 267]

As we discuss in [section H.3.11](#), Trotsky was simply repeating the same instrumentalist arguments he had made earlier. Clearly, the support for the soviets was purely instrumental, simply a means of securing party power. For Bolshevism, the party was the key institution of proletarian revolution:

*"The party set the soviets in motion, the soviets set in motion the workers, soldiers, and to some extent the peasantry . . . If you represent this conducting apparatus as a system of cog-wheels -- a comparison which Lenin had recourse at another period on another theme -- you may say that the impatient attempt to connect the party wheel directly with the gigantic wheel of the masses -- omitting the medium-sized wheel of the soviets -- would have given rise to the danger of breaking the teeth of the party wheel."* [Trotsky, Op. Cit., p. 264]

Thus the soviets existed to allow the party to influence the workers. What of the workers running society directly? What if the workers reject the decisions of the party? After all, **before** the revolution Lenin *"more than once repeated that the masses are far to the left of the party, just as the party is to the left of the Central Committee."* [Trotsky, Op. Cit., p. 258] What happens when the workers refuse to be set in motion by the party but instead set themselves in motion and reject the Bolsheviks? What then for the soviets? Looking at the logic of Trotsky's instrumentalist perspective, in such a case we would predict that the soviets would have to be tamed (by whatever means possible) in favour of party power (the real goal). And this is what did happen. The fate of the soviets after October prove that the Bolsheviks did not, in fact, seek soviet power without doubt (see [next section](#)). And as we discuss in [section 4](#) of the

appendix on "[How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?](#)", the peculiar Bolshevik definition of "soviet power" allowed them to justify the elimination of from the bottom-up grassroots democracy in the military and in the workplace with top-down appointments.

Thus we have a distinctly strange meaning by the expression "*All Power to the Soviets.*" In practice, it meant that the soviets alienate its power to a Bolshevik government. This is what the Bolsheviks considered as "soviet power," namely party power, pure and simple. As the Central Committee argued in November 1917, "*it is impossible to refuse a purely Bolshevik government without treason to the slogan of the power of the Soviets, since a majority at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets . . . handed power over to this government.*" [contained in Robert v. Daniels (ed.), **A Documentary History of Communism**, vol. 1, pp. 128-9] Lenin was clear, arguing mere days after the October Revolution that "*our present slogan is: No Compromise, i.e. for a homogeneous Bolshevik government.*" [quoted by Daniels, **Conscience of the Revolution**, p. 65]

In other words, "soviet power" exists when the soviets hand power over the someone else (namely the Bolshevik leaders)! The difference is important, "*for the Anarchists declared, if 'power' really should belong to the soviets, it could not belong to the Bolshevik party, and if it should belong to that Party, as the Bolsheviks envisaged, it could not belong to the soviets.*" [Voline, **The Unknown Revolution**, p. 213]

Which means that while anarchists and Leninists both use the expression "*All Power to the Soviets*" it does not mean they mean exactly the same thing by it. In practice the Bolshevik vision simply replaced the power of the soviets with a "soviet power" above them:

*"The success of the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution -- that is to say, the fact that they found themselves in power and from there subordinated the whole Revolution to their Party is explained by their ability to substitute the idea of a Soviet power for the social revolution and the social emancipation of the masses. A priori, these two ideas appear as non-contradictory for it was possible to understand Soviet power as the power of the soviets, and this facilitated the substitution of the idea of Soviet power for that of the Revolution. Nevertheless, in their realisation and consequences these ideas were in violent contraction to each other. The conception of Soviet Power incarnated in the Bolshevik state, was transformed into an entirely traditional bourgeois power concentrated in a handful of individuals who subjected to their authority all that was fundamental and most powerful in the life of the people -- in this particular case, the social revolution. Therefore, with the help of the 'power of the soviets' -- in which the Bolsheviks monopolised most of the posts - they effectively attained a total power and could proclaim their dictatorship throughout the revolutionary territory . . . All was reduced to a single centre, from where all instructions emanated concerning the way of life, of thought, of action of the working masses."* [Peter Arshinov, **The Two Octobers**]

Isolated from the masses, holding power on their behalf, the Bolshevik party could not help being

influenced by the realities of their position in society and the social relationships produced by statist forms. Far from being the servants of the people, they become upon the seizing of power their masters. As we argue in [section 7](#) of the appendix on "[How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?](#)", the experience of Bolshevism in power confirmed anarchist fears that the so-called "workers' state" would quickly become a danger to the revolution, corrupting those who held power and generating a bureaucracy around the new state bodies which came into conflict with both the ruling party and the masses. Placed above the people, isolated from them by centralisation of power, the Bolsheviks pre-revolutionary aim for party power unsurprisingly became in practice party dictatorship.

In less than a year, by July 1918, the soviet regime was a **de facto** party dictatorship. The theoretical revisions soon followed. Lenin, for example, was proclaiming in early December 1918 that while legalising the Mensheviks the Bolsheviks would "*reserve state power for ourselves, and for ourselves alone.*" [**Collected Works**, vol. 28, p. 213] Victor Serge records how when he arrived in Russia in the following month he discovered "*a colourless article*" signed by Zinoviev on "*The Monopoly of Power*" which said "*Our Party rules alone . . . it will not allow anyone . . . The false democratic liberties demanded by the counter-revolution.*" [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 69] Serge, like most Bolsheviks, embraced this perspective wholeheartedly. For example, when the Bolsheviks published Bakunin's "confession" to the Tsar in 1921 (in an attempt to discredit anarchism) "*Serge seized on Bakunin's passage concerning the need for dictatorial rule in Russia, suggesting that 'already in 1848 Bakunin had presaged Bolshevism.'*" [Lawrence D. Orton, "*introduction*," **The Confession of Mikhail Bakunin**, p. 21] At the time Bakunin wrote his "confession" he was not an anarchist. At the time Serge wrote his comments, he was a leading Bolshevik and reflecting mainstream Bolshevik ideology.

Indeed, so important was it considered by them, the Bolsheviks revised their theory of the state to include this particular lesson of their revolution (see [section H.3.8](#) for details). As noted in [section H.1.2](#), all the leading Bolsheviks were talking about the "*dictatorship of the party*" and continued to do so until their deaths. Such a position, incidentally, is hard to square with support for soviet power in any meaningful term (although it is easy to square with an instrumentalist position on workers' councils as a means to party power). It was only in the mid-30s that Serge started to revise his position for this position (Trotsky still subscribed to it). By the early 1940s, he wrote that "*[a]gainst the Party the anarchists were right when they inscribed on their black banners, 'There is no worse poison than power' -- meaning absolute power. From now on the psychosis of power was to captive the great majority of the leadership, especially at the lower levels.*" [Serge, **Op. Cit.**, p. 100]

Nor can the effects of the civil war explain this shift. As we discuss in the [next section](#), the Bolshevik assault on the soviets and their power started in the spring of 1918, months before the start of large scale civil war. And it should be stressed that the Bolsheviks were not at all bothered by the creation of party dictatorship over the soviets. Indeed, in spite of ruling over a one party state Lenin was arguing in November 1918 that "*Soviet power is a million times more democratic than the most democratic bourgeois republic.*" How can that be when the workers do not run society nor have a say in who rules them? When Karl Kautsky raised this issue, Lenin replied by saying he "*fails to see the class nature of the state apparatus, of the machinery of state . . . The Soviet government is the first in the world . . . to*

*enlist the people, specifically the exploited people in the work of administration.*" [Collected Works, vol. 28, p. 247 and p. 248]

However, the key issue is not whether workers take part in the state machinery but whether they determine the policies that are being implemented, i.e. whether the masses are running their own lives. After all, as Ante Ciliga pointed out, the Stalinist GPU (secret police) *"liked to boast of the working class origin of its henchmen."* One of his fellow prisoners retorted to such claims by pointing out they were *"wrong to believe that in the days the Tsar the gaolers were recruited from among the dukes and the executioners from among the princes!"* [The Russian Engima, pp. 255-6] Simply put, just because the state administration is made up of bureaucrats who were originally working class does not mean that the working class, as a class, manages society.

In December of that year Lenin went one further and noted that at the Sixth Soviet Congress *"the Bolsheviks had 97 per cent"* of delegates, i.e. "practically all representatives of the workers and peasants of the whole of Russia." This was proof of *"how stupid and ridiculous is the bourgeois fairy-tale about the Bolsheviks only having minority support."* [Op. Cit., pp. 355-6] Given that the workers and peasants had no real choice in who to vote for, can this result be surprising? Of course not. While the Bolsheviks **had** mass support a year previously, pointing to election results under a dictatorship where all other parties and groups are subject to state repression is hardly convincing evidence for current support. Needless to say, Stalin (like a host of other dictators) made similar claims on similarly dubious election results. If the Bolsheviks were sincere in their support for soviet power then they would have tried to organise genuine soviet elections. This was possible even during the civil war as the example of the Makhnovists showed.

So, in a nutshell, the Bolsheviks did not fundamentally support the goal of soviet power. Rather, they aimed to create a "soviet power," a Bolshevik power above the soviets which derived its legitimacy from them. However, if the soviets conflicted with that power, it were the soviets which were repudiated **not** party power. Thus the result of Bolshevik ideology was the marginalisation of the soviets and their replacement by Bolshevik dictatorship. This process started before the civil war and can be traced to the nature of the state as well as the underlying assumptions of Bolshevik ideology (see ["How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?"](#)).

## 6 What happened to the soviets after October?

As indicated in the last question, the last thing which the Bolsheviks wanted was *"all power to the soviets."* Rather they wanted the soviets to hand over that power to a Bolshevik government. As the people in liberal capitalist politics, the soviets were "sovereign" in name only. They were expected to delegate power to a government. Like the "sovereign people" of bourgeois republics, the soviets were much praised but in practice ignored by those with real power.

In such a situation, we would expect the soviets to play no meaningful role in the new "workers' state." Under such a centralised system, we would expect the soviets to become little more than a fig-leaf for

party power. Unsurprisingly, this is **exactly** what they did become. As we discuss in [section 7](#) of the appendix on "[How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?](#)", anarchists are not surprised by this as the centralisation so beloved by Marxists is designed to empower the few at the centre and marginalise the many at the circumference.

The very first act of the Bolshevik revolution was for the Second Congress of Soviets to alienate its power and hand it over to the "Council of People's Commissars." This was the new government and was totally Bolshevik in make-up (the Left SRs later joined it, although the Bolsheviks always maintained control). Thus the first act of the revolution was the creation of a power **above** the soviets. Although derived from the soviet congress, it was not identical to it. Thus the Bolshevik "workers' state" or "semi-state" started to have the same characteristics as the normal state (see [section H.3.7](#) for a discussion of what marks a state).

The subsequent marginalisation of the soviets in the "soviet" state occurred from top to bottom should not, therefore be considered an accident or a surprise. The Bolshevik desire for party power within a highly centralised state could have no other effect. At the top, the Central Executive Committee (CEC or VTsIK) was quickly marginalised from power. This body was meant to be the highest organ of soviet power but, in practice, it was sidelined by the Bolshevik government. This can be seen when, just four days after seizing power, the Bolshevik Council of People's Commissars (CPC or Sovnarkom) *"unilaterally arrogated to itself legislative power simply by promulgating a decree to this effect. This was, effectively, a Bolshevik **coup d'etat** that made clear the government's (and party's) pre-eminence over the soviets and their executive organ. Increasingly, the Bolsheviks relied upon the appointment from above of commissars with plenipotentiary powers, and they split up and reconstituted fractious Soviets and intimidated political opponents."* [Neil Harding, **Leninism**, p. 253] Strange actions for a party proclaiming it was acting to ensure "All power to the soviets" (as we discussed in the [last section](#), this was always considered by Lenin as little more than a slogan to hide the fact that the party would be in power).

It is doubtful that when readers of Lenin's **State and Revolution** read his argument for combining legislative and executive powers into one body, they had this in mind! But then, as we discussed in [section 4](#), that work was never applied in practice so we should not be too surprised by this turn of events. One thing is sure, four days after the "soviet" revolution the soviets had been replaced as the effective power in society by a handful of Bolshevik leaders. So the Bolsheviks immediately created a power **above** the soviets in the form of the CPC. Lenin's argument in **The State and Revolution** that, like the Paris Commune, the workers' state would be based on a fusion of executive and administrative functions in the hands of the workers' delegates did not last one night. In reality, the Bolshevik party was the **real** power in "soviet" Russia.

Given that the All-Russian central Executive Committee of Soviets (VTsIK) was dominated by Bolsheviks, it comes as no surprise to discover it was used to augment this centralisation of power into the hands of the party. The VTsIK (*"charged by the October revolution with controlling the government,"* the Sovnarkom) was *"used not to control but rather extend the authority and centralising*

*fiat of the government. That was the work of Iakov Sverdlov, the VTsIK chairman, who -- in close collaboration with Lenin as chairman of the Sovnarkom -- ensured that the government decrees and ordinances were by the VTsIK and that they were thus endowed with Soviet legitimacy when they were sent to provincial soviet executive committees for transmission to all local soviets . . . To achieve that, Sverdlov had to reduce the 'Soviet Parliament' to nothing more than an 'administrative branch' (as Sukhanov put it) of the Sovnarkom. Using his position as the VTsIK chairman and his tight control over its praesidium and the large, disciplined and compliant Bolshevik majority in the plenary assembly, Sverdlov isolated the opposition and rendered it impotent. So successful was he that, by early December 1917, Sukhanov had already written off the VTsIK as 'a sorry parody of a revolutionary parliament,' while for the Bolshevik, Martin Latsis-Zurabs, the VTsIL was not even a good rubberstamp. Latsis campaigned vigorously in March and April 1918 for the VTsIK's abolition: with its 'idle, long-winded talk and its incapacity for productive work' the VTsIK merely held up the work of government, he claimed. And he may have had a point: during the period of 1917 to 1918, the Sovnarkom issued 474 decrees, the VTsIK a mere 62." [Israel Getzler, **Soviets as Agents of Democratisation**, p. 27]*

This process was not an accident. Far from it. In fact, the Bolshevik chairman Sverdlov knew exactly what he was doing. This included modifying the way the CEC worked:

*"The structure of VTsIK itself began to change under Sverdlov. He began to use the presidium to circumvent the general meeting, which contained eloquent minority spokesmen . . . Sverdlov's use of the presidium marked a decisive change in the status of that body within the soviet hierarchy. In mid-1917 . . . [the] plenum had directed all activities and ratified bureau decisions which had a 'particularly important social-political character.' The bureau . . . served as the executive organ of the VTsIK plenum . . . Only in extraordinary cases when the bureau could not be convened for technical reason could the presidium make decisions. Even then such actions remained subject to review by the plenum." [Charles Duval, "Yakov M. Sverdlov and the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets (VTsIK)", pp. 3-22, **Soviet Studies**, vol. XXXI, no. 1, January 1979, pp. 6-7]*

Under the Bolsheviks, the presidium was converted *"into the **de facto** centre of power within VTsIK."* It *"began to award representations to groups and factions which supported the government. With the VTsIK becoming ever more unwieldy in size by the day, the presidium began to expand its activities."* The presidium was used *"to circumvent general meetings."* Thus the Bolsheviks were able *"to increase the power of the presidium, postpone regular sessions, and present VTsIK with policies which had already been implemented by the Sovnarkom. Even in the presidium itself very few people determined policy."* [Charles Duval, **Op. Cit.**, p.7, p. 8 and p. 18]

So, from the very outset, the VTsIK was overshadowed by the "Council of People's Commissars" (CPC). In the first year, only 68 of 480 decrees issued by the CPC were actually submitted to the Soviet Central Executive Committee, and even fewer were actually drafted by it. The VTsIK functions *"were never clearly delineated, even in the constitution, despite vigorous attempts by the Left SRs . . . that Lenin never saw this highest soviet organ as the genuine equal of his cabin and that the*

*Bolsheviks deliberated obstructed efforts at clarification is [a] convincing" conclusion to draw. It should be stressed that this process started before the outbreak of civil war in late May, 1918. After that the All-Russian Congress of soviets, which convened every three months or so during the first year of the revolution, met annually thereafter. Its elected VTsIK "also began to meet less frequently, and at the height of the civil war in late 1918 and throughout 1919, it never once met in full session." [Carmen Sirianni, **Workers' Control and Socialist Democracy**, pp. 203-4]*

The marginalisation of the soviets can be seen from the decision on whether to continue the war against Germany. As Cornelius Castoriadis notes, under Lenin "[c]ollectively, the only real instance of power is the Party, and very soon, only the summits of the Party. Immediately after the seizure of power the soviets as institutions are reduced to the status of pure window-dressing (we need only look at the fact that, already at the beginning of 1918 in the discussions leading up to the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty, their role was absolutely nil)." [The role of Bolshevik Ideology in the birth of the Bureaucracy, p. 97] In fact, on the 26th of February, 1918, the Soviet Executive "began a survey of 200 local soviets; by 10 March 1918 a majority (105-95) had come out in favour of a revolutionary war, although the soviets in the two capitals voted . . . to accept a separate peace." [Geoffrey Swain, **The Origins of the Russian Civil War**, p. 128] This survey was ignored by the Bolshevik Central Committee which voted 4 against, 4 abstain and 5 for it. This took Russia out of the Great War but handed over massive areas to imperialist Germany. The controversial treaty was ratified at the Fourth Soviet Congress, unsurprisingly as the Bolshevik majority simply followed the orders of their Central Committee. It would be pointless to go over the arguments of the rights and wrongs of the decision here, the point is that the 13 members of the Bolshevik Central Committee decided the future faith of Russia in this vote. The soviets were simply ignored in spite of the fact it was possible to consult them fully. Clearly, "soviet power" meant little more than window-dressing for Bolshevik power.

Thus, at the top summits of the state, the soviets had been marginalised by the Bolsheviks from day one. Far from having "all power" their CEC had given that to a Bolshevik government. Rather than exercise real power, it's basic aim was to control those who did exercise it. And the Bolsheviks successfully acted to undermine even this function.

If this was happening at the top, what was the situation at the grassroots? Here, too, oligarchic tendencies in the soviets increased post-October, with "[e]ffective power in the local soviets relentlessly gravitated to the executive committees, and especially their presidia. Plenary sessions became increasingly symbolic and ineffectual." The party was "successful in gaining control of soviet executives in the cities and at **uezd** and **guberniya** levels. These executive bodies were usually able to control soviet congresses, though the party often disbanded congresses that opposed major aspects of current policies." Local soviets "had little input into the formation of national policy" and "[e]ven at higher levels, institutional power shifted away from the soviets." [C. Sirianni, **Op. Cit.**, p. 204 and p. 203] The soviets quickly had become rubber-stamps for the Communist government, with the Soviet Constitution of 1918 codifying the centralisation of power and top-down decision making. Local soviets were expected to "carry out all orders of the respective higher organs of the soviet power" (i.e. to carry out the commands of the central government).

This was not all. While having popular support in October 1917, the realities of "Leninism in power" soon saw a backlash develop. The Bolsheviks started to lose popular support to opposition groups like the Mensheviks and SRs (left and right). This growing opposition was reflected in two ways. Firstly, a rise in working class protests in the form of strikes and independent organisations. Secondly, there was a rise in votes for the opposition parties in soviet elections. Faced with this, the Bolsheviks responded in three ways, delaying elections, gerrymandering or force. We will discuss each in turn.

Lenin argued in mid-April 1918 that the "*socialist character of Soviet, i.e. **proletarian**, democracy*" lies, in part, in because "*the people themselves determine the order and time of elections.*" [**The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, pp. 36-7] However, the reality in the grassroots was somewhat different. There "*the government [was] continually postponed the new general elections to the Petrograd Soviet, the term of which had ended in March 1918*" because it "*feared that the opposition parties would show gains. This fear was well founded since in the period immediately preceding 25 January, in those Petrograd factories where the workers had decided to hold new elections, the Mensheviks, SRs, and non-affiliated candidates had won about half the seats.*" [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 22] In Yaroslavl, the "*more the Bolsheviks tried to postpone the elections, the more the idea of holding new elections became an issue itself.*" When the Bolsheviks gave in and held elections in early April, the Mensheviks won 47 of the 98 seats, the Bolsheviks 38 and the SRs 13. ["*The Mensheviks' Political Comeback: The Elections to the Provincial City Soviets in Spring 1918*", **The Russian Review**, vol. 42, pp. 1-50, p. 18] The fate of the Yaroslavl soviet will be discussed shortly. As Geoffrey Swain summarizes, Menshevik and SR "*successes in recalling Bolshevik delegates from the soviets had forced the Bolsheviks increasingly to delay by-elections.*" [**The Origins of the Russian Civil War**, p. 91]

As well as postponing elections and recall, the Bolsheviks also quickly turned to gerrymandering the soviets to ensure the stability of their majority in the soviets. In this they made use of certain institutional problems the soviets had had from the start. On the day which the Petrograd soviet was formed in 1917, the Bolshevik Shlyapnikov "*proposed that each socialist party should have the right to two seats in the provisional executive committee of the soviet.*" This was "*designed, initially, to give the Bolsheviks a decent showing, for they were only a small minority of the initiating group.*" It was agreed. However, the "*result was that members of a dozen different parties and organisations (trades unions, co-operative movements, etc.) entered the executive committee. They called themselves 'representatives' (of their organisations) and, by virtue of this, they speedily eliminated from their discussions the committee members chosen by the general assembly although they were the true founders of the Soviet.*" This meant, for example, Bolshevik co-founders of the soviet made way for such people as Kamenev and Stalin. Thus the make-up of the soviet executive committee was decided upon by "*the leadership of each organisation, its executive officers, and not with the [soviet] assembly. The assembly had lost its right to control.*" Thus, for example, the Bolshevik central committee member Yoffe became the presidium of the soviet of district committees without being elected by anyone represented at those soviets. "*After October, the Bolsheviks were more systematic in their use of these methods, but there was a difference: there were now no truly free elections that might have put a brake to a procedure that could only benefit the Bolshevik party.*" [Marc Ferro, **October 1917**, p. 191 and p. 195]



The effects of this can be seen in Petrograd soviet elections of June 1918. In these the Bolsheviks "*lost the absolute majority in the soviet they had previously enjoyed*" but remained its largest party. However, the results of these elections were irrelevant. This was because "*under regulations prepared by the Bolsheviks and adopted by the 'old' Petrograd soviet, more than half of the projected 700-plus deputies in the 'new' soviet were to be elected by the Bolshevik-dominated district soviets, trade unions, factory committees, Red Army and naval units, and district worker conferences: thus, the Bolsheviks were assured of a solid majority even before factory voting began.*" [Alexander Rabinowitch, **Early Disenchantment with Bolshevik Rule**, p. 45] To be specific, the number of delegates elected directly from the workplace made up a mere third of the new soviet (i.e. only 260 of the 700 plus deputies in the new soviet were elected directly from the factories): "*It was this arbitrary 'stacking' of the new soviet, much more than election of 'dead souls' from shut-down factories, unfair campaign practices, falsification of the vote, or direct repression, that gave the Bolsheviks an unfair advantage in the contest.*" [Alexander Rabinowitch, **The Petrograd First City District Soviet during the Civil War**, p. 140]

In other words, the Bolsheviks gerrymandered and packed soviets to remain in power, so distorting the soviet structure to ensure Bolshevik dominance. This practice seems to have been commonplace. In Saratov, as in Petrograd, "*the Bolsheviks, fearing that they would lose elections, changed the electoral rules . . . in addition to the delegates elected directly at the factories, the trade unions -- but only those in favour of soviet power, in other words supporters of the Bolsheviks and Left SRs -- were given representation. Similarly, the political parties supporting Soviet power automatically received twenty-five seats in the soviets. Needless to say, these rules heavily favoured the ruling parties*" as the Mensheviks and SRs "*were regarded by the Bolsheviks as being against Soviet power.*" [Brovkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 30]

A similar situation existed in Moscow. For example, the largest single union in the soviet in 1920 was that of soviet employees with 140 deputies (9% of the total), followed by the metal workers with 121 (8%). In total, the bureaucracies of the four biggest trade unions had 29.5% of delegates in the Moscow soviet. This packing of the soviet by the trade union bureaucracy existed in 1918 as well, ensuring the Bolsheviks were insulated from popular opposition and the recall of workplace delegates by their electors. Another form of gerrymandering was uniting areas of Bolshevik strength "*for electoral purposes with places where they were weak, such as the creation of a single constituency out of the Moscow food administration (MPO) and the Cheka in February 1920.*" [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 179 and p. 178]

However, this activity was mild compared to the Bolshevik response to soviet elections which did not go their way. According to one historian, by the spring of 1918 "*Menshevik newspapers and activists in the trade unions, the Soviets, and the factories had made a considerable impact on a working class which was becoming increasingly disillusioned with the Bolshevik regime, so much so that in many places the Bolsheviks felt constrained to dissolve Soviets or prevent re-elections where Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries had gained majorities.*" [Israel Getzler, **Martov**, p. 179] This is confirmed by other sources. "*By the middle of 1918,*" notes Leonard Schapiro, "*the Mensheviks could claim with some justification that large numbers of the industrial working class were now behind them, and that for the*

*systematic dispersal and packing of the soviets, and the mass arrests at workers' meetings and congresses, their party could eventually have won power by its policy of constitutional opposition. In the elections to the soviets which were taking place in the spring of 1918 throughout Russia, arrests, military dispersal, even shootings followed whenever Mensheviks succeeded in winning majorities or a substantial representation.*" [**The Origin of the Communist Autocracy**, p. 191]

For example, the Mensheviks *"made something of a comeback about Saratov workers in the spring of 1918, for which the Bolsheviks expelled them from the soviet."* [Donald J. Raleigh, **Experiencing Russia's Civil War**, p. 187] Izhevsk, a town of 100,000 with an armaments industry which was the main suppliers of rifles to the Tzar's Army, experienced a swing to the left by the time of the October revolution. The Bolsheviks and SR-Maximalists became the majority and with a vote 92 to 58 for the soviet to assume power. After a revolt by SR-Maximalist Red Guards against the Bolshevik plans for a centralised Red Army in April, 1918, the Bolsheviks became the sole power. However, in the May elections the Mensheviks and [right] SRs *"experienced a dramatic revival"* and for *"the first time since September 1917, these two parties constituted a majority in the Soviet by winning seventy of 135 seats."* The Bolsheviks *"simply refused to acquiesce to the popular mandate of the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries."* In June, the Bolshevik leadership *"appealed to the Karzan' Soviet . . . for assistance."* The troops sent along with the Bolshevik dominated Red Guards *"abrogated the results of the May and June elections"* and imprisoned the SR and Menshevik soviet delegates. The summer of 1918 also saw victories for the SRs and Mensheviks in the soviet elections in Votkinsk, a steel town near Izhevsk. *"As in Izhevsk the Bolsheviks voided the elections."* [Stephan M. Merk, *"The 'Class-Tragedy' of Izhevsk: Working Class Opposition to Bolshevism in 1918"*, pp. 176-90, **Russian History**, vol. 2, no. 2, p. 181 and p. 186]

However, the most in depth account of this destruction of soviet is found in the research of Vladimir Brovkin. According to him, there *"are three factors"* which emerge from the soviet election results in the spring of 1918. These are, firstly, *"the impressive success of the Menshevik-SR opposition"* in those elections in all regions in European Russia. The second *"is the Bolshevik practice of outright disbandment of the Menshevik-SR-controlled soviets. The third is the subsequent wave of anti-Bolshevik uprisings."* In fact, *"in all provincial capitals of European Russia where elections were held on which there are data, the Mensheviks and the SRs won majorities on the city soviets in the spring of 1918."* Brovkin stresses that the *"process of the Menshevik-SR electoral victories threatened Bolshevik power. That is why in the course of the spring and summer of 1918, the soviet assemblies were disbanded in most cities and villages. To stay in power, the Bolsheviks had to destroy the soviets. . . These steps generated a far-reaching transformation in the soviet system, which remained 'soviet' in name only."* Brovkin presents accounts from numerous towns and cities. As an example, he discusses Tver' where the *"escalation of political tensions followed the already familiar pattern"* as the *"victory of the opposition at the polls"* in April 1918 *"brought about an intensification of the Bolshevik repression. Strikes, protests, and marches in Tver' lead to the imposition of martial law."* [Brovkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 46, p. 47, p. 48 and p. 11] Thus Bolshevik armed force not only overthrew the election results, it also suppressed working class protest against such actions. (Brovkin's book **The Mensheviks after October** contains the same information as his article).

This Bolshevik attack on the soviets usually started with attempts to stop new elections. For example, after a demonstration in Petrograd in favour of the Constituent Assembly was repressed by the Bolsheviks in mid-January 1918, calls for new elections to the soviet occurred in many factories. *"Despite the efforts of the Bolsheviks and the Factory Committees they controlled, the movement for new elections to the soviet spread to more than twenty factories by early February and resulted in the election of fifty delegates: thirty-six SRs, seven Mensheviks and seven non-party."* However, the Bolsheviks *"unwillingness to recognise the elections and to seat new delegates pushed a group of Socialists to . . . lay plans for an alternative workers' forum . . . what was later to become the Assembly of Workers' Plenipotentiaries."* [Scott Smith, *"The Social-Revolutionaries and the Dilemma of Civil War"*, **The Bolsheviks in Russian Society**, pp. 83-104, Vladimir N. Brovkin (Ed.), pp. 85-86] This forum, like all forms of working class protest, was crushed by the Bolshevik state. By the time the elections were held, in June 1918, the civil war had started (undoubtedly favouring the Bolsheviks) and the Bolsheviks had secured their majority by packing the soviet with non-workplace "representatives."

In Tula, again in the spring of 1918, local Bolsheviks reported to the Bolshevik Central Committee that the *"Bolshevik deputies began to be recalled one after another . . . our situation became shakier with passing day. We were forced to block new elections to the soviet and even not to recognise them where they had taken place not in our favour."* In the end, the local party leader was forced to abolish the city soviet and to vest power in the Provincial Executive Committee. This refused to convene a plenum of the city soviet for more than two months, knowing that newly elected delegates were non-Bolshevik. [Smith, **Op. Cit.**, p. 87]

In Yaroslavl', the newly elected soviet convened on April 9th, 1918, and when it elected a Menshevik chairman, *"the Bolshevik delegation walked out and declared the soviet dissolved. In response, workers in the city went out on strike, which the Bolsheviks answered by arresting the strike committee and threatening to dismiss the strikers and replace them with unemployed workers."* This failed and the Bolsheviks were forced to hold new elections, which they lost. Then *"the Bolsheviks dissolved this soviet as well and places the city under martial law."* A similar event occurred in Riazan' (again in April) and, again, the Bolsheviks *"promptly dissolved the soviet and declared a dictatorship under a Military-Revolutionary Committee."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 88-9]

The opposition parties raised such issues at the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets (VTsIK), to little avail. On the 11th of April, one *"protested that non-Bolshevik controlled soviets were being dispersed by armed force, and wanted to discuss the issue."* The chairman *"refus[ed] to include it in the agenda because of lack of supporting material"* and such information be submitted to the presidium of the soviet. The majority (i.e. the Bolsheviks) *"supported their chairman"* and the facts were *"submitted . . . to the presidium, where they apparently remained."* It should be noted that the *"same fate befell attempts to challenge the arrests of Moscow anarchists by the government on 12 April."* The chairman's *"handling of the anarchist matter ended its serious discussion in the VTsIK."* [Charles Duval, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 13-14] Given that the VTsIK was **meant** to be the highest soviet body between congresses, the lack of concern for Bolshevik repression against soviets and opposition groups clearly shows the Bolshevik contempt for soviet democracy.

Needless to say, this destruction of soviet democracy continued during the civil war. For example, the Bolsheviks simply rejected the voice of people and would refuse to accept an election result. Emma Goldman attended an election meeting of bakers in Moscow in March, 1920. *"It was," she said, "the most exciting gathering I had witnessed in Russia."* However the *"chosen representative, an Anarchist, had been refused his mandate by the Soviet authorities. It was the third time the workers gathered to re-elect their delegate . . . and every time they elected the same man. The Communist candidate opposing him was Semashko, the Commissar of the Department of Health . . . [who] raved against the workers for choosing a non-Communist, called anathema upon their heads, and threatened them with the Tcheka and the curtailment of their rations. But he had no effect on the audience except to emphasise their opposition to him, and to arouse antagonism against the party he represented. The workers' choice was repudiated by the authorities by the authorities and later even arrested and imprisoned."* After a hunger strike, they were released. In spite of chekists with loaded guns attending union meetings, the bakers *"would not be intimidated"* and threatened a strike unless they were permitted to elect their own candidate. This ensured the bakers' demands were met. [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, pp. 88-9]

Unsurprisingly, *"there is a mass of evidence to support the Menshevik accusations of electoral malpractice"* during elections in May 1920. And in spite of Menshevik *"declaration of support for the Soviet regime against the Poles"* the party was *"still subject to harassment."* [Skawa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 178]

This gerrymandering was not limited to just local soviets. The Bolsheviks used it at the fifth soviet congress as well.

First, it should be noted that in the run up to the congress, *"on 14 June 1918, they expelled Martov and his five Mensheviks together with the Socialist Revolutionaries from the Central Executive Committee, closed down their newspapers . . . and drove them underground, just on the eve of the elections to the Fifth Congress of Soviets in which the Mensheviks were expected to make significant gains."* [Israel Getzler, **Martov**, p. 181] The rationale for this action was the claim that the Mensheviks had taken part in anti-soviet rebellions (as we discuss in [section 23](#), this was not true). The action was opposed by the Left SRs, who correctly questioned the legality of the Bolshevik expulsion of opposition groupings. They *"branded the proposed expulsion bill illegal, since the Mensheviks and SRs had been sent to the CEC by the Congress of Soviets, and only the next congress had the right to withdraw their representation. Furthermore, the Bolsheviks had no right to pose as defenders of the soviets against the alleged SR counter-revolution when they themselves has been disbanding the peasants' soviets and creating the committees of the poor to replace them."* [Brovkin, **The Mensheviks After October**, p. 231] When the vote was taken, only the Bolsheviks supported it. Their votes were sufficient to pass it.

Given that the Mensheviks had been winning soviet elections across Russia, it is clear that this action was driven far more by political needs than the truth. This resulted in the Left Social Revolutionaries (LSRs) as the only significant party left in the run up to the fifth Congress. The LSR author (and ex-commissar for justice in the only coalition soviet government) of the only biography of LSR leader (and long standing revolutionary who suffered torture and imprisonment in her fight against Tsarism) Maria Spiridonova states that *"[b]etween 900 and 100 delegates were present. Officially the LSR numbered 40*

percent of the delegates. Their own opinion was that their number were even higher. The Bolsheviks strove to keep their majority by all the means in their power." He quotes Spiridonova's address to the Congress: "You may have a majority in this congress, but you do have not a majority in the country." [I. Steinberg, **Spiridonova**, p. 209]

Historian Geoffrey Swain indicates that the LSRs had a point:

*"Up to the very last minute the Left SRs had been confident that, as the voice of Russia's peasant masses, they would receive a majority when the Fifth Congress of Soviets assembled . . . which would enable them to deprive Lenin of power and launch a revolutionary war against Germany. Between April and the end of June 1918 membership of their party had almost doubled, from 60,000 to 100,000, and to prevent them securing a majority at the congress Lenin was forced to rely on dubious procedures: he allowed so-called committees of poor peasants to be represented at the congress. Thus as late as 3 July 1918 returns suggested a majority for the Left SRs, but a Congress of Committees of Poor Peasants held in Petrograd the same day 'redressed the balance in favour of the Bolsheviks,' to quote the **Guardian's** Philips-Price, by deciding it had the right to represent the all those districts where local soviets had not been 'cleansed of kulak elements and had not delivered the amount of food laid down in the requisitioning lists of the Committees of Poor Peasants.' This blatant gerrymandering ensured a Bolshevik majority at the Fifth Congress of Soviets." [The Origins of the Russian Civil War, p. 176]*

Historian Alexander Rabinowitch confirms this gerrymandering. As he put it, by the summer of 1918 "popular disenchantment with Bolshevik rule was already well advanced, not only in rural but also in urban Russia" and the "primary beneficiaries of this nationwide grass-roots shift in public opinion were the Left SRs. During the second half of June 1918, it was an open question which of the two parties would have a majority at the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets . . . On the evening of 4 July, virtually from the moment the Fifth Congress of Soviets opened in Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre, it was clear to the Left SRs that the Bolsheviks had effectively 'fabricated' a sizeable majority in the congress and consequently, that there was no hope whatever of utilising it to force a fundamental change in the government's pro-German, anti-peasant policies." While he acknowledges that an "exact breakdown of properly elected delegates may be impossible to ascertain" it was possible ("based on substantial but incomplete archival evidence") to conclude that "it is quite clear that the Bolshevik majority was artificially inflated and highly suspect." He quotes the report of one leading LSR, based on data from LSR members of the congress's Credentials Committee, saying that the Bolsheviks "conjured up" 299 voting delegates. "The Bible tells us," noted the report's author, "that God created the heavens and the earth from nothing . . . In the twentieth century the Bolsheviks are capable of no lesser miracles: out of nothing, they create legitimate credentials." ["Maria Spiridonova's 'Last Testament'", **The Russian Review**, pp. 424-46, vol. 54, July 1995, p. 426]

This gerrymandering played a key role in the subsequent events. "Deprived of their democratic majority," Swain notes, "the Left SRs resorted to terror and assassinated the German ambassador

*Mirbach.*" [Swain, **Op. Cit.**, p. 176] The LSR assassination of Mirbach and the events which followed were soon labelled by the Bolsheviks an "*uprising*" against "soviet power" (see [section 23](#) for more details). Lenin "*decided that the killing of Mirbach provided a fortuitous opportunity to put an end to the growing Left SR threat.*" [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 427] After this, the LSRs followed the Mensheviks and Right SRs and were expelled from the soviets. This in spite of the fact that the rank and file knew nothing of the plans of the central committees and that their soviet delegates had been elected by the masses. The Bolsheviks had finally eliminated the last of their more left-wing opponents (the anarchists had been dealt with in April, see [section 24](#) for details).

As discussed in [section 21](#), the Committees of Poor Peasants were only supported by the Bolsheviks. Indeed, the Left SRs opposed them as being utterly counter-productive and an example of Bolshevik ignorance of village life. Consequently, we can say that the "delegates" from the committees were Bolsheviks or at least Bolshevik supporters. Significantly, by early 1919 Lenin admitted the Committees were failures and ordered them disbanded. The new policy reflected Left SR arguments against the Committees. It is hard not to concur with Vladimir Brovkin that by "*establishing the committees of the poor to replace the [rural] soviets . . . the Bolsheviks were trying to create some institutional leverage of their own in the countryside for use against the SRs. In this light, the Bolshevik measures against the Menshevik-led city soviets . . . and against SR-led village soviets may be seen as a two-pronged attempt to stem the tide that threatened to leave them in the minority at the Fifth Congress of Soviets.*" [**The Mensheviks after October**, p. 226]

Thus, by July 1918, the Bolsheviks had effectively secured a monopoly of political power in Russia. When the Bolsheviks (rightly, if hypocritically) disbanded the Constituent Assembly in January 1918, they had claimed that the soviets (rightly) represented a superior form of democracy. Once they started losing soviet elections, they could find no better way to "secure" workers' democracy than to destroy it by gerrymandering soviets, disbanding them and expelling opposition parties from them. All peaceful attempts to replace them had been destroyed. The soviet CEC was marginalised and without any real power. Opposition parties had been repressed, usually on little or no evidence. The power of the soviets had been replaced by a soviet power in less than a year. However, this was simply the culmination of a process which had started when the Bolsheviks seized power in November 1917. Simply put, the Bolsheviks had always aimed for "all power to the party via the soviets" and once this had been achieved, the soviets could be dispensed with. Maurice Brinton simply stated the obvious when he wrote that "*when institutions such as the soviets could no longer be influenced by ordinary workers, the regime could no longer be called a soviet regime.*" [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. xiii] By this obvious criteria, the Bolshevik regime was no longer soviet by the spring of 1918, i.e. before the outbreak of civil war. While opposition groups were not finally driven out of the soviets until 1923 (i.e. three years **after** the end of the civil war) their presence "*does not indicate the existence of a multi-party system since they in no way threatened the dominating role of the Bolsheviks, and they had not done so from mid-1918.*" [Richard Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 168]

Tony Cliff, leader of the British Leninist party the SWP, justified the repression of the Mensheviks and SRs on the grounds that they were not prepared to accept the Soviet system and rejected the role of

*"constitutional opposition."* He tries to move forward the repression until after the outbreak of full civil war by stating that "[d]espite their strong opposition to the government, for some time, i.e. until after the armed uprising of the Czechoslovakian Legion [in late May, 1918] -- the Mensheviks were not much hampered in their propaganda work." If having papers banned every now and then, members arrested and soviets being disbanded as soon as they get a Menshevik majority is *"not much hampered"* then Cliff does seem to be giving that phrase a new meaning. Similarly, Cliff's claim that the *"civil war undermined the operation of the local soviets"* also seems lacking based on this new research. [**Lenin: Revolution Besieged**, vol. 3, p. 163, p. 167 and p. 150]

However, the Bolshevik assault on the soviets started during the spring of 1918 (i.e. in March, April and May). That is **before** the Czech rising and the onset of full scale civil war which occurred in late May (see [section 3](#) of the appendix on ["What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?"](#) on Bolshevik repression before the Czech revolt). Nor is it true that the Mensheviks rejected constitutional methods. Though they wished to see a re-convocation of the Constituent Assembly they believed that the only way to do this was by winning a majority of the soviets (see [section 23](#)). Clearly, attempts to blame the Civil War for the elimination of soviet power and democracy seems woefully weak given the actions of the Bolsheviks in the spring of 1918. And, equally clearly, the reduction of local soviet influence cannot be fully understood without factoring in the Bolshevik prejudice in favour of centralisation (as codified in the Soviet Constitution of 1918) along with this direct repression.

The simple fact is that the soviets were marginalised and undermined after the October Revolution simply because they **did** reflect the wishes of the working class, in spite of their defects (defects the Bolsheviks exploited to consolidate their power). The problem was that the workers no longer supported Lenin. Few Leninists would support such an obvious conclusion. For example, John Rees states that *"[i]n the cities the Reds enjoyed the fierce and virtually undivided loyalty of the masses throughout the civil war period."* [*"In Defence of October"*, pp. 3-82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 47] Which, of course, explains the vast number of strikes and protests directed against the Bolshevik regime and the workers' resolutions calling its end! It also explains why the Bolsheviks, in the face of such *"undivided loyalty"*, had to suppress opposition parties and impose a party dictatorship!

Simply put, **if** the Bolsheviks did have the support Rees states they did then they had no need to repress soviet democracy and opposition parties. Such *"fierce"* loyalty would not have been amenable to opposition arguments. Strange, then, that the Bolsheviks continually explained working class unrest in terms of the influence of Mensheviks, Left SRs and so on during the civil war. Moreover, Rees contradicts himself by arguing that if the Kronstadt revolt had succeeded, then it would have resulted in *"the fall of the Bolsheviks."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 63] Now, given that the Kronstadt revolt called for free soviet elections (and **not** *"soviets without parties"* as Rees asserts), why did the Bolsheviks not agree to them (at least in the cities)? If, as Rees argues, the Reds had the fierce loyalty of the city workers, then why did the Bolsheviks not introduce soviet democracy in the cities after the end of the Civil War? Simply because they knew that such *"loyalty"* did not, in fact, exist. Zinoviev, for example, declared that the Bolsheviks' support had been reduced to 1 per cent in early 1920. [Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 188]

So much for working class "loyalty" to the Bolsheviks. And, needless to say, Rees' comments totally ignore the election results **before** the start of the civil war which prompted the Bolsheviks to pack or disband soviets. As Bertrand Russell summarised from his experiences in Lenin's Russia during the civil war (in 1920): *"No conceivable system of free elections would give majorities to the Communists, either in the town or country."* [**The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism**, pp. 40-1] Thus we have a major contradiction in the pro-Leninist argument. On the one hand, they stress that the workers supported the Bolsheviks wholeheartedly during the civil war. On the other, they argue that party dictatorship had to be imposed. If the Bolsheviks had the support they claimed they had, then they would have won soviet elections easily. They did not and so free soviet elections were not held.

This fact also explains the fate of the so-called "non party" conferences favoured by the Bolsheviks in late 1920. In spite of praising the soviets as *"more democratic"* than anything in the *"best democratic republics of the bourgeois world,"* Lenin also argued that non-Party conferences were also required *"to be able to watch the mood of the masses, to come closer to them, to respond to their demands."* [**Left-Wing Communism**, p. 33 and p. 32] If the soviets were as democratic as Lenin claimed, then the Bolsheviks would have no need of "non-party" conferences. Significantly, the Bolsheviks "responded" to these conferences and "their demands" by disbanding them. This was because *"[d]uring the disturbances"* of late 1920, *"they provided an effective platform for criticism of Bolshevik policies."* Their frequency was decreased and they "were discontinued soon afterward." [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 203] In other words, they meet the same fate as the soviets in the spring and summer of 1918.

Perhaps we should not be too surprised by these developments. After all, as we discuss in [section 8](#) of the appendix on ["How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?"](#), the Bolsheviks had long had a distinctly undemocratic political ideology. Their support for democratic norms were less than consistent. The one thing they **were** consistent was their hypocrisy. Thus democratic decisions were to be binding on their opponents (even if that majority had to be manipulated into being) but not upon them. Before the revolution Lenin had openly espoused a double standard of discipline. *"We will not permit,"* he argued, *"the idea of unity to tie a noose around our necks, and we shall under no circumstances permit the Mensheviks to lead us by the rope."* [quoted by Robert V. Daniels, **The Conscience of the Revolution**, p. 17] Once in power, their political perspectives had little trouble ignoring the will of the working class when it clashed with what they, as that class's self-proclaimed vanguard, had decided what was in its best interests. As we discussed in [section H.5](#), such an autocratic perspective is at the heart of vanguardism. If you aim for party power, it comes as no surprise that the organs used to achieve it will wither under it. Just as muscles only remain strong if you use them, so soviets can only work if it is used to run society, not nominate the handful of party leaders who do. As Kropotkin argued in 1920:

*"The idea of soviets . . . of councils of workers and peasants . . . controlling the economic and political life of the country is a great idea. All the more so, since it necessarily follows that these councils should be composed of all who take part in the production of natural wealth by their own efforts."*



*"But as long as the country is governed by a party dictatorship, the workers' and peasants' councils evidently lose their entire significance. They are reduced to . . . [a] passive role . . . A council of workers ceases to be free and of any use when liberty of the press no longer exists . . . [and they] lose their significance when the elections are not preceded by a free electoral campaign, and when the elections are conducted under pressure of a party dictatorship . . . It means the death-knell of the new system."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, pp. 254-5]

Clearly, the fate of the soviets after October shows the dangers of Bolshevism to popular self-management and autonomy. We should be try and learn the lessons from the experience rather than, as pro-Bolsheviks do, rationalise and justify the usurpation of power by the party. The most obvious lesson to learn is to oppose the creation of any power **above** the soviets. This was not lost on Russian anarchists active in the revolution. For this reason, anarcho-syndicalists resolved, in August 1918, that they *"were for the soviets but categorically against the Soviet of People's Commissars as an organ which does not stem from the soviet structure but only interferes with its work."* Thus they were *"for the establishment of **free soviets** of workers' and peasants' representatives, and the abolition of the Soviet of People's Commissars as an organisation inimical to the interests of the working class."* [contained in Paul Avrich, **The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, p. 118 and p. 117] This resolution was driven by the experience of the Bolshevik dominated "soviet" regime.

It is also worth quoting Rudolf Rocker at length on this issue:

*"Let no one object that the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' cannot be compared to run of the mill dictatorship because it is the dictatorship of a class. Dictatorship of a class cannot exist as such, for it ends up, in the last analysis, as being the dictatorship of a given party which arrogates to itself the right to speak for that class. Thus, the liberal bourgeoisie, in their fight against despotism, used to speak in the name of the 'people'. . .*

*"We already know that a revolution cannot be made with rosewater. And we know, too, that the owning classes will never yield up their privileges spontaneously. On the day of victorious revolution the workers will have to impose their will on the present owners of the soil, of the subsoil and of the means of production, which cannot be done -- let us be clear on this -- without the workers taking the capital of society into their own hands, and, above all, without their having demolished the authoritarian structure which is, and will continue to be, the fortress keeping the masses of the people under dominion. Such an action is, without doubt, an act of liberation; a proclamation of social justice; the very essence of social revolution, which has nothing in common with the utterly bourgeois principle of dictatorship.*

*"The fact that a large number of socialist parties have rallied to the idea of councils, which is the proper mark of libertarian socialist and revolutionary syndicalists, is a confession, recognition that the tack they have taken up until now has been the product of*

*a falsification, a distortion, and that with the councils the labour movement must create for itself a single organ capable of carrying into effect the unmitigated socialism that the conscious proletariat longs for. On the other hand, it ought not to be forgotten that this abrupt conversion runs the risk of introducing many alien features into the councils concept, features, that is, with no relation to the original tasks of socialism, and which have to be eliminated because they pose a threat to the further development of the councils. These alien elements are able only to conceive things from the dictatorial viewpoint. It must be our task to face up to this risk and warn our class comrades against experiments which cannot bring the dawn of social emancipation any nearer -- which indeed, to the contrary, positively postpone it.*

*"Consequently, our advice is as follows: Everything for the councils or soviets! No power above them! A slogan which at the same time will be that of the social revolutionary." [Anarchism and Sovietism]*

The validity of this argument can be seen, for example, from the expulsion of opposition parties from the soviets in June and July 1918. This act exposes the hollowness of Bolshevik claims of their soviet system presented a form of "higher" democracy. If the Bolshevik soviet system was, as they claimed, based on instant recall then why did they, for example, have to expel the Mensheviks and Right SRs from the soviet CEC in the first place? Why did the electors not simply recall them? It was two weeks after the Czech revolt before the Bolsheviks acted, surely enough time for voters to act? Perhaps this did not happen because the CEC was not, in fact, subject to instant recall at all? Being nominated at the quarterly soviet congress, they were effectively isolated from popular control. It also means that the Bolshevik government was even more insulated from popular control and accountability. To "recall" it, electors would have to either wait for the next national soviet congress or somehow convince the CEC to call an emergency one. As an example of workers' running society, the Bolshevik system leaves much to be desired.

Another obvious lesson to learn was the use of appointments to the soviets and their executives from other organisations. As seen above, the Bolsheviks used the "representation" of other bodies they control (such as trade unions) to pack soviet assemblies in their favour. Similarly, allowing political parties to nominate representatives in soviet executives also marginalised the soviet assemblies and those delegates actually elected in the workplaces.

This was obvious to the Russian anarchists, who argued *"for effective soviets organised on collective lines with the direct delegation of workers and peasants from every factory, workshop, village, etc., and not political chatterboxes gaining entry through party lists and turning the soviets into talking shops."* [contained in Paul Avrich, **The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, p. 118] The Makhnovists, likewise, argued that *"[o]nly labourers who are contributing work necessary to the social economy should participate in the soviets. Representatives of political organisations have no place in worker-peasant soviets, since their participation in a workers' soviet will transform the latter into deputies of the party and can lead to the downfall of the soviet system."* [contained in Peter Arshinov's

**History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 266] As we discuss in [section 15](#) of the appendix on "[Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?](#)", Leninists sometimes distort this into a claim that the Makhnovists opposed members of political standing for election.

This use of party lists meant that soviet delegates could be anyone. For example, the leading left-wing Menshevik Martov recounts that in early 1920 Bolsheviks in a chemical factory "*put up Lenin against me as a candidate [to the Moscow soviet]. I received seventy-six votes he-eight (in an open vote).*" [quoted by Israel Getzler, **Martov**, p. 202] How would either of these two intellectuals actually know and reflect the concerns and interests of the workers they would be "delegates" of? If the soviets were meant to be the delegates of working people, then why should non-working class members of political parties be elected to a soviet?

However, in spite of these problems, the Russian soviets were a key means of ensuring working class participation in the revolution. As recognised by all the socialist oppositions to the Bolsheviks, from the anarchists to the Mensheviks. As one historian put it:

*"Small wonder that the principal political demand of Mensheviks, Left SRs, SR Maximalists, Kronstadt sailors and of many oppositionists . . . has been for freely elected soviets which would this be restored to their original role as agents of democratisation."* [Israel Getzler, **Soviets as Agents of Democratisation**, p. 30]

The sad fate of the soviets after the Bolshevik seizure of power simply confirms the opinion of the left Menshevik Martov who had "*rubbed it in to the Bolsheviks . . . at the first All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions [in January 1918], that they who were now extolling the Soviets as the 'highest forms of the socialist development of the proletariat,' had shown little love of them in 1905 or in 1917 after the July days; they loved Soviets only when they were 'in the hands of the Bolshevik party.'*" [Getzler, **Martov**, p. 174] As the next few months showed, once the soviets left those hands, then the soviets themselves were destroyed. The civil war did not start this process, it just gave the latter-day supporters of Bolshevism something to use to justify these actions.

## **7 How did the factory committee movement develop?**

## **8 What was the Bolshevik position on "workers' control" in 1917?**

## **9 What happened to the factory committees after October?**

## **10 What were the Bolshevik economic policies in 1918?**

- 11 Did Bolshevik economic policies work?**
- 12 Was there an alternative to Lenin's "state capitalism" and "war communism"?**
- 13 Did the Bolsheviks allow independent trade unions?**
- 14 Was the Red Army really a revolutionary army?**
- 15 Was the Red Army "filled with socialist consciousness"?**
- 16 How did the civil war start and develop?**
- 17 Was the civil war between just Reds and Whites?**
- 18 How extensive was imperialist intervention?**
- 19 Did the end of the civil war change Bolshevik policies?**
- 20 Can the Red Terror and the Cheka be justified?**
- 21 Did Bolshevik peasant policies work?**
- 22 Was there an alternative to grain requisition?**
- 23 Was the repression of the socialist opposition justified?**
- 24 What did the anarchists do during the revolution?**
- 25 Did the Russian revolution refute anarchism?**

# How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?

It is a truism of Leninism that Stalinism has nothing to do with the ideas of Bolshevism. Moreover, most are at pains to stress that these ideas have no relation to the actual practice of the Bolshevik Party after the October Revolution. To re-quote one Leninist:

*"it was overwhelmingly the force of circumstance which obliged the Bolsheviks to retreat so far from their own goals. They travelled this route in opposition to their own theory, not because of it -- no matter what rhetorical justifications were given at the time."* [John Rees, *"In Defence of October,"* pp. 3-82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 70]

His fellow party member Duncan Hallas argued that it was *"these desperate conditions"* (namely terrible economic situation combined with civil war) which resulted in *"the Bolshevik Party [coming] to substitute its own rule for that of a decimated, exhausted working class"* anarchists disagree. [**Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Party**, p. 43]

We have discussed in the appendix on ["What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?"](#) why the various *"objective factors"* explanations favoured by Leninists to explain the defeat of the Russian Revolution are unconvincing. Ultimately, they rest on the spurious argument that if only what most revolutionaries (including, ironically, Leninists!) consider as inevitable side effects of a revolution did not occur, then Bolshevism would have been fine. It is hard to take seriously the argument that if only the ruling class disappeared without a fight, if the imperialists had not intervened and if the economy was not disrupted then Bolshevism would have resulted in socialism. This is particularly the case as Leninists argue that only **their** version of socialism recognises that the ruling class will **not** disappear after a revolution, that we will face counter-revolution and so we need a state to defend the revolution! As we argued in [section H.2.1](#), this is not the case. Anarchists have long recognised that a revolution will require defending and that it will provoke a serious disruption in the economic life of a country.

Given the somewhat unrealistic tone of these kinds of assertions, it is necessary to look at the ideological underpinnings of Bolshevism and how they played their part in the defeat of the Russian Revolution. This section, therefore, will discuss why such Leninist claims are not true. Simply put, Bolshevik ideology **did** play a role in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. This is obvious once we look at most aspects of Bolshevik ideology as well as the means advocated by the Bolsheviks to achieve their goals. Rather than being in opposition to the declared aims of the Bolsheviks, the policies implemented by them during the revolution and civil war had clear relations with their pre-revolution ideas and visions. To quote Maurice Brinton's conclusions after looking at this period:

*"there is a clear-cut and incontrovertible link between what happened under Lenin and*

*Trotsky and the later practices of Stalinism. We know that many on the revolutionary left will find this statement hard to swallow. We are convinced however that any honest reading of the facts cannot but lead to this conclusion. The more one unearths about this period the more difficult it becomes to define - or even to see - the 'gulf' allegedly separating what happened in Lenin's time from what happened later. Real knowledge of the facts also makes it impossible to accept . . . that the whole course of events was 'historically inevitable' and 'objectively determined'. Bolshevik ideology and practice were themselves important and sometimes decisive factors in the equation, at every critical stage of this critical period. Now that more facts are available self-mystification on these issues should no longer be possible. Should any who have read these pages remain 'confused' it will be because they want to remain in that state -- or because (as the future beneficiaries of a society similar to the Russian one) it is their interest to remain so."* [The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control, p. 84]

This is unsurprising. The Leninist idea that politics of the Bolsheviks had no influence on the outcome of the revolution, that their policies during the revolution were a product purely of objective forces, is unconvincing. The fact of the matter is that people are faced with choices, choices that arise from the objective conditions that they face. What decisions they make will be influenced by the ideas they hold -- they will **not** occur automatically, as if people were on auto-pilot -- and their ideas are shaped by the social relationships they experience. Thus, someone who favours centralisation and sees nationalisation as the defining characteristic of socialism will make different decisions than someone who favours decentralising power and sees self-management as the key issue. The former will also create **different** forms of social organisation based on their perceptions of what "socialism" is and what is "efficient." Similarly, the different forms of social organisation favoured will also impact on how a revolution develops and the political decisions they make. For example, if you have a vision which favours centralised, hierarchical organisation then those placed into a position of power over others within such structures will act in certain ways, have a certain world view, which would be alien to someone subject to egalitarian social relations.

In summary, the ideas in people's heads matter, including during a revolution. Someone in favour of centralisation, centralised power and who equates party rule with class rule (like Lenin and Trotsky), will act in ways (and create structures) totally different from someone who believes in decentralisation and federalism. The organisation they create will create specific forms of social relationships which, in turn, will shape the ideas of those subject to them. This means that a centralised, hierarchical system will create authoritarian social relationships and these will shape those within them and the ideas they have in totally different ways than a decentralised, egalitarian system.

Similarly, if Bolshevik policies hastened the alienation of working class people and peasants from the regime which, in turn, resulted in resistance to them then some of the "objective factors" facing Lenin's regime were themselves the products of earlier political decisions. Unwelcome and unforeseen (at least to the Bolshevik leadership) consequences of specific Bolshevik practices and actions, but still flowing from Bolshevik ideology all the same. So, for example, when leading Bolsheviks had preconceived biases against decentralisation, federalism, "petty-bourgeois" peasants, "declassed" workers or "anarcho-

syndicalist" tendencies, this would automatically become an ideological determinant to the policies decided upon by the ruling party. While social circumstances may have limited Bolshevik options, these social circumstances were also shaped by the results of Bolshevik ideology and practice and, moreover, possible solutions to social problems were also limited by Bolshevik ideology and practice.

So, **political ideas do matter**. And, ironically, the very Leninists who argue that Bolshevik politics played no role in the degeneration of the revolution accept this. Modern day Leninists, while denying Bolshevik ideology had a negative on the development of the revolution also subscribe to the contradictory idea that Bolshevik politics were essential for its "success"! Indeed, the fact that they **are** Leninists shows this is the case. They obviously think that Leninist ideas on centralisation, the role of the party, the "*workers' state*" and a host of other issues are correct and, moreover, essential for the success of a revolution. They just dislike the results when these ideas were applied in practice within the institutional context these ideas promote, subject to the pressures of the objective circumstances they argue **every** revolution will face!

Little wonder anarchists are not convinced by Leninist arguments that their ideology played no role in the rise of Stalinism in Russia. Simply put, if you use certain methods then these will be rooted in the specific vision you are aiming for. If you think socialism is state ownership and centralised planning then you will favour institutions and organisations which facilitate that end. If you want a highly centralised state and consider a state as simply being an "*instrument of class rule*" then you will see little to worry about in the concentration of power into the hands of a few party leaders. However, if you see socialism in terms of working class managing their own affairs then you will view such developments as being fundamentally in opposition to your goals and definitely **not** a means to that end.

So part of the reason why Marxist revolutions yield such anti-working class outcomes is to do with its ideology, methods and goals. It has little to do with the will to power of a few individuals (important a role as that can play, sometimes, in events). In a nutshell, the ideology and vision guiding Leninist parties incorporate hierarchical values and pursue hierarchical aims. Furthermore, the methods and organisations favoured to achieve (their vision of) "socialism" are fundamentally hierarchical, aiming to ensure that power is centralised at the top of pyramidal structures in the hands of the party leaders.

It would be wrong, as Leninists will do, to dismiss this as simply a case of "idealism." After all, we are talking about the ideology of a ruling party. As such, these ideas are more than just ideas: after the seizure of power, they became a part of the real social situation within Russia. Individually, party members assumed leadership posts in all spheres of social life and started to apply their ideology. Then, overtime, the results of this application ensured that the party could not be done otherwise as the framework of exercising power had been shaped by its successful application (e.g. Bolshevik centralism ensured that all its policies were marked by centralist tendencies, simply because Bolshevik power had become centralised). Soon, the only real instance of power is the Party, and very soon, only the summits of the Party. This cannot help but shape its policies and actions. As Castoriadis argues:

*"If it is true that people's real social existence determines their consciousness, it is from*

*that moment illusory to expect the Bolshevik party to act in any other fashion than according to its real social position. The real social situation of the Party is that of a directorial organ, and its point of view toward this society henceforth is not necessarily the same as the one this society has toward itself.*" [**The role of Bolshevik Ideology in the birth of the Bureaucracy**, p. 97]

As such, means and ends are related and cannot be separated. As Emma Goldman argued, there is *"no greater fallacy than the belief that aims and purposes are one thing, while methods and tactics are another. This conception is a potent menace to social regeneration. All human experience teaches that methods and means cannot be separated from the ultimate aim. The means employed become, through individual habit and social practice, part and parcel of the final purpose; they influence it, modify it, and presently the aims and means become identical. . . The great and inspiring aims of the Revolution became so clouded with and obscured by the methods used by the ruling political power that it was hard to distinguish what was temporary means and what final purpose. Psychologically and socially the means necessarily influence and alter the aims. The whole history of man is continuous proof of the maxim that to divest one's methods of ethical concepts means to Sink into the depths of utter demoralisation. In that lies the real tragedy of the Bolshevik philosophy as applied to the Russian Revolution. May this lesson not be in vain."* In summary, *"[n]o revolution can ever succeed as a factor of liberation unless the MEANS used to further it be identical in spirit and tendency with the PURPOSES to be achieved."* [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, pp. 260-1]

If this analysis of the anarchists against Bolshevism is true then it follows that the Bolsheviks were not just wrong on one or two issues but their political outlook right down to the core was wrong. Its vision of socialism was flawed, which produced a flawed perspective on the potentially valid means available to achieve it. Leninism, we must never forget, does not aim for the same kind of society anarchism does. As we discussed in [section H.3.1](#), the short, medium and long term goals of both movements are radically different. While both claim to aim for "communism," what is meant by that word is radically different in details if somewhat similar in outline. The anarchist ideal of a classless, stateless and free society is based on a decentralised, participatory and bottom-up premise. The Leninist ideal is the product of a centralised, party ruled and top-down paradigm.

This explains why Leninists advocate a democratic-centralist "Revolutionary Party." It arises from the fact that their programme is the capture of state power in order to abolish the *"anarchy of the market."* Not the abolition of wage labour, but its universalisation under the state as one big boss. Not the destruction of alienated forces (political, social and economic) but rather their capture by the party on behalf of the masses. In other words, this section of the FAQ is based on the fact that Leninists are not (libertarian) communists; they have not broken sufficiently with Second International orthodoxy, with the assumption that socialism is basically state capitalism (*"The idea of the State as Capitalist, to which the Social-Democratic fraction of the great Socialist Party is now trying to reduce Socialism."* [Peter Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 31]). Just as one cannot abolish alienation with alienated means, so we cannot attack Leninist *"means"* also without distinguishing our libertarian *"ends"* from theirs.



This means that both Leninist means and ends are flawed. Both will fail to produce a socialist society. As Kropotkin said at the time, the Bolsheviks *"have shown how the Revolution is **not** to be made."* [quoted by Berkman, **The Bolshevik Myth**, p. 75] If applied today, Leninist ideas will undoubtedly fail from an anarchist point of view while, as under Lenin, "succeeding" from the limited perspective of Bolshevism. Yes, the party may be in power and, yes, capitalist property may be abolished by nationalisation but, no, a socialist society would be no nearer. Rather we would have a new hierarchical and class system rather than the classless and free society which non-anarchist socialists claim to be aiming for.

Let us be perfectly clear. Anarchists are **not** saying that Stalinism will be the inevitable result of any Bolshevik revolution. What we are saying is that some form of class society will result from any such a revolution. The exact form this class system will take will vary depending on the objective circumstances it faces, but no matter the specific form of such a post-revolutionary society it will not be a socialist one. This is because of the ideology of the party in power will shape the revolution in specific ways which, by necessity, form new forms of hierarchical and class exploitation and oppression. The preferred means of Bolshevism (vanguardism, statism, centralisation, nationalisation, and so on) will determine the ends, the ends being not communist anarchism but some kind of bureaucratic state capitalist society labelled *"socialism"* by those in charge. Stalinism, in this perspective, was the result of an interaction of certain ideological goals and positions as well as organisational principles and preferences with structural and circumstantial pressures resulting from the specific conditions prevalent at the time. For example, a Leninist revolution in an advanced western country would not require the barbaric means used by Stalinism to industrialise Russia.

This section of the FAQ will, therefore, indicate the key areas of Bolshevik ideology which, when applied, will undermine any revolution as they did the Russian. As such, it is all fine and well for Trotskyist Max Shachtman (like so many others) to argue that the Bolsheviks had *"convert[ed] the expediencies and necessities of the civil war period into virtues and principles which had never been part of their original program."* Looking at this *"original program"* we can see elements of what was latter to be applied. Rather than express a divergence it could be argued that it was this that undermined the more democratic aspects of their original program. In other words, perhaps the use of state power and economic nationalisation came into conflict with, and finally destroyed, the original proclaimed socialist principles? And, perhaps, the *"socialist"* vision of Bolshevism was so deeply flawed that even attempting to apply it destroyed the aspirations for liberty, equality and solidarity that inspired it? For, after all, as we indicated in [section H.3.1](#), the anarchist and mainstream Marxist visions of socialism and how to get there **are** different. Can we be surprised if Marxist means cannot achieve anarchist (i.e. authentic socialist) ends? To his credit, Shachtman acknowledges that post-civil war salvation "required full democratic rights" for all workers, and that this was *"precisely what the Bolsheviks . . . were determined not to permit."* Sadly he failed to wonder **why** the democratic principles of the *"original program"* were only *"honoured in the breach"* and why *"Lenin and Trotsky did not observe them."* The possibility that Bakunin was right and that statism and socialism cannot go together was not raised. ["Introduction" to Trotsky's **Terrorism and Communism**, p. xv]

Equally, there is a tendency of pro-Leninists to concentrate on the period between the two revolutions of 1917 when specifying what Bolshevism "really" stood for, particularly Lenin's book *State and Revolution*. To use an analogy, when Leninists do this they are like politicians who, when faced with people questioning the results of their policies, ask them to look at their election manifesto rather than what they have done when in power. As we discuss in [section 4](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)" Lenin's book was never applied in practice. From the very first day, the Bolsheviks ignored it. After 6 months **none** of its key ideas had been applied. Indeed, in all cases the exact opposite had been imposed. As such, to blame (say) the civil war for the reality of "Bolshevik in power" (as Leninists do) seems without substance. Simply put, **State and Revolution** is no guide to what Bolshevism "really" stood for. Neither is their position **before** seizing power if the realities of their chosen methods (i.e. seizing state power) quickly changed their perspective, practice **and** ideology (i.e. shaped the desired ends). Assuming of course that most of their post-October policies were radically different from their pre-October ones, which (as we indicate here) they were not.

With that said, what do anarchists consider the key aspects of Bolshevik ideology which helped to ensure the defeat of the Russian Revolution and had, long before the civil war started, had started its degeneration into tyranny? These factors are many and so we will, by necessity, concentrate on the key ones. These are believe in centralisation, the confusion of party power with popular power, the Marxist theory of the state, the negative influence of Engels' infamous essay "*On Authority*", the equation of nationalisation and state capitalism with socialism, the lack of awareness that working class economic power was a key factor in socialism, the notion that "big" was automatically "more efficient," the identification of class consciousness with supporting the party, how the vanguard party organises itself and, lastly, the underlying assumptions that vanguardism is based on.

Each one of these factors had a negative impact on the development of the revolution, combined they were devastating. Nor can it be a case of keeping Bolshevism while getting rid of some of these positions. Most go to the heart of Bolshevism and could only be eliminated by eliminating what makes Leninism Leninist. Thus some Leninists now pay lip service to workers' control of production and recognise that the Bolsheviks saw the form of property (i.e., whether private or state owned) as being far more important than workers' management of production. Yet revising Bolshevism to take into account this flaw means little unless the others are also revised. Simply put, workers' management of production would have little impact in a highly centralised state ruled over by an equally centralised vanguard party. Self-management in production or society could not co-exist with a state and party power nor with "*centralised*" economic decision making based on nationalised property. In a nutshell, the only way Bolshevism could result in a genuine socialist society is if it stopped being Bolshevik!

## 1 How did the Marxist historical materialism affect Bolshevism?

As is well known, Marx argued that history progressed through distinct stages. After his death, this "*materialist conception of history*" became known as "*historical materialism*." The basic idea of this is that the "*totality of [the] relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms*

*of social consciousness . . . At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or -- this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms -- with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution."* [**A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy**, pp. 20-1]

Thus slavery was replaced by feudalism, feudalism with capitalism. For Marx, the *"bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production"* and *"the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 21] In other words, after capitalism there would be socialism:

*"The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production which has flourished alongside and under it. The centralisation of the means of production and the socialisation of labour reach a point at which they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. The integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated."* [Karl Marx, **Capital**, vol. 1, p. 929]

Socialism replaces capitalism once the *"proletariat seized political power and turns the means of production into state property."* By so doing, *"it abolishes itself as proletariat, abolishes all class distinctions and class antagonisms, abolishes also the state as state."* [Engels, **The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 713]

Most Marxists subscribe to this schema of historical progress. For example, Tony Cliff noted that, *"[f]or Lenin, whose Marxism was never mechanical or fatalistic, the definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a **transition period** meant that there could be **two** outcomes of this phase: going forward to socialism, or backsliding to capitalism. The policy of the party would tip the balance."* [**Revolution Besieged**, p. 364]

Marxists, like Marx, argue that socialism was the society which would come after capitalism. Thus the Bolsheviks had the mindset that whatever they did there was only two possibilities: (their version of) socialism or the restoration of capitalism. However, this is based on a false premise. Is it valid to assume that there is only one possible post-capitalist future, one that, by definition, is classless? If so, then any action or structure could be utilised to fight reaction as after victory there can be only one outcome. However, if there is more than one post-capitalist future then the question of means becomes decisive. If we assume just two possible post-capitalist futures, one based on self-management and without classes and another with economic, social and political power centralised in a few hands, then the means used in a revolution become decisive in determining which possibility will become reality.

If we accept the Marxist theory and assume only one possible post-capitalist system, then all that is required of revolutionary anti-capitalist movements is that they only need to overthrow capitalism and they will wind up where they wish to arrive as there is no other possible outcome. But if the answer no,

then in order to wind up where we wish to arrive, we have to not only overthrow capitalism, we have use means that will push us toward the desired future society. As such, **means** become the key and they cannot be ignored or downplayed in favour of the ends -- particularly as these ends will never be reached if the appropriate means are not used.

This is no abstract metaphysical or ideological/theoretical point. The impact of this issue can be seen from the practice of Bolshevism in power. For Lenin and Trotsky, **any** and **all** means could and were used in pursuit of their ends. They simply could not see how the means used shaped the ends reached. Ultimately, there was only two possibilities -- socialism (by definition classless) or a return to capitalism.

Once we see that because of their flawed perspective on what comes after capitalism we understand why, for the Bolsheviks, the means used and institutions created were meaningless. We can see one of the roots for Bolshevik indifference to working class self-management. As Samuel Farber notes that *"there is no evidence indicating that Lenin or any of the mainstream Bolshevik leaders lamented the loss of workers' control or of democracy in the soviets, or at least referred to these losses as a retreat, as Lenin declared with the replacement of War Communism by NEP in 1921."* [**Before Stalinism**, p. 44] There was no need, for such means had no impact on achieving the ends Bolshevik power had set itself. As we discuss in [section 6](#), such questions of meaningful working class participation in the workplace or the soviets were considered by the likes of Trotsky as fundamentally irrelevant to whether Bolshevik Russia was socialist or whether the working class was the ruling class or not, incredible as it may seem.

So if we accept Marx's basic schema, then we simply have to conclude that what means we use are, ultimately, irrelevant as there is only one outcome. As long as property is nationalised and a non-capitalist party holds state power, then the basic socialist nature of the regime automatically flows. This was, of course, Trotsky's argument with regard to Stalinist Russia and why he defended it against those who recognised that it was a new form of class society. Yet it is precisely the rise of Stalinism out of the dictatorship of the Bolsheviks which exposes the limitations in the Marxist schema of historical development.

Simply put, there is no guarantee that getting rid of capitalism will result in a decent society. As anarchists like Bakunin argued against Marx, it is possible to get rid of capitalism while not creating socialism, if we understand by that term a free, classless society of equals. Rather, a Marxist revolution would *"concentrate all the powers of government in strong hands, because the very fact that the people are ignorant necessitates strong, solicitous care by the government. [It] will create a single State bank, concentrating in its hands all the commercial, industrial, agricultural, and even scientific production; and they will divide the mass of people into two armies -- industrial and agricultural armies under the direct command of the State engineers who will constitute the new privileged scientific-political class."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 289] As Bolshevism proved, there **was** always an alternative to socialism or a reversion to capitalism, in this case **state** capitalism.

So libertarians have long been aware that actually existing capitalism could be replaced by another form

of class society. As the experience of Bolshevik tyranny proves beyond doubt, this perspective is the correct one. And that perspective ensured that during the Russian Revolution the Makhnovists **had** to encourage free soviets and workers' self-management, freedom of speech and organisation in order for the revolution to remain socialist (see the appendix on "[Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?](#)"). In contrast, the Bolsheviks implemented party dictatorship, nationalisation and one-man management while proclaiming this had something to do with socialism. Little wonder Trotsky had such difficulties understanding the obvious truth that Stalinism has **nothing** to do with socialism.

## 2 Why did the Marxist theory of the state undermine working class power?

As discussed in [section H.3.7](#), anarchists and Marxists have fundamentally different definitions of what constitutes a state. These different definitions resulted, in practice, to the Bolsheviks undermining **real** working class power during the Russian Revolution in favour of an abstract "power" which served as little more than a fig-leaf for Bolshevik power.

For anarchists, the state is marked by centralised power in the hands of a few. The state, we argue, is designed to ensure minority rule and, consequently, cannot be used by the majority to manage their own affairs. Every bourgeois revolution, moreover, has been marked by a conflict between centralised power and popular power and, unsurprisingly, the bourgeois favoured the former over the latter. As such, we would expect centralised power (i.e. a state) to be the means by which a minority class seized power **over** the masses and never the means by which the majority managed society themselves. It was for this reason that anarchists refuse to confuse a federation of self-managed organisations with a state:

*"The reader knows by now that the anarchists refused to use the term 'State' even for a transitional situation. The gap between authoritarians and libertarians has not always been very wide on this score. In the First International the collectivists, whose spokesman was Bakunin, allowed the terms 'regenerate State,' 'new and revolutionary State,' or even 'socialist State' to be accepted as synonyms for 'social collective.' The anarchists soon saw, however, that it was rather dangerous for them to use the same word as the authoritarians while giving it a quite different meaning. They felt that a new concept called for a new word and that the use of the old term could be dangerously ambiguous; so they ceased to give the name 'State' to the social collective of the future."* [Daniel Guerin, **Anarchism**, pp. 60-1]

This is no mere semantics. The essence of statism is the removal of powers that should belong to the community as whole (though they may for reasons of efficiency delegate their actual implementation to elected, mandated and recallable committees) into the hands of a tiny minority who claim to act on our behalf and in our interests but who are not under our direct control. In other words it continues the division into rulers and ruled. Any confusion between two such radically different forms of organisation

can only have a seriously negative effect on the development of any revolution. At its most basic, it allows those in power to develop structures and practices which disempower the many while, at the same time, taking about extending working class "power."

The roots of this confusion can be found at the root of Marxism. As discussed in [section H.3.7](#), Marx and Engels had left a somewhat contradictory inheritance on the nature and role of the state. Unlike anarchists, who clearly argued that only confusion would arise by calling the organs of popular self-management required by a revolution a "state," the founders of Marxism confused two radically different ideas. On the one hand, there is the idea of a radical and participatory democracy (as per the model of the Paris Commune). On the other, there is a centralised body with a government in charge (as per the model of the democratic state). By using the term "state" to cover these two radically different concepts, it allowed the Bolsheviks to confuse party power with popular power and, moreover, replace the latter by the former without affecting the so-called "proletarian" nature of the state. The confusion of popular organs of self-management with a state ensured that these organs **were** submerged by state structures and top-down rule.

By confusing the state (delegated power, necessarily concentrated in the hands of a few) with the organs of popular self-management Marxism opened up the possibility of a "workers' state" which is simply the rule of a few party leaders over the masses. The "truth of the matter," wrote Emma Goldman, "is that the Russian people have been **locked out** and that the Bolshevik State -- even as the bourgeois industrial master -- uses the sword and the gun to keep the people out. In the case of the Bolsheviks this tyranny is masked by a world-stirring slogan . . . Just because I am a revolutionist I refuse to side with the master class, which in Russia is called the Communist Party." [My Disillusionment in Russia, p. xlix] In this, she simply saw in practice that which Bakunin had predicted would happen. For Bakunin, like all anarchists, "every state power, every government, by its nature and by its position stands outside the people and above them, and must invariably try to subject them to rules and objectives which are alien to them." It was for this reason "we declare ourselves the enemies of every government and state every state power . . . the people can only be happy and free when they create their own life, organising themselves from below upwards." [Statism and Anarchy, p. 136]

The "workers' state" proved no exception to that generalisation. The roots of the problem, which expressed itself from the start during the Russian revolution, was the fatal confusion of the state with organs of popular self-management. Lenin argued in "State and Revolution" that, on the one hand, "the armed proletariat itself shall **become the government**" while, on the other, that "[w]e cannot imagine democracy, not even proletarian democracy, without representative institutions." If, as Lenin asserts, democracy "means equality" he has reintroduced inequality into the "proletarian" state as the representatives have, by definition, more power than those who elected them. [Essential Works of Lenin, p. 363, p. 306 and p. 346] Yet, as noted in [section H.1.2](#), representative bodies necessarily place policy-making in the hands of deputies and do not (and cannot) mean that the working class **as a class** can manage society. Moreover, such bodies ensure that popular power can be usurped without difficulty by a minority. After all, a minority already **does** hold power.

True equality implies the abolition of the state and its replacement by a federation of self-managed communes. The state, as anarchists have long stressed, signifies a power **above** society, a concentration of power into a few hands. Lenin, ironically, quotes Engels on the state being marked by *"the establishment of a **public power**, which is no longer directly identical with the population organising itself as an armed power."* [quoted by Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 275] As Lenin supported **representative** structures rather than one based on elected, mandated and recallable **delegates** then he has created a *"public power"* no longer identical with the population.

Combine this with an awareness that bureaucracy must continue to exist in the "proletarian" state then we have the ideological preconditions for dictatorship **over** the proletariat. *"There can be no thought,"* asserted Lenin, *"of destroying officialdom immediately everywhere, completely. That is utopia. But to **smash** the old bureaucratic machine at once and to begin immediately to construct a new one that will enable all officialdom to be gradually abolished is **not** utopia."* In other words, Lenin expected *"the gradual 'withering away' of all bureaucracy."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 306 and p. 307]

Yet why expect a "new" bureaucracy to be as easy to control as the old one? Regular election to posts does not undermine the institutional links, pressures and powers a centralised "officialdom" will generate around itself, even a so-called "proletarian" one. Significantly, Lenin justified this defence of temporary state bureaucracy by the kind of straw man argument against anarchism *"State and Revolution"* is riddled with. *"We are not utopians,"* asserted Lenin, *"we do not indulge in 'dreams' of dispensing **at once** with all administration, with all subordination: these anarchist dreams . . . are totally alien to Marxism, and, as a matter of fact, serve only to postpone the socialist revolution until human nature has changed. No, we want the socialist revolution with human nature as it is now, with human nature that cannot dispense with subordination, control and 'managers.'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 307] Yet anarchists do not wish to "dispense" with "all administration," rather we wish to replace government **by** administration, hierarchical positions ("*subordination*") with co-operative organisation. Equally, we see the revolution as a process in which "*human nature*" is changed by the struggle itself so that working class people become capable of organising itself and society without bosses, bureaucrats and politicians. If Lenin says that socialism "*cannot dispense*" with the hierarchical structures required by class society why should we expect the same kinds of structures and social relationships to have different ends just because "*red*" managers are in power?

Thus Lenin's work is deeply ambiguous. He is confusing popular self-management with a state structure. Anarchists argue that states, by their very nature, are based on concentrated, centralised, alienated power in the hands of a few. Thus Lenin's "*workers' state*" is just the same as any other state, namely rule by a few over the many. This is confirmed when Lenin argues that *"[u]nder socialism, **all** will take part in the work of government in turn and will soon become accustomed to no one governing."* In fact, once the "*overwhelming majority*" have "*learned to administer the state **themselves**, have taken this business into their own hands . . . the need for government begins to disappear. The more complete democracy becomes, the nearer the moment approaches when it becomes unnecessary. The more democratic the 'state' of the armed workers -- which is 'no longer a state in the proper sense of the word' -- becomes, the more rapidly does **the state** begin to wither away."* Moreover, *"[u]ntil the 'higher' phase of communism arrives, the Socialists demand the **strictest** control, by society **and by the state**, of the amount of labour*

*and of consumption.*" [Op. Cit., p. 361, p. 349 and p. 345]

Clearly, the "proletarian" state is **not** based on direct, mass, participation by the population but, in fact, on giving power to a few representatives. It is **not** identical with "*society*," i.e. the armed, self-organised people. Rather than look to the popular assemblies of the French revolution, Lenin, like the bourgeoisie, looked to representative structures -- structures designed to combat working class power and influence. (at one point Lenin states that "*for a certain time not only bourgeois right, but even the bourgeois state remains under communism, without the bourgeoisie!*" This was because "*bourgeois right in regard to the distribution of articles of **consumption** inevitably presupposes the existence of the **bourgeois state**, for right is nothing without an apparatus capable of **enforcing** the observance of the standards of right.*" [Op. Cit., p. 346]).

Can we expect the same types of organs and social relationships to produce different results simply because Lenin is at the head of the state? Of course not.

As the Marxist theory of the state confused party/vanguard power with working class power, we should not be surprised that Lenin's "*State and Revolution*" failed to discuss the practicalities of this essential question in anything but a passing and ambiguous manner. For example, Lenin notes that "[b]y educating the workers' party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat which is capable of assuming power and of **leading the whole people** to socialism, of directing and organising the new order." [Op. Cit., p. 288] It is not clear whether it is the vanguard or the proletariat as a whole which assumes power. Later, he states that "*the dictatorship of the proletariat*" was "*the organisation of the vanguard of the oppressed as the ruling class for the purpose of crushing the oppressors.*" [Op. Cit., p. 337] Given that this fits in with subsequent Bolshevik practice, it seems clear that it is the vanguard which assumes power rather than the whole class. The negative effects of this are discussed in [section 8](#).

However, the assumption of power by the party highlights the key problem with the Marxist theory of the state and how it could be used to justify the destruction of popular power. It does not matter in the Marxist schema whether the class or the party is in power, it does not impact on whether the working class is the "*ruling class*" or not. As Lenin put it. "*democracy is **not** identical with the subordination of the minority to the majority. Democracy is a **state** which recognises the subordination of the minority to the majority, i.e. an organisation for the systematic use of **violence** by one class against the other, by one section of the population against another.*" [Op. Cit., p. 332] Thus the majority need not actually "*rule*" (i.e. make the fundamental decisions) for a regime to be considered a "*democracy*" or an instrument of class rule. That power can be delegated to a party leadership (even dictatorship) without harming the "*class nature*" of the state. This results of such a theory can be seen from Bolshevik arguments in favour of party dictatorship during the civil war period (and beyond).

The problem with the centralised, representative structures Lenin favours for the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*" is that they are rooted in the inequality of power. They constitute in fact, if not initially in theory, a power **above** society. As Lenin put it, "*the **essence** of bureaucracy*" is "*privileged persons divorced from the masses and **superior to the masses.***" [Op. Cit., p. 360] In the words of Malatesta, a



*"government, that is a group of people entrusted with making laws and empowered to use the collective power to oblige each individual to obey them, is already a privileged class and cut off from the people. As any constituted body would do, it will instinctively seek to extend its powers, to be beyond public control, to impose its own policies and to give priority to its special interests. Having been put in a privileged position, the government is already at odds with the people whose strength it disposes of."* [Anarchy, p. 34] As we discussed in appendix ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#), Lenin's regime provides more than enough evidence to support such an analysis.

This is the fatal flaw in the Marxist theory of the state. As Bakunin put it, *"the theory of the state" is "based on this fiction of pseudo-popular representation -- which in actual fact means the government of the masses by an insignificant handful of privileged individuals, elected (or even not elected) by mobs of people rounded up for voting and never knowing what or whom they are voting for -- on this imaginary and abstract expression of the imaginary thought and will of the all the people, of which the real, living people do not have the faintest idea."* Thus the state represents *"government of the majority by a minority in the name of the presumed stupidity of the one and the presumed intelligence of the other."* [Op. Cit., pp. 136-7]

By confusing popular participation with a state, by ignoring the real inequalities of power in any state structure, Marxism allowed Lenin and the Bolsheviks to usurp state power, implement party dictatorship **and** continue to talk about the working class being in power. Because of Marxism's metaphysical definition of the state (see [section H.3.7](#)), actual working class people's power over their lives is downplayed, if not ignored, in favour party power.

As parties represent classes in this schema, if the party is in power then, by definition, so is the class. This raises the possibility of Lenin asserting the *"working class"* held power even when his party was exercising a dictatorship **over** the working class and violently repressing any protests by it. As one socialist historian puts it, *"while it is true that Lenin recognised the different functions and democratic raison d'etre for both the soviets and his party, in the last analysis it was the party that was more important than the soviets. In other words, the party was the final repository of working-class sovereignty. Thus, Lenin did not seem to have been reflected on or have been particularly perturbed by the decline of the soviets after 1918."* [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 212] This can be seen from how the Marxist theory of the state was changed **after** the Bolsheviks seized power to bring into line with its new role as the means by which the vanguard ruled society (see [section H.3.8](#)).

This confusion between two radically different concepts and their submersion into the term *"state"* had its negative impact from the start. Firstly, the Bolsheviks constantly equated rule by the Bolshevik party (in practice, its central committee) with the working class as a whole. Rather than rule by all the masses, the Bolsheviks substituted rule by a handful of leaders. Thus we find Lenin talking about *"the power of the Bolsheviks -- that is, the power of the proletariat"* as if these things were the same. Thus it was a case of *"the Bolsheviks"* having *"to take the whole governmental power into their own hands,"* of *"the complete assumption of power by the Bolsheviks alone,"* rather than the masses. Indeed, Russia had been *"ruled by 130,000 landowners"* and *"yet they tell us that Russia will not be able to be governed by the*

240,000 members of the Bolshevik Party -- governing in the interests of the poor and against the rich." [Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?, p. 102, p. 7 and pp. 61-2]

However, governing in the "interests" of the poor is **not** the same as the poor governing themselves. Thus we have the first key substitution that leads to authoritarian rule, namely the substitution of the power of the masses by the power of a few members who make up the government. Such a small body will require a centralised state system and, consequently, we have the creation of a hierarchical body around the new government which, as we discuss in [section 7](#), will become the real master in society.

The preconditions for a new form of class society have been created and, moreover, they are rooted in the basic ideas of Marxism. Society has been split into two bodies, the masses and those who claim to rule in their name. Given this basic inequality in power we would, according to anarchist theory, expect the interests of the masses and the rulers to separate and come into conflict. While the Bolsheviks had the support of the working class (as they did in the first few months of their rule), this does not equal mass participation in running society. Quite the reverse. So while Lenin raised the vision of mass participation in the "final" stage of communism, he unfortunately blocked the means to get there.

Simply put, a self-managed society can only be created by self-managed means. To think we can have a "public power" separate from the masses which will, slowly, dissolve itself into it is the height of naivety. Unsurprisingly, once in power the Bolsheviks held onto power by all means available, including gerrymandering and disbanding soviets, suppressing peaceful opposition parties and violently repressing the very workers it claimed ruled in "soviet" Russia (see [section 6](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)"). Significantly, this conflict developed before the start of the civil war (see [section 3](#) of the appendix on "[What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?](#)" for details). So when popular support was lost, the basic contradictions in the Bolshevik position and theory became clear. Rather than be a "soviet" power, the Bolshevik regime was simply rule over the workers in their name, nothing more. And equally unsurprising, the Leninists revised their theory of the state to take into account the realities of state power and the need to justify minority power **over** the masses (see [section H.3.8](#)).

Needless to say, even electoral support for the Bolsheviks should not and cannot be equated to working class management of society. Echoing Marx and Engels at their most reductionist (see [section H.3.9](#)), Lenin stressed that the state was "*an organ or machine for the subjection of one class by another . . . when the State has become proletarian, when it has become a machine for the domination of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, then we shall fully and unreservedly for a strong government and centralism.*" [Op. Cit., p. 75] The notions that the state could have interests of its own, that it is not simply an instrument of class rule but rather **minority** class rule are nowhere to be found. The implications of this simplistic analysis had severe ramifications for the Russian Revolution and Trotskyist explanations of both Stalinism and its rise.

Which brings us to the second issue. It is clear that by considering the state simply as an instrument of class rule Lenin could downplay, even ignore, such important questions of **how** the working class can

"rule" society, how it can be a "ruling" class. Blinded by the notion that a state could not be anything **but** an instrument of class rule, the Bolsheviks simply were able to justify any limitation of working class democracy and freedom and argue that it had no impact on whether the Bolshevik regime was really a "dictatorship of the proletariat" or not. This can be seen from Lenin's polemic with German Social-Democrat Karl Kautsky, where he glibly stated that "*[t]he form of government, has absolutely nothing to do with it.*" [**Collected Works**, vol. 28, p. 238]

Yet the idea that there is a difference between **who** rules in a revolutionary situation and **how** they rule is a key one, and one raised by the anarchists against Marxism. After all, if the working class is politically expropriated how can you maintain that a regime is remotely "proletarian"? Ultimately, the working class can only "rule" society through its collective participation in decision making (social, economic and "political"). If working class people are not managing their own affairs, if they have delegated that power to a few party leaders then they are **not** a ruling class and could never be. While the bourgeoisie can, and has, ruled economically under an actual dictatorship, the same cannot be said to be the case with the working class. Every class society is marked by a clear division between order takers and order givers. To think that such a division can be implemented in a socialist revolution and for it to remain socialist is pure naivety. As the Bolshevik revolution showed, representative government is the first step in the political expropriation of the working class from control over their fate.

This can best be seen by Trotsky's confused analyses of Stalinism. He simply could not understand the nature of Stalinism with the simplistic analytical tools he inherited from mainstream Marxism and Bolshevism. Thus we find him arguing in 1933 that:

*"The dictatorship of a class does not mean by a long shot that its entire mass always participates in the management of the state. This we have seen, first of all, in the case of the propertied classes. The nobility ruled through the monarchy before which the noble stood on his knees. The dictatorship of the bourgeoisie took on comparatively developed democratic forms only under the conditions of capitalist upswing when the ruling class had nothing to fear. Before our own eyes, democracy has been supplanted in Germany by Hitler's autocracy, with all the traditional bourgeois parties smashed to smithereens. Today, the German bourgeoisie does not rule directly; politically it is placed under complete subjection to Hitler and his bands. Nevertheless, the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie remains inviolate in Germany, because all the conditions of its social hegemony have been preserved and strengthened. By expropriating the bourgeoisie politically, Hitler saved it, even if temporarily, from economic expropriation. The fact that the bourgeoisie was compelled to resort to the fascist regime testifies to the fact that its hegemony was endangered but not at all that it had fallen."* [Trotsky, **The Class Nature Of The Soviet State**]

Yet Trotsky is confusing the matter. He is comparing the actions of class society with those a socialist revolution. While a minority class need not "*participate*" **en mass** the question arises does this apply to the transition from class society to a classless one? Can the working class **really** can be "*expropriated*" politically and still remain "*the ruling class*"? Moreover, Trotsky fails to note that the working class was

**economically** and **politically** expropriated under Stalinism as well. This is unsurprising, as both forms of expropriation had occurred when he and Lenin held the reins of state power. Yet Trotsky's confused ramblings do serve a purpose in showing how the Marxist theory of the state can be used to rationalise the replacement of popular power by party power. With such ideological baggage, can it be a surprise that the Bolshevik replacement of workers' power by party power could be a revolutionary goal? Ironically, the Marxist theory of the state as an instrument of class rule helped ensure that the Russian working class did **not** become the ruling class post-October. Rather, it ensured that the Bolshevik party did.

To conclude, by its reductionist logic, the Marxist theory of the state ensured that the substitution of popular power by party power could go ahead and, moreover, be justified ideologically. The first steps towards party dictatorship can be found in such apparently "libertarian" works as Lenin's *"State and Revolution"* with its emphasis on "representation" and "centralisation." The net effect of this was to centralise power into fewer and fewer hands, replacing the essential constructive working class participation and self-activity required by a social revolution with top-down rule by a few party leaders. Such rule could not avoid becoming bureaucratised and coming into conflict with the real aspirations and interests of those it claimed to represent. In such circumstances, in a conflict between the *"workers' state"* and the actual workers the Marxist theory of the state, combined with the assumptions of vanguardism, made the shift to party dictatorship inevitable. As we discussed in [section 3](#) of the appendix on ["What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?"](#), authoritarian tendencies had surfaced before the civil war began.

The strange paradox of Leninism, namely that the theoretical dictatorship of the proletariat was, in practice, a dictatorship **over** the proletariat comes as no surprise. In spite of Lenin announcing *"all power to the soviets"* he remained committed to a disciplined party wielding centralised power. This regime soon expropriated the soviets while calling the subsequent regime "Soviet." Rather than create the authoritarian tendencies of the Bolshevik state the "objective factors" facing Lenin's regime simply increased their impact. The preconditions for the minority rule which the civil war intensified to extreme levels already existed within Marxist theory. Consequently, a Leninist revolution which avoided the (inevitable) problems facing a revolution would still create some kind of class society simply because it reproduces minority rule by creating a *"workers' state"* as its first step. Sadly, Marxist theory confuses popular self-government with a state so ensuring the substitution of rule by a few party leaders for the popular participation required to ensure a successful revolution.

### **3 How did Engels' essay *"On Authority"* affect the revolution?**

We have discussed Engels' infamous diatribe against anarchism already (see [section H.4](#) and subsequent sections). Here we discuss how its caricature of anarchism helped disarm the Bolsheviks theoretically to the dangers of their own actions, so helping to undermine the socialist potential of the Russian revolution. While the Marxist theory of the state, with its ahistoric and ambiguous use of the word "state" undermined popular autonomy and power in favour of party power, Engels' essay *"On Authority"* helped undermine popular self-management.

Simply put, Engels' essay contained the germs from which Lenin and Trotsky's support for one-man management flowed. He provided the Marxist orthodoxy required to undermine real working class power by confusing all forms of organisation with "*authority*" and equating the necessity of self-discipline with "*subordination*" to one will. Engels' infamous essay helped Lenin to destroy self-management in the workplace and replace it with appointed "*one-man management*" armed with "*dictatorial powers*."

For Lenin and Trotsky, familiar with Engels' "*On Authority*," it was a truism that any form of organisation was based on "*authoritarianism*" and, consequently, it did not really matter **how** that "*authority*" was constituted. Thus Marxism's agnostic attitude to the patterns of domination and subordination within society was used to justify one-man management and party dictatorship. Indeed, "*Soviet socialist democracy and individual management and dictatorship are in no way contradictory . . . the will of a class may sometimes be carried by a dictator, who sometimes does more alone and is frequently more necessary.*" [Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 30, p. 476]

Like Engels, Lenin defended the principle of authority. The dictatorship of the Party over the proletariat found its apology in this principle, thoroughly grounded in the practice of bureaucracy and modern factory production. Authority, hierarchy, and the need for submission and domination is inevitable given the current mode of production, they argued. And no foreseeable change in social relations could ever overcome this blunt necessity. As such, it was (fundamentally) irrelevant **how** a workplace is organised as, no matter what, it would be "*authoritarian*." Thus "*one-man management*" would be, basically, the same as worker's self-management via an elected factory committee.

For Engels, any form of joint activity required as its "*first condition*" a "*dominant will that settles all subordinate questions, whether this will is represented by a single delegate or a committee charged with the execution of the resolutions of the majority of persons interested. In either case there is very pronounced authority.*" Thus the "*necessity of authority, and of imperious authority at that.*" Collective life, he stressed, required "*a certain authority, no matter how delegated*" and "*a certain subordination, are things which, independently of all social organisation, are imposed upon us.*" [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 732]

Lenin was aware of these arguments, even quoting from this essay in his **State and Revolution**. Thus he was aware that for Engels, collective decisions meant "*the will of the single individual will always have to subordinate itself, which means that questions are settled in an authoritarian way.*" Thus there was no difference if "*they are settled by decision of a delegate placed at the head of each branch of labour or, if possible, by a majority vote.*" The more advanced the technology, the greater the "*despotism*": "*The automatic machinery of a big factory is much more despotic than the small capitalist who employ workers ever have been.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 731] Thus Engels had used the modern factory system of mass production as a direct analogy to argue against the anarchist call for workers' councils and self-management in production, for workers' autonomy and participation. Like Engels, Lenin stressed the necessity of central authority in industry.

It can be argued that it was this moment that ensured the creation of state capitalism under the Bolsheviks. This is the moment in Marxist theory when the turn from economics to technics, from proletarian control to technocracy, from workers' self-management to appointed state management was ensured. Henceforth the end of any critique of alienation in mainstream Marxism was assured. Submission to technique under hierarchical authority effectively prevents active participation in the social production of values. And there was no alternative.

As noted in [section 8](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)"). and [section H.3.14](#), during 1917 Lenin did not favour workers' self-management of production. He raised the idea of "*workers' control*" after the workers spontaneously raised the idea and practice themselves during the revolution. Moreover, he interpreted that slogan in his own way, placing it within a statist context and within institutions inherited from capitalism (see [section H.3.12](#)). Once in power, it was (unsurprisingly) **his** vision of socialism and workers' control that was implemented, **not** the workers' factory committees. The core of that vision he repeatedly stressed had been raised **before** the October revolution.

This vision can be best seen in **The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, written by Lenin and published on the 25th of April 1918. This occurred before the start of the civil war and, indeed, he starts by arguing that "*[t]hanks to the peace which has been achieved*" the Bolsheviks had "*gained an opportunity to concentrate its efforts for a while on the most important and most difficult aspect of the socialist revolution, namely the task of organisation.*" The Bolsheviks, who had "*managed to complete the conquest of power,*" now faced "*the principal task of convincing people*" and doing "**practical organisational work.**" Only when this was done "*will it be possible to say that Russia **has become** not only a Soviet, but also a socialist, republic.*" [**The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, p. 2 and p. 8]

Sadly, this "*organisation*" was riddled with authoritarianism and was fundamentally top-down in nature. His "socialist" vision was simply state capitalism (see [section 10](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)"). However, what interests us here is that his arguments to justify the "socialist" policies he presented are similar to those put forward by Engels in "*On Authority.*" As such, we can only reach the following conclusions. Firstly, that the "*state capitalist*" vision of socialism imposed upon Russia by the Bolsheviks was what they had always intended to introduce. It was their limited support for workers' control in 1917 that was atypical and not part of their tradition, **not** their policies once in power (as modern day Leninists assert). Secondly, that this vision had its roots in classical Marxism, specifically Engels' "*On Authority*" and the identification of socialism with nationalised property (see [section H.3.13](#) for more on this).

That Engels diatribe had a negative impact on the development of the Russian revolution can easily be seen from Lenin's arguments. For example, Lenin argues that the "*tightening of discipline*" and "*harmonious organisation*" calls "*for coercion -- coercion precisely in the form of dictatorship.*" He did not object to granting "*individual executives dictatorial power (or 'unlimited' powers)*" and did not think "*the appointment of individual, dictators with unlimited power*" was incompatible with "*the fundamental principles of the Soviet government.*" After all, "*the history of revolutionary movements*" had "*shown*"

that *"the dictatorship of individuals was very often the expression, the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of revolutionary classes."* He notes that *"[u]ndoubtedly, the dictatorship of individuals was compatible with bourgeois democracy."* [Op. Cit., p. 28 and p. 32] It would be churlish to note that previous revolutionary movements had not been **socialist** in nature and did not aim to **abolish** classes. In such cases, the government appointing people with dictatorial powers would not have harmed the nature of the revolution, which was transferring power from one minority class to another.

Lenin mocked the *"exceedingly poor arguments"* of those who objected, saying that they *"demand of us a higher democracy than bourgeois democracy and say: personal dictatorship is absolutely incompatible with your, Bolshevik (i.e. not bourgeois, **but socialist**) Soviet democracy."* As the Bolsheviks were *"not anarchists,"* he admitted the need *"coercion"* in the *"transition from capitalism to socialism,"* its form being determined *"by the degree of development of the given revolutionary class, and also by special circumstances."* In general, he stressed, there was *"absolutely **no** contradiction in principle between Soviet (**that is, socialist**) democracy and the exercise of dictatorial powers by individuals."* [Op. Cit., pp. 32-3 and p. 33] Which is, of course, sophistry as dictatorship by a few people in some aspects of life will erode democracy in others. For example, being subject to the economic power of the capitalist during work harms the individual and reduces their ability to participate in other aspects of social life. Why should being subject to "red" bosses be any different?

In particular, Lenin argued that *"individual dictatorial power"* was required because *"large-scale machine industry"* (which is the *"foundation of socialism"*) calls for *"absolute and strict **unity of will**, which directs the joint labours of hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands of people. . . But how can strict unity of will be ensured? By thousands subordinating their will to the will of one."* He reiterated that the *"**unquestioning subordination** to a single will is absolutely necessary for the success of processes organised on the pattern of large-scale machine industry."* The people must *"**unquestioningly obey the single will** of the leaders of labour."* And so it was a case (for the workers, at least) of *"[o]bedience, and unquestioning obedience at that, during work to the one-man decisions of Soviet directors, of the dictators elected or appointed by Soviet institutions, vested with dictatorial powers."* [Op. Cit., p. 33, p. 34 and p. 44]

The parallels with Engels' *"On Authority"* could not be clearer, as are the fallacies of Lenin's assertions (see, for example, [section H.4.4](#)). Lenin, like Engels, uses the example of modern industry to bolster his arguments. Yet the net effect of Lenin's argument was to eliminate working class economic power at the point of production. Instead of socialist social relationships, Lenin imposed capitalist ones. Indeed, no capitalist would disagree with Lenin's workplace regime -- they try to create such a regime by breaking unions and introducing technologies and techniques which allow them to control the workers. Unsurprisingly, Lenin also urged the introduction of two such techniques, namely *"piece-work"* and *"applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system."* [Op. Cit., pp. 23-4] As Trotskyist Tony Cliff reminds us, *"the employers have at their disposal a number of effective methods of disrupting th[e] unity [of workers as a class]. Once of the most important of these is the fostering of competition between workers by means of piece-work systems."* He notes that these were used by the Nazis and the Stalinists *"for the same purpose."* [State Capitalism in Russia, pp. 18-9] Obviously piece-work is different when Lenin introduces it! Similarly, when Trotsky notes that *"[b]lind obedience is not*

*a thing to be proud of in a revolutionary,"* it is somewhat different when Lenin calls upon workers to do so (or, for that matter, Trotsky himself when in power -- see [section 6](#) for Trotsky's radically different perspective on blind obedience of the worker to "his" state in 1920!). [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. xlvii]

The **economic** dominance of the bourgeoisie ensures the political dispossession of the working class. Why expect the introduction of capitalist social relations in production to have different outcomes just because Lenin was the head of the government? In the words of libertarian socialist Maurice Brinton:

*"We hold that the 'relations of production' -- the relations which individuals or groups enter into with one another in the process of producing wealth - are the essential foundations of any society. A certain pattern of relations of production is the common denominator of all class societies. This pattern is one in which the producer does not dominate the means of production but on the contrary both is 'separated from them' and from the products of his own labour. In all class societies the producer is in a position of subordination to those who manage the productive process. Workers' management of production -- implying as it does the total domination of the producer over the productive process -- is not for us a marginal matter. It is the core of our politics. It is the only means whereby authoritarian (order-giving, order-taking) relations in production can be transcended and a free, communist or anarchist, society introduced.*

*"We also hold that the means of production may change hands (passing for instance from private hands into those of a bureaucracy, collectively owning them) with out this revolutionising the relations of production. Under such circumstances -- and whatever the formal status of property -- the society is still a class society for production is still managed by an agency other than the producers themselves. Property relations, in other words, do not necessarily reflect the: relations of production. They may serve to mask them -- and in fact they often have."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. vii-viii]

The net effect of Lenin's arguments, as anarchist Peter Arshinov noted a few years later, was that the "fundamental fact" of the Bolshevik revolution was "that the workers and the peasant labourers remained within the earlier situation of 'working classes' -- producers managed by authority from above." He stressed that Bolshevik political and economic ideas may have "remov[ed] the workers from the hands of individual capitalists" but they "delivered them to the yet more rapacious hands of a single ever-present capitalist boss, the State. The relations between the workers and this new boss are the same as earlier relations between labour and capital . . . Wage labour has remained what it was before, expect that it has taken on the character of an obligation to the State. . . . It is clear that in all this we are dealing with a simple substitution of State capitalism for private capitalism." [**The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 35 and p. 71] Moreover, Lenin's position failed to understand that unless workers have power at the point of production, they will soon lose it in society as a whole. Which, of course, they soon did in Bolshevik Russia, even in the limited form of electing a "revolutionary" government.



So while the causes of the failure of the Russian Revolution were many fold, the obvious influence of Engels' "*On Authority*" on the fate of the workers' control movement should be noted. After all, Engels' argument confuses the issues that Bakunin and other anarchists were trying to raise (namely on the nature of the organisations we create and our relationships with others). If, as Engels' argues, all organisation is "*authoritarian*," then does this mean that there no real difference between organisational structures? Is a dictatorship just the same as a self-managed group, as they are both organisations and so both "*authoritarian*"? If so, surely that means the kinds of organisation we create are irrelevant and what **really** matters is state ownership? Such logic can only lead to the perspective that working class self-management of production is irrelevant to socialism and, unfortunately, the experience of the Russian Revolution tends to suggest that for mainstream Marxism this is the case. The Bolsheviks imposed distinctly authoritarian social structures while arguing that they were creating socialism.

Like Engels, the Bolsheviks defended the principle of authority. The dictatorship of the Party over the proletariat in the workplace (and, indeed, elsewhere) ultimately found its apology in this principle, thoroughly grounded in the practice of bureaucracy and modern factory production. Authority, hierarchy, and the need for submission and domination is inevitable, given the current mode of production, they argued. And, as Engels had stressed, no foreseeable change in social relations could ever overcome this blunt necessity. As such, it was (fundamentally) irrelevant for the leading Bolsheviks **how** a workplace is organised as, no matter what, it would be "*authoritarian*." Thus "*one-man management*" would be, basically, the same as worker's self-management via an elected factory committee. As Trotsky made clear in 1920, for the Bolsheviks the "*dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy over the whole Soviet mechanism of the collective will of the workers [i.e. the party, which Trotsky cheerfully admits is exercising a **party** dictatorship], and not at all in the form in which individual economic enterprises are administered.*" Thus, it "*would be a most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the head of the factories.*" [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 162]

By equating "*organisation*" with "*authority*" (i.e. hierarchy) and dismissing the importance of revolutionising the social relationships people create between themselves, Engels opened the way for the Bolsheviks' advocacy of "*one-man management*." His essay is at the root of mainstream Marxism's agnostic attitude to the patterns of domination and subordination within society and was used to justify one-man management. After all, if Engels was right, then it did not matter **how** the workplace was organised. It would, inherently, be "*authoritarian*" and so what mattered, therefore, was who owned property, **not** how the workplace was run. Perhaps, then, "*On Authority*" was a self-fulfilling prophecy -- by seeing any form of organisation and any form of advanced technology as needing hierarchy, discipline and obedience, as being "*authoritarian*," it ensured that mainstream Marxism became blinded to the key question of **how** society was organised. After all, if "*despotism*" was a fact of life within industry regardless of how the wider society was organised, then it does not matter if "*one-man management*" replaces workers' self-management. Little wonder then that the continued alienation of the worker was widespread long before Stalin took power and, more importantly, before the civil war started.

As such, the dubious inheritance of classical Marxism had started to push the Bolshevik revolution down an authoritarian path and create economic structures and social relationships which were in no way socialist and, moreover, laid the foundations for Stalinism. Even if the civil war had not occurred, capitalist social relationships would have been dominant within "socialist" Russia -- with the only difference being that rather than private capitalism it would have been state capitalism. As Lenin admitted, incidentally. It is doubtful that this state capitalism would have been made to serve "*the whole people*" as Lenin naively believed.

In another way Engels identification of organisation with authority affected the outcome of the revolution. As **any** form of organisation involved, for Engels, the domination of individuals and, as such, "*authoritarian*" then the nature of the socialist state was as irrelevant as the way workplaces were run. As both party dictatorship and soviet democracy meant that the individual was "*dominated*" by collective decisions, so both were "*authoritarian.*" As such, the transformation of the soviet state into a party dictatorship did not fundamentally mean a change for the individuals subject to it. Little wonder that no leading Bolshevik called the end of soviet democracy and its replacement by party dictatorship as a "retreat" or even as something to be worried about (indeed, they all argued the opposite, namely that party dictatorship was essential and not an issue to be worried about).

Perhaps this analogy by the SWP's Tony Cliff of the relationship between the party and the working class provides an insight:

*"In essence the dictatorship of the proletariat **does not** represent a combination of abstract, immutable elements like democracy and centralism, independent of time and space. The actual level of democracy, as well as centralism, depends on three basic factors: 1. the strength of the proletariat; 2. the material and cultural legacy left to it by the old regime; and 3. the strength of capitalist resistance. The level of democracy feasible must be indirect proportion to the first two factors, and in inverse proportion to the third. The captain of an ocean liner can allow football to be played on his vessel; on a tiny raft in a stormy sea the level of tolerance is far lower."* [Lenin, vol. 3, p. 179]

Ignoring the obvious points (such as comparing working class freedom and democracy to a game!), we can see shades of Engels in Cliff's words. Let us not forget that Engels argued that "*a ship on the high seas*" at a "*time of danger*" required "*the necessity of authority, and of imperious authority at that.*" [Op. Cit., p. 732] Here Cliff is placing the party into the Captain's role and the workers as the crew. The Captain, in Engels argument, exercised "*imperious authority.*" In Cliff's, the party decides the freedoms which working class people are allowed to have -- and so subjects them to its "*imperious authority.*"

Little wonder Bolshevism failed. By this simple analogy Cliff shows the authoritarian essence of Bolshevism and who really has "*all power*" under that system. Like the crew and passengers dominated by the will of the captain, the working class under Leninism will be dominated by the party. It does not bode well that Cliff thinks that democracy can be "*feasible*" in some circumstances, but not others and it is up to those in power (i.e. the party leaders) to determine when it was. In his rush to justify Bolshevik

party dictatorship in terms of "objective conditions" he clearly forgot his earlier comments that the *"liberation of the working class can only be achieved through the action of the working class. Hence one can have a revolution with more or less violence, with more or less suppression of civil rights of the bourgeoisie and its hangers-on [a general catch-all category which, if Bolshevik practice is anything to go by, can include rebel workers, indeed the whole working class!], with more or less political freedom, but one cannot have a revolution, as the history of Russia conclusively demonstrates, without workers' democracy -- even if restricted and distorted. Socialist advance must be gauged by workers' freedom, by their power to shape their own destiny . . . Without workers' democracy the immediate means leads to a very different end, to an end that is prefigured in these same means."* [Op. Cit., p. 110] Obviously if Lenin and Trotsky are the captains of the ship of state, such considerations are less important. When it is Lenin wielding *"imperious authority"* then workers' democracy can be forgotten and the regime remain a *"workers' state"*!

By ignoring the key issue Bakunin and other anarchists drew attention to by attacking *"authority"* (and let us not forget that by that they meant hierarchical organisations in which power is concentrated at the top in a few hands -- see [section H.4](#)), Engels opened up the way of seeing democratic decision as being less than important. This is **not** to suggest that Engels favoured dictatorship. Rather we are suggesting that by confusing two radically different forms of organisation as self-management and hierarchy he blunted latter Marxists to the importance of participation and collective decision making from below. After all, if all organisation is *"authoritarian"* then it matters little, in the end, how it is structured. Dictatorship, representative democracy and self-management were all equally *"authoritarian"* and so the issues raised by anarchism can safely be ignored (namely that electing bosses does not equate to freedom). Thus the Bolshevik willingness to equate their dictatorship with rule by the working class is not such a surprise after all.

To conclude, rather than the anti-authoritarians not knowing *"what they are talking about," "creating nothing but confusion," "betraying the movement of the proletariat"* and *"serv[ing] the reaction,"* it was Engels' essay that aided the Bolshevik counter-revolution and helped, in its own small way, to lay the foundations for Leninist tyranny and state capitalism. [Engels, **Op. Cit.**, p. 733] Ultimately, Engels *"On Authority"* helped give Lenin the ideological premises by which to undermine workers' economic power during the revolution and recreate capitalist social relations and call it *"socialism."* His ill thought out diatribe had ramifications even he would never have guessed (but were obvious at the time to libertarians). His use of the modern factory system to argue against the anarchist call for workers' councils, federalism and workers' autonomy, for participation, for self-management, became the basis for re-imposing **capitalist** relations of production in revolutionary Russia.

## 4 How did the Bolshevik vision of "democracy" affect the revolution?

As discussed in [section H.3.2](#), Marx and Engels had left their followers with a contradictory legacy as regards *"socialism from below."* On the one hand, their praise for the Paris Commune and its libertarian ideas pointed to a participatory democracy run from below. On the other, Marx's comments during the

German Revolution in 1850 that the workers must "*strive for . . . the most determined centralisation of power in the hands of the state authority*" because "*the path of revolutionary activity*" can "proceed only from the centre" suggests a top-down approach. He stressed that centralisation of power was essential to overcome local autonomy, which would allow "*every village, every town and every province*" to put "*a new obstacle in the path*" the revolution due to "*local and provincial obstinacy.*" [**Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 509]

Building upon this contradictory legacy, Lenin unambiguously stressed the "*from above*" aspect of it (see [section H.3.3](#) for details). The only real exception to this perspective occurred in 1917, when Lenin was trying to win mass support for his party. However, even this support for democracy from below was always tempered by reminding the reader that the Bolsheviks stood for centralisation and strong government once they were in power (see [section 7](#)).

Once in power, the promises of 1917 were quickly forgotten. Unsurprisingly, modern day Leninists argue that this was due to the difficult circumstances facing the Bolsheviks at the time. They argue that the words of 1917 represent the true democratic vision of Bolshevism. Anarchists are not impressed. After all, for an idea to be useful it must be practical -- even in "exceptional circumstances." If the Bolshevik vision is not robust enough to handle the problems that have affected every revolution then we have to question the validity of that vision or the strength of commitment its supporters hold it.

Given this, the question becomes which of these two aspects of Marxism was considered its "essence" by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Obviously, it is hard to isolate the real Bolshevik vision of democracy from the influence of "objective factors." However, we can get a taste by looking at how the Bolsheviks acted and argued during the first six months in power. During this period, the problems facing the revolution were hard but not as bad as those facing it after the Czech revolt at the end of May, 1918. Particularly after March, 1918, the Bolsheviks were in a position to start constructive work as in the middle of that month Lenin claimed that the "*Soviet Government has triumphed in the Civil War.*" [quoted by Maximoff, **The Guillotine at Work**, p. 53]

So the question as to whether the Bolsheviks were forced into authoritarian and hierarchical methods by the practical necessities of the civil war or whether all this was inherent in Leninism all along, and the natural product of Leninist ideology, can be answered by looking at the record of the Bolsheviks prior to the civil war. From this we can ascertain the effect of the civil war. And the obvious conclusion is that the record of the initial months of Bolshevik rule point to a less than democratic approach which suggests that authoritarian policies were inherent in Leninism and, as such, pointed the revolution into a path where further authoritarian policies were not only easy to implement, but had to be as alternative options had been eliminated by previous policies. Moreover, Bolshevik ideology itself made such policies easy to accept and to justify.

As discussed in [section 6](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)", it was during this period that the Bolsheviks started to gerrymander soviets and disband any they lost elections to. As we indicate in [section 9](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)", they

undermined the factory committees, stopping them federating and basically handed the factories to the state bureaucracy. Lenin argued for and implemented one-man management, piecework, Taylorism and other things Stalinism is condemned for (see [section 3](#), for example). In the army, Trotsky disbanded the soldier committees and elected officers by decree.

How Trotsky defended this policy of appointing officers is significant. It mirrors Lenin's argument in favour of appointed one-man management and, as such, reflects the basic Bolshevik vision of democracy. By looking at his argument we can see how the Bolshevik vision of democracy fatally undermined the Russian Revolution and its socialist content. The problems of the civil war simply deepened the abscess in democracy created by Lenin and Trotsky in the spring of 1918.

Trotsky acknowledged that that *"the soldier-workers and soldier-peasants" needed "to elect commanders for themselves" in the Tzarist army "not [as] military chiefs, but simply [as] representatives who could guard them against attacks of counter-revolutionary classes."* However, in the new Red Army this was not needed as it was the *"workers' and peasants' Soviets, i.e. the same classes which compose the army"* which is building it. He blandly asserted that *"[h]ere no internal struggle is possible."* To illustrate his point he pointed to the trade unions. *"The metal workers,"* he noted, *"elect their committee, and the committee finds a secretary, a clerk, and a number of other persons who are necessary. Does it ever happen that the workers should say: 'Why are our clerks and treasurers appointed, and not elected?' No, no intelligent workers will say so."* [**Leon Trotsky Speaks**, p. 112-3]

Thus in less than six months, Lenin's call in *"State and Revolution"* that *"[a]ll officials, without exception, [would be] elected and subject to recall at any time"* was dismissed as the demand that *"no intelligent workers"* would raise! [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 302] But, then again, Trotsky **was** in the process of destroying another apparent *"principle"* of Leninism, namely (to quote, like Lenin, Marx) *"the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people."* [quoted by Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 300]

Trotsky continues his argument. The Trade union committee, he asserts, would say *"You yourselves have chosen the committee. If you don't like us, dismiss us, but once you have entrusted us with the direction of the union, then give us the possibility of choosing the clerk or the cashier, since we are better able to judge in the matter than you, and if our way of conducting business is bad, then throw us out and elect another committee."* After this defence of elected dictatorship, he states that the *"Soviet government is the same as the committee of a trade union. It is elected by the workers and peasants, and you can at the All-Russian Congress of the Soviets, at any moment you like, dismiss that government and appoint another."* Until that happens, he was happy to urge blind obedience by the sovereign people to their servants: *"But once you have appointed it, you must give it the right to choose the technical specialists, the clerks, the secretaries in the broad sense of the word, and in military affairs, in particular."* He tried to calm the nerves of those who could see the obvious problems with this argument by asking whether it was *"possible for the Soviet government to appoint military specialists against the interests of the labouring and peasant masses?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 113]

And the answer to that question is, of course, an empathic yes. Even looking at his own analogy, namely that of a trade union committee, it is obvious that an elected body can have interests separate from and in opposition to those who elected it. The history of trade unionism is full of examples of committees betraying the membership of the unions. And, of course, the history of the Soviet government under Lenin and Trotsky (never mind Stalin!) shows that just because it was once elected by a majority of the working people does not mean it will act in their best interests.

Trotsky even went one better. *"The army is now only in the process of formation,"* he noted. *"How could the soldiers who have just entered the army choose the chiefs! Have they have any vote to go by? They have none. And therefore elections are impossible."* [Op. Cit., p. 113] If only the Tsar had thought of that one! If he had, he would still be in power. And, needless to say, Trotsky did not apply that particular logic to himself. After all, he had no experience of holding governmental office or building an army (or even being in combat). Nor did any of the other Bolshevik leaders. By the logic of his argument, not only should the workers not been allowed to vote for a soviet government, he and his fellow Bolsheviks should not have assumed power in 1917. But, clearly, sauce for the goose is definitely **not** sauce for the gander.

For all his talk that the masses could replace the Bolsheviks at the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, Trotsky failed to realise that these proposals (and other ones like it) ensured that this was unlikely to happen. Even assuming that the Bolsheviks had not gerrymandered and disbanded soviets, the fact is that the Bolshevik vision of "democracy" effectively hollowed out the grassroots participation required to make democracy at the top anything more than a fig-leaf for party power. He honestly seemed to believe that eliminating mass participation in other areas of society would have no effect on the levels of participation in soviet elections. Would people subjected to one-man management in the workplace and in the army really be truly free and able to vote for parties which had not appointed their bosses? Could workers who were disenfranchised economically and socially remain in political power (assuming you equate voting a handful of leaders into power with *"political power"*)? And does being able to elect a representative every quarter to the All-Russian congress really mean that the working class was really in charge of society? Of course not.

This vision of top-down "democracy" can, of course, be traced back to Marx's arguments of 1850 and Lenin's comments that the *"organisational principle of revolutionary Social-Democracy"* was *"to proceed from the top downward."* (see sections [H.3.2](#) and [H.3.3](#)). By equating centralised, top-down decision making by an elected government with "democracy," the Bolsheviks had the ideological justification to eliminate the functional democracy associated with the factory committees and soldiers committees. In place of workers' and soldiers' direct democracy and self-management, the Bolsheviks appointed managers and officers and justified because a workers' party was in power. After all, had not the masses elected the Bolsheviks into power? This became the means by which **real** democracy was eliminated in area after area of Russian working class life. Needless to say, a state which eliminates functional democracy in the grassroots will not stay democratic in any meaningful sense for long. At best, it will be like a bourgeois republic with purely elections where people elect a party to misrepresent them every four or so years while real economic, political and social power rests in the hands of a few.

At worse, it would be a dictatorship with "elections" whose results are known before hand.

The Leninist vision of "democracy" is seen purely as a means of placing the party into power. Thus power in society shifts to the top, to the leaders of the centralised party in charge of the centralised state. The workers' become mere electors rather than actual controllers of the revolution and are expected to carry out the orders of the party without comment. In other words, a decidedly bourgeois vision of "democracy." Anarchists, in contrast, seek to dissolve power back into the hands of society and empower the individual by giving them a direct say in the revolution through their workplace and community assemblies and their councils and conferences.

This vision was not a new development. Far from it. While, ironically enough, Lenin's and Trotsky's support for the appointment of officers/managers can be refuted by looking at Lenin's **State and Revolution**, the fact is that the undemocratic perspectives they are based on can be found in Lenin's **What is to be Done?**. This suggests that his 1917 arguments were the aberration and against the true essence of Leninism, not his and Trotsky's policies once they were in power (as Leninists like to argue).

Forgetting that he had argued against "*primitive democracy*" in *What is to Be Done?*, Lenin had lambasted the opportunists and "present Kautskyists" for "*repeat[ing] the vulgar bourgeois jeers at 'primitive' democracy.*" Now, in 1917, it was a case that "*the transition from capitalism to socialism is impossible without some 'reversion' to 'primitive' democracy (how else can the majority, even the whole population, proceed to discharge state functions?)*" [Op. Cit., p. 302] Very true. As Leninism in power showed, the conscious elimination of "*primitive democracy*" in the army and workplace ensured that socialism was "*impossible.*" And this elimination was not justified in terms of "difficult" circumstances but rather in terms of principle and the inability of working people to manage their own affairs directly.

Particularly ironic, given Trotsky's trade union committee analogy was Lenin's comment that "*Bernstein [the arch revisionist and reformist] combats 'primitive democracy' . . . To prove that 'primitive democracy' is worthless, Bernstein refers to the experience of the British trade unions, as interpreted by the Webbs. Seventy years of development . . . convinced the trade unions that primitive democracy was useless, and they substituted ordinary democracy, i.e. parliamentarism, combined with bureaucracy, for it.*" Lenin replied that because the trade unions operated "*in absolute capitalist slavery*" a "*number of concessions to the prevailing evil, violence, falsehood, exclusion of the poor from the affairs of the 'higher' administration 'cannot be avoided.'* Under socialism much of the '*primitive*' democracy will inevitably be revived, since, for the first time in history of civilised society, the **mass** of the population will rise to **independent** participation, not only in voting and elections, **but also in the everyday administration of affairs**" [Op. Cit., p. 361] Obviously things looked a bit different once he and his fellow Bolshevik leaders were in power. Then the exclusion of the poor from the affairs of the "*higher*" administration was seen as normal practice, as proven by the practice of the trade unions! And as we note in [section H.3.8](#), this "*exclusion*" was taken as a key lesson of the revolution and built into the Leninist theory of the state.

This development was not unexpected. After all, as we noted in [section H.5.5](#), over a decade before

Lenin had been less than enthralled by "*primitive democracy*" and more in agreement with Bernstein than he lets on in **State and Revolution**. In **What is to Be Done?**, he based his argument for centralised, top-down party organisation on the experiences of the labour movement in democratic capitalist regimes. He quotes the same book by the Webb's to defend his position. He notes that "*in the first period of existence in their unions, the British workers thought it was an indispensable sign of democracy for all members to do all the work of managing the unions.*" This involved "*all questions [being] decided by the votes of all the members*" and all "*official duties*" being "*fulfilled by all the members in turn.*" He dismisses "*such a conception of democracy*" as "*absurd*" and "*historical experience*" made them "*understand the necessity for representative institutions*" and "*full-time professional officials.*" Ironically, Lenin records that in Russia the "*'primitive' conception of democracy*" existed in two groups, the "*masses of the students and workers*" and the "*Economists of the Bernstein persuasion.*" [Op. Cit., pp. 162-3]

Thus Trotsky's autocratic and top-down vision of democracy has its roots within Leninism. Rather than being forced upon the Bolsheviks by difficult circumstances, the eroding of grassroots, functional ("primitive") democracy was at the core of Bolshevism. Lenin's arguments in 1917 were the exception, not his practice after he seized power.

This fundamentally undemocratic perspective can be found today in modern Leninism. As well as defending the Bolshevik dictatorship during the civil war, modern Leninists support the continuation of party dictatorship after its end. In particular, they support the Bolshevik repression of the Kronstadt rebellion (see appendix ["What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?"](#) for more details). As Trotsky put it in 1937, if the Kronstadt demand for soviet elections had been implemented then "*to free the soviets from the leadership [sic!] of the Bolsheviks would have meant within a short time to demolish the soviets themselves . . . Social-Revolutionary-anarchist soviets would serve only as a bridge from the proletarian dictatorship [sic!] to capitalist restoration.*" He generalised this example, by pointing to the "*experience of the Russian soviets during the period of Menshevik and SR domination and, even more clearly, the experience of the German and Austrian soviets under the domination of the Social Democrats.*" [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 90] Modern day Leninists repeat this argument, failing to note that they sound like leftist Henry Kissingers (Kissinger, let us not forget, ensured US aid for Pinochet's coup in Chile and argued that "*I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people*").

Today we have Leninists combining rhetoric about democratic socialism, with elections and recall, with a mentality which justifies the suppression of working class revolt because they are not prepared to stand by and watch a country go capitalist due to the irresponsibility of its own people. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, previously in 1937 Trotsky expressed his support for the "*objective necessity*" of the "*revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party*" and, two years later, that the "*vanguard of the proletariat*" must be "*armed with the resources of the state in order to repel dangers, including those emanating from the backward layers of the proletariat itself.*" (see [section H.3.8](#)). If only modern day Leninists were as honest!



So the Bolshevik contempt for working class self-government still exists. While few, however, explicitly proclaim the logic of this position (namely party dictatorship) most defend the Bolsheviks implementing this conclusion in practice. Can we not conclude that, faced with the same problems the Bolsheviks faced, these modern day Leninists will implement the same policies? That they will go from party power to party dictatorship, simply because they know better than those who elected them on such matters? That answer seems all too obvious.

As such, the Bolshevik preference for centralised state power and of representative forms of democracy involved the substitution of the party for the class and, consequently, will facilitate the dictatorship **over** the proletariat when faced with the inevitable problems facing any revolution. As Bakunin put it, a *"people's administration, according to [the Marxists], must mean a people's administration by virtue of a small number of representatives chosen by the people . . . [I]t is a deception which would conceal the despotism of a governing minority, all the more dangerous because it appears as a sham expression of the people's will . . . [T]he vast majority, the great mass of people, would be governed by a privileged minority . . . [of] **former** workers, who would stop being workers the moment they became rulers or representatives, and would then come to regard the whole blue-collared world from governmental heights, and would not represent the people but themselves and their pretensions."* So the Marxist state would be *"the reign of the **scientific mind**, the most aristocratic, despotic, arrogant and contemptuous of all regimes. There will be a new class, a new hierarchy of real of bogus learning, and the world will be divided into a dominant, science-based minority and a vast, ignorant majority. And then let the ignorant masses beware!"* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 268, pp. 268-9 and p. 266]

In summary, Trotsky's deeply undemocratic justification for appointing officers, like Lenin's similar arguments for appointing managers, express the logic and reality of Bolshevism far better than statements made before the Bolsheviks seized power and never implemented. Sadly, modern Leninists concentrate on the promises of the election manifesto rather than the grim reality of Bolshevik power and its long standing top-down vision of "democracy." A vision which helped undermine the revolution and ensure its degeneration into a party dictatorship presiding over a state capitalist economy.

## 5 What was the effect of the Bolshevik vision of "socialism"?

As we discussed in [section H.3.1](#), anarchists and most Marxists are divided not only by **means** but also by **ends**. Simply put, libertarians and Leninist do **not** have the same vision of socialism. Given this, anarchists are not surprised at the negative results of the Bolshevik revolution -- the use of anti-socialist means to attain anti-socialist ends would obviously have less than desirable results.

The content of the Bolshevik vision of "socialism" is criticised by anarchists on two main counts. Firstly, it is a top-down, centralised vision of "socialism." This can only result in the destruction of working class economic power at the point of production in favour of centralised bureaucratic power. Secondly, for Bolshevism nationalisation, **not** workers' self-management, was the key issue. We will discuss the first issue here and the second in the following section.

The Bolshevik vision of "socialism" was inherently centralised and top-down. This can be seen from the organisational schemas and arguments made by leading Bolsheviks before and immediately after the Revolution. For example, we discover Trotsky arguing in March 1918 that workplaces "*will be subject to policies laid down by the local council of workmen's deputies*" who, in turn, had "*their range of discretion . . . limited in turn by regulations made for each class of industry by the boards or bureaux of the central government.*" He dismissed Kropotkin's communalist ideas by saying local autonomy was not "*suited to the state of things in modern industrial society*" and "*would result in endless frictions and difficulties.*" As the "*coal from the Donets basin goes all over Russia, and is indispensable in all sorts of industries*" you could not allow "*the organised people of that district [to] do what they pleased with the coal mines*" as they "*could hold up all the rest of Russia.*" [contained in Al Richardson (ed.), **In Defence of the Russian Revolution**, p. 186]

Lenin repeated this centralised vision in June of that year, arguing that "*Communism requires and presupposes the greatest possible centralisation of large-scale production throughout the country. The all-Russian centre, therefore, should definitely be given the right of direct control over all the enterprises of the given branch of industry. The regional centres define their functions depending on local conditions of life, etc., in accordance with the general production directions and decisions of the centre.*" He continued by explicitly arguing that "*[t]o deprive the all-Russia centre of the right to direct control over all the enterprises of the given industry . . . would be regional anarcho-syndicalism, and not communism.*" [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 292]

Thus the Bolshevik economic ideal was centralised and top-down. This is not unsurprising, as Lenin had promised precisely this when the Bolsheviks got into power. As in the Bolshevik party itself, the lower organs were controlled by the higher ones (and as we will discuss, these higher ones were not directly elected by the lower ones). The problems with this vision are many fold.

Firstly, to impose an "ideal" solution would destroy a revolution -- the actions and decisions (**including what others may consider mistakes**) of a free people are infinitely more productive and useful than the decisions and decrees of the best central committee. Moreover, a centralised system by necessity is an imposed system (as it excludes by its very nature the participation of the mass of the people in determining their own fate). Thus **real** socialisation must proceed from below, reflecting the real development and desires of those involved. Centralisation can only result in replacing socialisation with nationalisation and the elimination of workers' self-management with hierarchical management. Workers' again would be reduced to the level of order-takers, with control over their workplaces resting not in their hands but in those of the state.

Secondly, Trotsky seems to think that workers at the base of society would be so unchanged by a revolution that they would hold their fellow workers ransom. And, moreover, that other workers would let them. That, to say the least, seems a strange perspective. But not as strange as thinking that giving extensive powers to a central body will **not** produce equally selfish behaviour (but on a wider and more dangerous scale). The basic fallacy of Trotsky's argument is that the centre will not start to view the whole economy as its property (and being centralised, such a body would be difficult to effectively control). Indeed, Stalin's power was derived from the state bureaucracy which ran the economy in its

own interests. Not that did not suddenly arise with Stalin. It was a feature of the Soviet system from the start. Samuel Farber, for example, notes that, *"in practice, [the] hypercentralisation [pursued by the Bolsheviks from early 1918 onwards] turned into infighting and scrambles for control among competing bureaucracies"* and he points to the *"not untypical example of a small condensed milk plant with few than 15 workers that became the object of a drawn-out competition among six organisations including the Supreme Council of National Economy, the Council of People's Commissars of the Northern Region, the Vologda Council of People's Commissars, and the Petrograd Food Commissariat."* [**Before Stalinism**, p. 73]

In other words, centralised bodies are not immune to viewing resources as their own property and doing as they please with it. Compared to an individual workplace, the state's power to enforce its viewpoint against the rest of society is considerably stronger and the centralised system would be harder to control. The requirements of gathering and processing the information required for the centre to make intelligent decisions would be immense, thus provoking a large bureaucracy which would be hard to control and soon become the **real** power in the state. A centralised body, therefore, effectively excludes the mass participation of the mass of workers -- power rests in the hands of a few people which, by its nature, generates bureaucratic rule. If that sounds familiar, it should. It is precisely what **did** happen in Lenin's Russia and laid the basis for Stalinism.

Thirdly, to eliminate the dangers of workers' self-management generating "propertarian" notions, the workers' have to have their control over their workplace reduced, if not eliminated. This, by necessity, generates bourgeois social relationships and, equally, appointment of managers from above (which the Bolsheviks did embrace). Indeed, by 1920 Lenin was boasting that in 1918 he had *"pointed out the necessity of recognising the dictatorial authority of single individuals for the pursue of carrying out the Soviet idea"* and even claimed that at that stage *"there were no disputes in connection with the question"* of one-man management. [quoted by Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 65] While the first claim is true (Lenin argued for one-man management appointed from above before the start of the Civil War in May 1918) the latter one is not true (excluding anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and Maximalists, there were also the dissent *"Left Communists"* in the Bolshevik party itself).

Fourthly, centralism was not that efficient. The central bodies the Bolsheviks created had little knowledge of the local situation and often gave orders that contradicted each other or had little bearing to reality, so encouraging factories to ignore the centre: *"it seems apparent that many workers themselves . . . had now come to believe . . . that confusion and anarchy [sic!] at the top were the major causes of their difficulties, and with some justification. The fact was that Bolshevik administration was chaotic . . . Scores of competitive and conflicting Bolshevik and Soviet authorities issued contradictory orders, often brought to factories by armed Chekists. The Supreme Economic Council. . . issu[ed] dozens of orders and pass[ed] countless directives with virtually no real knowledge of affairs."* [William G. Rosenberg, **Russian Labour and Bolshevik Power**, p. 116] The Bolsheviks, as Lenin had promised, built from the top-down their system of *"unified administration"* based on the Tsarist system of central bodies which governed and regulated certain industries during the war. [Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 36] This was very centralised and very inefficient (see [section 7](#) for more discussion).

Moreover, having little real understanding of the circumstances on the ground they could not compare their ideological assumptions and preferences to reality. As an example, the Bolshevik idea that "big" was automatically "more efficient" and "better" had a negative impact on the revolution. In practice, as Thomas F. Remington notes, this simply resulted generated waste:

*"The waste of scarce materials at [the giant] Putilov [plant] was indeed serious, but not only political unrest had caused it. The general shortage of fuel and materials in the city took its greatest toll on the largest enterprises, whose overhead expenditures for heating the plant and firing the furnaces were proportionally greater than those for smaller enterprises. This point -- explained by the relative constant proportions among needed inputs to producers at any given point in time -- only was recognised latter. Not until 1919 were the regime's leaders prepared to acknowledge that small enterprises, under the conditions of the time, might be more efficient in using resources: and not until 1921 did a few Bolsheviks theorists grasp the economic reasons for this apparent violation of their standing assumption that larger units were inherently more productive. Thus not only were the workers accused of politically motivated resistance, but the regime blamed them for the effects of circumstances which the workers had no control."* [**Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia**, p. 106]

All in all, the Bolshevik vision of socialism was a disaster. Centralism was a source of massive economic mismanagement and, moreover, bureaucratisation from the start. As anarchists had long predicted. As we discuss in [section 12](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)", there was an alternative in the form of the factory committees and the federation. Sadly this was not part of the Bolshevik vision. At best they were tacked onto this vision as a (very) junior partner (as in 1917) or they were quickly marginalised and then dumped when they had outlived their usefulness in securing Bolshevik power (as in 1918).

While some Leninists like to paint the economic policies of the Bolsheviks in power as being different from what they called for in 1917, the truth is radically different. For example, Tony Cliff of the UK's "Socialist Workers Party" asserts, correctly, that in April 1918 the *"defence of state capitalism constituted the essence of his economic policy for this period."* However, he also states that this was *"an entirely new formulation,"* which was not the case in the slightest. [Cliff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 69] As Lenin himself acknowledged.

Lenin had always confused state capitalism with socialism. *"State capitalism,"* he wrote, *"is a complete material preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism there are no gaps."* He argued that socialism *"is nothing but the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly. In other words, Socialism is merely state capitalist monopoly made to benefit the whole people; by this token it ceases to be capitalist monopoly."* [**The Threatening Catastrophe and how to avoid it**, p. 38 and p. 37] This was in May, 1917. A few months latter, he was talking about how the institutions of state capitalism could be taken over and used to create socialism (see [section H.3.12](#)). Unsurprisingly, when defending Cliff's *"new formulation"* against the

"*Left Communists*" in the spring of 1918 he noted that he gave his "'high' appreciation of state capitalism" "*before the Bolsheviks seized power.*" [**Selected Works**, vol. 2, p. 636]

And, indeed, his praise for state capitalism and its forms of social organisation can be found in his *State and Revolution*:

*"the post-office [is] an example of the socialist system . . . At present . . . [it] is organised on the lines of a state capitalist monopoly. Imperialism is gradually transforming all trusts into organisations of a similar type . . . the mechanism of social management is here already to hand. Overthrow the capitalists . . . Our immediate object is to organise the whole of national economy on the lines of the postal system . . . It is such a state, standing on such an economic basis, that we need."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, pp. 307-8]

Given this, Lenin's rejection of the factory committee's model of socialism comes as no surprise (see [section 10](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)" for more details). As we noted in [section H.3.14](#), rather than promote workers' control, Lenin effectively undermined it. Murray Bookchin points out the obvious:

*"In accepting the concept of worker's control, Lenin's famous decree of November 14, 1917, merely acknowledged an accomplished fact; the Bolsheviks dared not oppose the workers at this early date. But they began to whittle down the power of the factory committees. In January 1918, a scant two months after 'decreeing' workers' control, Lenin began to advocate that the administration of the factories be placed under trade union control. The story that the Bolsheviks 'patiently' experimented with workers' control, only to find it 'inefficient' and 'chaotic,' is a myth. Their 'patience' did not last more than a few weeks. Not only did Lenin oppose direct workers' control within a matter of weeks . . . even union control came to an end shortly after it had been established. By the summer of 1918, almost all of Russian industry had been placed under bourgeois forms of management."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 200-1]

Significantly, even his initial vision of workers' control was hierarchical, centralised and top-down. In the workplace it was to be exercised by factory committees. The "*higher workers' control bodies*" were to be "*composed of representatives of trade unions, factory and office workers' committees, and workers' co-operatives.*" The decisions of the lower bodies "*may be revoked only by higher workers' control bodies.*" [quoted by Cliff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 10] As Maurice Brinton notes:

*"there [was] . . . a firm hierarchy of control organs . . . each Committee was to be responsible to a 'Regional Council of Workers' Control', subordinated in turn to an 'All-Russian Council of Workers' Control'. The composition of these higher organs was decided by the Party.*

*"The trade unions were massively represented in the middle and higher strata of this new*

*pyramid of 'institutionalised workers' control.' For instance the All-Russian Council of Workers' Control was to consist of 21 'representatives': 5 from the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Soviets, 5 from the Executive of the All-Russian Council of Trade Unions, 5 from the Association of Engineers and Technicians, 2 from the Association of Agronomists, 2 from the Petrograd Trade Union Council, 1 from each All-Russian Trade Union Federation numbering fewer than 100,000 members (2 for Federations of over this number)... and 5 from the All-Russian Council of Factory Committees! The Factory Committees often under anarcho-syndicalist influence had been well and truly 'cut down to size'." [Op. Cit., p. 18]*

As we note in [section 10](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)", this was a conscious preference on Lenin's part. The factory committees had started to federate, creating their own institutional framework of socialism based on the workers own class organisation. Lenin, as he had explained in 1917, favoured using the institutions created by "*state capitalism*" and simply tacked on a form of "*workers' control*" distinctly at odds with the popular usage of the expression. He **rejected** the suggestions of factory committees themselves. The Supreme Economic Council, established by the Soviet government, soon demonstrated how to really mismanage the economy.

As such, the economic developments proposed by Lenin in early 1918 and onwards were **not** the result of the specific problems facing the Russian revolution. The fact is while the dire problems facing the Russian revolution undoubtedly made many aspects of the Bolshevik system worse, they did not create them. Rather, the centralised, bureaucratic and top-down abuses Leninists like to distance themselves from where, in fact, built into Lenin's socialism from the start. A form of socialism Lenin and his government explicitly favoured and created in opposition to other, authentically proletarian, versions.

The path to state capitalism was the one Lenin wanted to trend. It was not forced upon him or the Bolsheviks. And, by re-introducing wage slavery (this time, to the state) the Bolshevik vision of socialism helped undermine the revolution, workers' power and, sadly, build the foundations of Stalinism.

## 6 How did Bolshevik preference for nationalisation affect the revolution?

As noted in the [last section](#), unlike anarchism, for Bolshevism nationalisation, **not** workers' self-management, was the key issue in socialism. As noted in [section 3](#), Lenin had proclaimed the necessity for appointed one-man managers and implementing "*state capitalism*" in April 1918. Neither policy was thought to harm the socialist character of the regime. As Trotsky stressed in 1920, the decision to place a manager at the head of a factory instead of a workers' collective had no political significance:

*"It would be a most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the head of factories. The*

*dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy of the collective will of the workers and not at all in the form in which individual economic organisations are administered."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 162]

Nor was this considered a bad thing or forced upon the Bolsheviks as a result of terrible circumstances. Quite the reverse: *"I consider if the civil war had not plundered our economic organs of all that was strongest, most independent, most endowed with initiative, we should undoubtedly have entered the path of one-man management in the sphere of economic administration much sooner and much less painfully."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 162-3] As discussed in the [previous section](#), this evaluation fits perfectly into Bolshevik ideology and practice before and after they seized power. One can easily find dozens of quotations from Lenin expressing the same idea.

Needless to say, Trotsky's *"collective will of the workers"* was simply a euphemism for the Party, whose dictatorship **over** the workers Trotsky glibly justified:

*"We have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of the party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the . . . party . . . [that] the Soviets . . . [became] transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 109]

While Trotsky's honesty on this matter is refreshing (unlike his followers today who hypocritically talk about the "leadership" of the Bolshevik party) we can say that this was a **fatal** position to take. Indeed, for Trotsky **any** system (including the militarisation of labour) was acceptable as the key *"differences . . . is defined by a fundamental test: who is in power?"* -- the capitalist class or the proletariat (i.e. the party) [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 171-2] Thus working class control over their own affairs was of little importance: *"The worker does not merely bargain with the Soviet State; no, he is subordinated to the Soviet State, under its orders in every direction -- for it is **his** State."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 168] This, of course, echoed his own arguments in favour of appointment (see [section 4](#)) **and** Lenin's demands for the *"exercise of dictatorial powers by individuals"* in the workplace (see [section 3](#)) in early 1918. Cornelius Castoriadis points out the obvious:

*"The role of the proletariat in the new State was thus quite clear. It was that of enthusiastic and passive citizens. And the role of the proletariat in work and in production was no less clear. On the whole, it was the same as before -- under capitalism -- except that workers of 'character and capacity' [to quote Trotsky] were to be chosen to replace factory managers who had fled."* [**The Role of the Bureaucracy in the birth of the Bureaucracy**, p. 99]

Trotsky's position, it should be noted, remained consistent. In the early 1930s he argued (in respect to Stalin's regime) that *"anatomy of society is determined by its economic relations. So long as the forms of property that have been created by the October Revolution are not overthrown, the proletariat remains the ruling class."* [**The Class Nature of The Soviet State**] Obviously, if the prime issue is property and not who **manages** the means of production (or even *"the state"*) then having functioning factory-committees becomes as irrelevant as having democratic soviets when determining whether the working class is in power or not.

(As an aside, we should not be surprised that Trotsky could think the workers were the *"ruling class"* in the vast prison-camp which was Stalin's USSR, given that he thought the workers were the *"ruling class"* when he and Lenin headed the Bolshevik party dictatorship! Thus we have the strange division Leninists make between Lenin's dictatorship and Stalin's (and those of Stalin's followers). When Lenin presides over a one-party dictatorship, breaks up strikes, bans political parties, bans Bolshevik factions, and imprisons and shoots political dissidents these are all regrettable but necessary steps in the protection of the "proletarian state." When Stalin does the exact same thing, a few years later, they are all terrible examples of the deformation of this same "proletarian state"!)

For anarchists (and other libertarian socialists) this was and is nonsense. Without workers' self-management in production, socialism cannot exist. To focus attention of whether individuals own property or whether the state does is fundamentally a red-herring. Without workers' self-management of production, private capitalism will simply have been replaced by **state** capitalism. As one anarchist active in the factory committee movement argued in January, 1918, it is *"not the liberation of the proletariat when many individual plunders are changed for one very powerful plunder -- the state. The position of the proletariat remains the same."* Therefore, *"[w]e must not forget that the factory committees are the nuclei of the future socialist order"* nor must we forget *"that the state . . . will try to maintain its own interests at the expense of the interests of the workers. There is no doubt that we will be witnesses of a great conflict between the state power in the centre and the organisations composed exclusively of workers which are found in the localities."* He was proved right. Instead of centralised the Bolshevik vision of state capitalism, the anarchists argued that factory committees *"be united on the basis of federalism, into industrial federations . . . [and] poly-industrial soviets of national economy."* Only in that way could **real** socialism be created. [quoted by Frederick I. Kaplan, **Bolshevik Ideology and the Ethics of Soviet Labour**, p. 163 and p. 166] (see [section 7](#) of the appendix ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#) for more on the factory committee movement).

The reason is obvious. It is worth quoting Cornelius Castoriadis at length on why the Bolshevik system was doomed to failure:

*"So we end up with the uncontested power of managers in the factories, and the Party's exclusive 'control' (in reality, what kind of control was it, anyway?). And there was the uncontested power of the Party over society, without any control. From that point on, nobody could prevent these two powers from merging, could anyone stop the two strata embodying them from merging, nor could the consolidation of an irremovable*



*bureaucracy ruling over all sectors of social life be halted. The process may have been accelerated or magnified by the entry of non-proletarian elements into the Party, as they rushed to jump on the bandwagon. But this was a consequence, and not a cause, of the Party's orientation . . .*

*"Who is to manage production . . .? . . . the correct answer [is] the collective organs of labouring people. What the party leadership wanted, what it had already imposed -- and on this point there was no difference between Lenin and Trotsky -- was a hierarchy directed from above. We know that this was the conception that triumphed. We know, too, where this 'victory' led . . .*

*"In all Lenin's speeches and writings of this period, what recurs again and again like an obsession is the idea that Russia ought to learn from the advanced capitalist countries; that there are not a hundred and one different ways of developing production and labour productivity if one wants to emerge from backwardness and chaos; that one must adopt capitalist methods of 'rationalisation' and management as well as capitalist forms of work 'incentives.' All these, for Lenin, are just 'means' that apparently could freely be placed in the service of a radically different historical end, the building of socialism.*

*"Thus Trotsky, when discussing the merits of militarism, came to separate the army itself, its structure and its methods, from the social system it serves. What is criticisable in bourgeois militarism and in the bourgeois army, Trotsky says in substance, is that they are in the service of the bourgeoisie. Except for that, there is nothing in them to be criticised. The sole difference, he says, lies in this: **'Who is in power?'** Likewise, the dictatorship of the proletariat is not expressed by the 'form in which individual economic enterprises are administered.'*

*"The idea that like means cannot be placed indifferently into the service of different ends; that there is an intrinsic relationship between the instruments used and the result obtained; that, especially, neither the army nor the factory are simple 'means' or 'instruments,' but social structures in which are organised two fundamental aspects of human relations (production and violence); that in them can be seen in condensed form the essential expression of the type of social relations that characterise an era -- this idea, though perfectly obvious and banal for Marxists, was totally 'forgotten.' It was just a matter of developing production, using proven methods and structures. That among these 'proofs' the principal one was the development of capitalism as a social system and that a factory produces not so much cloth or steel but proletariat and capital were facts that were utterly ignored.*

*"Obviously, behind this 'forgetfulness' is hidden something else. At the time, of course, there was the desperate concern to revive production as soon as possible and to put a collapsing economy back on its feet. This preoccupation, however, does not fatally dictate*

*the choice of 'means.' If it seemed obvious to Bolshevik leaders that the sole effective means were capitalist ones, it was because they were imbued with the conviction that capitalism was the only effective and rational system of production. Faithful in this respect to Marx, they wanted to abolish private property and market anarchy, but not the type of organisation capitalism had achieved at the point of production. They wanted to modify the **economy**, not the relations between people at work or the nature of labour itself.*

*"At a deeper level still, their philosophy was to develop the forces of production. Here too they were the faithful inheritors of Marx -- or at least one side of Marx, which became the predominant one in his mature writings. The development of the forces of production was, if not the ultimate goal, at any rate the essential means, in the sense that everything else would follow as a by-product and that everything else had to be subordinated to it. . .*

*"To manage the work of others -- this is the beginning and the end of the whole cycle of exploitation. The 'need' for a specific social category to manage the work of others in production (and the activity of others in politics and in society), the 'need' for a separate business management and for a Party to rule the State -- this is what Bolshevism proclaimed as soon as it seized power, and this is what it zealously laboured to impose. We know that it achieved its ends. Insofar as ideas play a role in the development of history -- and, **in the final analysis**, they play an enormous role -- the Bolshevik ideology (and with it, the Marxist ideology lying behind it) was a decisive factor in the birth of the Russian bureaucracy." [Op. Cit., pp. 100-4]*

Therefore, we *"may therefore conclude that, contrary to the prevailing mythology, it was not in 1927, or in 1923, or even in 1921 that the game was played and lost, but much earlier, during the period from 1918 to 1920. . . . [1921 saw] the beginning of the reconstruction of the productive apparatus. This reconstruction effort, however, was already firmly set in the groove of bureaucratic capitalism."* [Op. Cit., p. 99] In this, they simply followed the economic ideas Lenin had expounded in 1917 and 1918, but in an even more undemocratic way. Modern-day Leninism basically takes the revolutionised Russia of the Bolsheviks and, essentially, imposes upon it a more democratic form of government rather than Lenin's (and then Stalin's). Anarchists, however, still oppose the economy.

Ironically, proof that libertarians are right on this issue can be found in Trotsky's own work. In 1936, he argued that the *"demobilisation of the Red Army of five million played no small role in the formation of the bureaucracy. The victorious commanders assumed leading posts in the local Soviets, in economy, in education, and they persistently introduced everywhere that regime which had ensured success in the civil war. Thus on all sides the masses were pushed away gradually from actual participation in the leadership of the country."* [The Revolution Betrayed] Needless to say, he failed to note who had abolished the election of commanders in the Red Army in March 1918, namely himself (see [section 4](#)). Similarly, he failed to note that the *"masses"* had been *"pushed . . . from actual participation in the leadership of the country"* well before the end of the civil war and that, at the time, he was not concerned

about it. Equally, it would be churlish to note that back in 1920 he thought that *"Military' qualities . . . are valued in every sphere. It was in this sense that I said that every class prefers to have in its service those of its members who, other things being equal, have passed through the military school . . . This experience is a great and valuable experience. And when a former regimental commissary returns to his trade union, he becomes not a bad organiser."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 173]

In 1937 Trotsky asserted that *"liberal-anarchist thought closes its eyes to the fact that the Bolshevik revolution, with all its repressions, meant an upheaval of social relations in the interests of the masses, whereas Stalin's Thermidorian upheaval accompanies the reconstruction of Soviet society in the interest of a privileged minority."* [Trotsky, **Stalinism and Bolshevism**] Yet Stalin's "upheaval" was built upon the social relations created when Lenin and Trotsky held power. State ownership, one-man management, and so on were originally advocated and implemented by Lenin and Trotsky. The bureaucracy did not have to expropriate the working class economically -- "real" Bolshevism had already did so. Nor can it be said that the social relations associated with the political sphere had fundamentally changed under Stalin. He had, after all, inherited the one-party state from Lenin and Trotsky. In a nutshell, Trotsky is talking nonsense.

Simply put, as Trotsky himself indicates, Bolshevik preference for nationalisation helped ensure the creation and subsequent rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Rather than be the product of terrible objective circumstances as his followers suggest, the Bolshevik state capitalist economic system was at the heart of their vision of what socialism was. The civil war simply brought the underlying logic of vision into the fore.

## 7 How did Bolshevik preference for centralism affect the revolution?

The next issue we will discuss is centralisation. Before starting, it is essential that it be stressed that anarchists are **not** against co-ordinated activity and organisation on a large scale. Anarchists stress the need for federalism to meet the need for such work (see [section A.2.9](#), for example). As such, our critique of Bolshevik centralism is **not** a call for "localism" or isolation (as many Leninists assert). Rather, it is a critique of **how** the social co-operation essential for society will be conducted. Will it be in a federal (and so bottom-up) way or will it be in a centralised (and so top-down) way?

It goes almost without saying that Bolshevik ideology was centralist in nature. Lenin repeatedly stressed the importance of centralisation, arguing constantly that Marxism was, by its very nature, centralist (and top-down -- [section H.3.3](#)). Long before the revolution, Lenin had argued that within the party it was a case of *"the transformation of the power of ideas into the power of authority, the subordination of lower Party bodies to higher ones."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 7, p. 367] Such visions of centralised organisation were the model for the revolutionary state. In 1917, he repeatedly stressed that after it the Bolsheviks would be totally in favour of *"centralism"* and *"strong state power."* [Lenin, **Selected Works**, vol. 2, p. 374] Once in power, they did not disappoint.

Anarchists argue that this prejudice in favour of centralisation and centralism is at odds with Leninist claims to be in favour of mass participation. It is all fine and well for Trotskyist Tony Cliff to quote Lenin arguing that under capitalism the *"talent among the people"* is *"merely suppressed"* and that it *"must be given an opportunity to display itself"* and that this can *"save the cause of socialism,"* it is something else for Lenin (and the Leninist tradition) to favour organisational structures that allow that to happen. Similarly, it is fine to record Lenin asserting that *"living, creative socialism is the product of the masses themselves"* but it is something else to justify the barriers Leninist ideology placed in the way of it by its advocacy of centralism. [quoted by Tony Cliff, **Lenin**, vol. 3, p. 20 and p. 21]

The central contradiction of Leninism is that while it (sometimes) talks about mass participation, it has always prefers an organisational form (centralism) which hinders, and ultimately destroys, the participation that **real** socialism needs.

That centralism works in this way should come as no surprise. After all, it based on centralising power at the top of an organisation and, consequently, into a few hands. It was for this precise reason that **every** ruling class in history has utilised centralisation against the masses. As we indicated in [section B.2.5](#), centralisation has always been the tool of minority classes to disempower the masses. In the American and French revolutions, centralisation of state power was the means used to destroy the revolution, to take it out off the hands of the masses and concentrate it into the hands of a minority. In France:

*"From the moment the bourgeoisie set themselves against the popular stream they were in need of a weapon that could enable them to resist pressure from the bras nus [working people]; they forced one by strengthening the central power . . . [This was] the formation of the state machinery through which the bourgeoisie was going to enslave the proletariat. Here is the centralised state, with its bureaucracy and police . . . [it was] a conscious attempt to reduce . . . the power of the people."* [Daniel Guerin, **Class Struggle in the First French Republic**, p. 176]

The reason is not hard to understand -- mass participation and class society do not go together. Thus, *"the move towards bourgeois dictatorship"* saw *"the strengthening of the central power against the masses."* [Guerin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 177-8] *"To attack the central power,"* argued Kropotkin, *"to strip it of its prerogatives, to decentralise, to dissolve authority, would have been to abandon to the people the control of its affairs, to run the risk of a truly popular revolution. That is why the bourgeoisie sought to reinforce the central government even more."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 143]

Can we expect a similar concentration of the central power under the Bolsheviks to have a different impact? And, as discussed in appendix ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#) we find a similar marginalisation of the working class from its own revolution. Rather than being actively participating in the transformation of society, they were transformed into spectators who simply were expected to implement the decisions made by the Bolsheviks on their behalf. Bolshevik centralisation quickly ensured the disempowerment of working class people. Unsurprisingly enough, given its role in class society and in bourgeois revolutions.

In this section of the FAQ, we will indicate why this process happened, why Bolshevik centralisation undermined the socialist content of the revolution in favour of new forms of oppression and exploitation.

Therefore, anarchists argue, centralism cannot help but generate minority rule, not a classless society. Representative, and so centralised, democracy, argued Malatesta, "*substitutes the will of a few for that of all . . . and in the name of a fictitious collective interest, rides roughshod over every real interests, and by means of elections and the vote, disregards the wishes of each and everyone.*" [**Life and Ideas**, p. 147]

This is rooted in the nature of the system, for democracy does not mean, in practice, "*rule by all the people.*" Rather, as Malatesta pointed out, it "*would be closer to the truth to say 'government of the majority of the people.'*" And even this is false, as "*it is never the case that the representatives of the majority of the people are in the same mind on all questions; it is therefore necessary to have recourse again to the majority system and thus we will get closer still to the truth with 'government of the majority of the elected by the majority of the electors.'*" This, obviously, "*is already beginning to bear a strong resemblance to minority government.*" And so, "*it is easy to understand what has already been proven by universal historical experience: even in the most democratic of democracies it is always a small minority that rules and imposes its will and interests by force.*" And so centralism turns democracy into little more than picking masters. Therefore, anarchists argue, "*those who really want 'government of the people' . . . must abolish government.*" [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 78]

The Russian Revolution is a striking confirmation of this libertarian analysis. By applying centralism, the Bolsheviks disempowered the masses and concentrated power into the hands of the party leadership. This places power in a distinct social class and subject to the pervasive effects of their concrete social circumstances within their institutional position. As Bakunin predicted with amazing accuracy:

*"The falsehood of the representative system rests upon the fiction that the executive power and the legislative chamber issuing from popular elections must, or even can for that matter, represent the will of the people . . . the instinctive aims of those who govern . . . are, because of their exceptional position diametrically opposed to the instinctive popular aspirations. Whatever their democratic sentiments and intentions may be, viewing society from the high position in which they find themselves, they cannot consider this society in any other way but that in which a schoolmaster views the pupils. And there can be no equality between the schoolmaster and the pupils. . . Whoever says political power says domination. And where domination exists, a more or less considerable section of the population is bound to be dominated by others. . . those who do the dominating necessarily must repress and consequently oppress those who are subject to the domination . . . [This] explains why and how men who were democrats and rebels of the reddest variety when they were a part of the mass of governed people, became exceedingly moderate when they rose to power. Usually these backslidings are attributed to treason. That, however, is an erroneous idea; they have for their main cause the change of position and perspective . . . if there should be established tomorrow a government . . . made up*

*exclusively of workers, those . . . staunch democrats and Socialists, will become determined aristocrats, bold or timid worshippers of the principle of authority, and will also become oppressors and exploiters."* [The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 218]

However, due to the inefficiencies of centralised bodies, this is not the end of the process. Around the new ruling bodies inevitably springs up officialdom. This is because a centralised body does not know what is happening in the grassroots. Therefore it needs a bureaucracy to gather and process that information and to implement its decisions. In the words of Bakunin:

*"where is the head, however brilliant it may be, or if one wishes to speak of a collective dictatorship, were it formed of many hundreds of individuals endowed with superior faculties, where are those brains powerful enough and wide-ranging enough to embrace the infinite multiplicity and diversity of the real interests, aspirations, wishes and needs whose sum total constitutes the collective will of a people, and to invent a social organisation which can satisfy everybody? This organisation will never be anything but a Procrustean bed which the more or less obvious violence of the State will be able to force unhappy society to lie down on. . . Such a system . . . would lead inevitably to the creation of a new State, and consequently to the formation of a governmental aristocracy, that is, an entire class of people, having nothing in common with the mass of people . . . [and would] exploit the people and subject them."* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, pp. 204-6]

As the bureaucracy is permanent and controls information and resources, it soon becomes the main source of power in the state. The transformation of the bureaucracy from servant to the master soon results. The "official" government is soon controlled by it, shaping its activities in line with its interests. Being highly centralised, popular control is even more limited than government control -- people would simply not know where real power lay, which officials to replace or even what was going on within the distant bureaucracy. Moreover, if the people did manage to replace the corrupt people, the newcomers would be subject to the same institutional pressures that corrupted the previous members and so the process would start again (assuming they did not come under the immediate influence of those who remained in the bureaucracy). Consequently, a new bureaucratic class develops around the centralised bodies created by the governing party. This body would soon become riddled with personal influences and favours, so ensuring that members could be sheltered from popular control. As Malatesta argued, they *"would use every means available to those in power to have their friends elected as the successors who would then in turn support and protect them. And thus government would be passed to and fro in the same hands, and democracy, which is the alleged government of all, would end up, as usual, in an oligarchy, which is the government of a few, the government of a class."* [Anarchy, p. 34]

This state bureaucracy, of course, need not be dictatorial nor the regime it rules/administers be totalitarian (for example, bourgeois states combine bureaucracy with many real and important liberties). However, such a regime is still a class one and socialism would still not exist -- as proven by the state bureaucracies and nationalised property within bourgeois society.

So the danger to liberty of combining political **and** economic power into one set of hands (the state's) is obvious. As Kropotkin argued:

*"the state was, and continues to be, the chief instrument for permitting the few to monopolise the land, and the capitalists to appropriate for themselves a quite disproportionate share of the yearly accumulated surplus of production. Consequently, while combating the present monopolisation of land, and capitalism altogether, the anarchists combat with the same energy the state, as the main support of that system. Not this or that special form, but the state altogether . . . The state organisation, having always been, both in ancient and modern history . . . the instrument for establishing monopolies in favour of the ruling minorities, cannot be made to work for the destruction of these monopolies. The anarchists consider, therefore, that to hand over to the state all the main sources of economical life -- the land, the mines, the railways, banking, insurance, and so on - as also the management of all the main branches of industry, in addition to all the functions already accumulated in its hands (education, state-supported religions, defence of the territory, etc.), would mean to create a new instrument of tyranny. State capitalism would only increase the powers of bureaucracy and capitalism. True progress lies in the direction of decentralisation, both **territorial** and **functional**, in the development of the spirit of local and personal initiative, and of free federation from the simple to the compound, **in lieu** of the present hierarchy from the centre to the periphery."* [Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets, p. 286]

Thus we have the basic argument **why** centralism will result in the continuation of class society. Does the Bolshevik experience contradict this analysis? Essentially, it confirms to Kropotkin's predictions on the uselessness of "revolutionary" government:

*"Instead of acting for themselves, instead of marching forward, instead of advancing in the direction of the new order of things, the people confiding in their governors, entrusted to them the charge of taking initiative. This was the first consequence of the inevitable result of elections. . . Shut up in the city hall, charged to proceed after the forms established by the preceding governments, these ardent revolutionists, these reformers found themselves smitten with incapacity and sterility. . . but it was not the men who were the cause for this failure -- it was the system.. .*

*"The will of the bulk of the nation once expressed, the rest would submit to it with a good grace, but this is not how things are done. The revolution bursts out long before a general understanding has come, and those who have a clear idea of what should be done the next day are only a very small minority. The great mass of the people have as yet only a general idea of the end which they wish realised, without knowing much how to advance towards that end, and without having much confidence in the direction to follow. The practical solution will not be found, will not be made clear until the change will have already begun. It will be the product of the revolution itself, of the people in action, -- or*

*else it will be nothing, incapable of finding solutions which can only spring from the life of the people. . . The government becomes a parliament with all the vices of a middle-class parliament. Far from being a 'revolutionary' government it becomes the greatest obstacle to the revolution and at last the people find themselves compelled to put it out of the way, to dismiss those that but yesterday they acclaimed as their children.*

*"But it is not so easy to do so. The new government which has hastened to organise a new administration in order to extend it's domination and make itself obeyed does not understand giving up so easily. Jealous of maintaining it's power, it clings to it with all the energy of an institution which has yet had time to fall into senile decay. It decides to oppose force with force, and there is only one means then to dislodge it, namely, to take up arms, to make another revolution in order to dismiss those in whom the people had placed all their hopes." [Op. Cit., pp. 240-2]*

By the spring and summer of 1918, the Bolshevik party had consolidated its power. It had created a new state, marked as all states are by the concentration of power in a few hands and bureaucracy. Effective power became concentrated into the hands of the executive committees of the soviets from top to bottom. Faced with rejection at soviet election after soviet election, the Bolsheviks simply disbanded them and gerrymandered the rest. At the summit of the new state, a similar process was at work. The soviets had little real power, which was centralised in Lenin's new government. This is discussed in more detail in [section 6](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)". Thus centralisation quickly displaced popular power and participation. As predicted by Russia anarchists in November 1917:

*"Once their power is consolidated and 'legalised', the Bolsheviks -- who are Social Democrats, that is, men of centralist and authoritarian action -- will begin to rearrange the life of the country and of the people by governmental and dictatorial methods, imposed by the centre. The[y] . . . will dictate the will of the party to all Russia, and command the whole nation. Your Soviets and your other local organisations will become little by little, simply executive organs of the will of the central government. In the place of healthy, constructive work by the labouring masses, in place of free unification from the bottom, we will see the installation of an authoritarian and statist apparatus which would act from above and set about wiping out everything that stood in its way with an iron hand. The Soviets and other organisations will have to obey and do its will. That will be called 'discipline.'" [quoted by Voline, **The Unknown Revolution**, p. 235]*

From top to bottom, the new party in power systematically undermined the influence and power of the soviets they claimed to be ensuring the power of. This process had begun, it should be stressed **before** the start of the civil war in May, 1918. Thus Leninist Tony Cliff is wrong to state that it was "*under the iron pressure of the civil war*" which forced the Bolshevik leaders "*to move, as the price of survival, to a one-party system.*" [**Revolution Besieged**, p. 163] From the summer of 1918 (i.e. before the civil war even started), the Bolsheviks had turned from the first of Kropotkin's "revolutionary" governments



(representative government) to the other, dictatorship, with sadly predictable results.

So far, the anarchist predictions on the nature of centralised revolutionary governments had been confirmed. Being placed in a new social position and, therefore, different social relationships, produced a dramatic revision on the perspectives of the Bolsheviks. They went from being in favour of party power to being in favour of party dictatorship. They acted to ensure their power by making accountability and recall difficult, if not impossible, and simply ignored any election results which did not favour them.

What of the second prediction of anarchism, namely that centralisation will recreate bureaucracy? That, too, was confirmed. After all, some means were required to gather, collate and provide information by which the central bodies made their decisions. Thus a necessary side-effect of Bolshevik centralism was bureaucracy, which, as is well known, ultimately fused with the party and replaced Leninism with Stalinism. The rise of a state bureaucracy started immediately with the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks. Instead of the state starting to "*wither away*" from the start it grew:

*"The old state's political apparatus was 'smashed,' but in its place a new bureaucratic and centralised system emerged with extraordinary rapidity. After the transfer of government to Moscow in March 1918 it continued to expand . . . As the functions of the state expanded so did the bureaucracy, and by August 1918 nearly a third of Moscow's working population were employed in offices [147,134 employed in state institutions and 83,886 in local ones. This was 13.7% of the total adult population and 29.6% of the independent population of 846,095]. The great increase in the number of employees . . . took place in early to mid-1918 and, thereafter, despite many campaigns to reduce their number, they remained a steady proportion of the falling population . . . At first the problem was dismissed by arguments that the impressive participation of the working class in state structures was evidence that there was no 'bureaucratism' in the bureaucracy. According to the industrial census of 31 August 1918, out of 123,578 workers in Moscow, only 4,191 (3.4 percent) were involved in some sort of public organisation . . . Class composition is a dubious criterion of the level of bureaucratism. Working class participation in state structures did not ensure an organisation against bureaucratism, and this was nowhere more true than in the new organisations that regulated the economic life of the country."* [Richard Sakwa, "*The Commune State in Moscow in 1918*," pp. 429-449, **Slavic Review**, vol. 46, no. 3/4, pp. 437-8]

*The "bureaucracy grew by leaps and bounds. Control over the new bureaucracy constantly diminished, partly because no genuine opposition existed. The alienation between 'people' and 'officials,' which the soviet system was supposed to remove, was back again. Beginning in 1918, complaints about 'bureaucratic excesses,' lack of contact with voters, and new proletarian bureaucrats grew louder and louder."* [Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, p. 242]

Overtime, this permanent collection of bodies would become the real power in the state, with the party

members nominally in charge really under the control of an unelected and uncontrolled officialdom. This was recognised by Lenin in the last years of his life. As he noted in 1922:

*"Let us look at Moscow . . . Who is leading whom? The 4,700 responsible Communists the mass of bureaucrats, or the other way round? I do not believe that you can say that the Communists are leading this mass. To put it honestly, they are not the leaders, but the led."* [quoted by Chris Harman, **Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe**, p. 13]

By the end of 1920, there were five times more state officials than industrial workers. 5, 880,000 were members of the state bureaucracy. However, the bureaucracy had existed since the start. As noted above, the 231,000 people employed in offices in Moscow in August 1918 represented 30 per cent of the workforce there. *"By 1920 the general number of office workers . . . still represented about a third of those employed in the city."* In November, 1920, they were 200 000 office workers in Moscow, compared to 231 000 in August, 1918. By July, 1921 (in spite of a plan to transfer 10,000 away) their numbers had increased to 228,000 and by October 1922, to 243,000. [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 192, p. 191 and p. 193]

This makes perfect sense as *"on coming to power the Bolsheviks smashed the old state but rapidly created their own apparatus to wage the political and economic offensive against the bourgeois and capitalism. As the functions of the state expanded, so did the bureaucracy . . . following the revolution the process of institutional proliferation reached unprecedented heights."* [Op. Cit., p. 191] And with bureaucracy came the abuse of it simply because it held **real** power:

*"The prevalence of bureaucracy, of committees and commissions . . . permitted, and indeed encouraged, endless permutations of corrupt practices. These raged from the style of living of communist functionaries to bribe-taking by officials. With the power of allocation of scare resources, such as housing, there was an inordinate potential for corruption."* [Op. Cit., p. 193]

The growth in **power** of the bureaucracy should not, therefore, come as a major surprise given that had existed from the start in sizeable numbers. However, for the Bolsheviks *"the development of a bureaucracy"* was a puzzle, *"whose emergence and properties mystified them."* However, it should be noted that, *"[f]or the Bolsheviks, bureaucratism signified the escape of this bureaucracy from the will of the party as it took on a life of its own."* [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 182 and p. 190] This was the key. They did not object the usurpation of power by the party (indeed they placed party dictatorship at the core of their politics and universalised it to a general principle for **all** "socialist" revolutions). Nor did they object to the centralisation of power and activity (and so the bureaucratisation of life). They only objected to it when the bureaucracy was not doing what the party wanted it to. Indeed, this was the basic argument of Trotsky against Stalinism (see [section 3](#) of the appendix on ["Were any of the Bolshevik oppositions a real alternative?"](#)).

Faced with this bureaucracy, the Bolsheviks tried to combat it (unsuccessfully) and explain it. As the

failed to achieve the latter, they failed in the former. Given the Bolshevik fixation for all things centralised, they simply added to the problem rather than solve it. Thus we find that "*[o]n the eve of the VIII Party Congress Lenin had argued that centralisation was the only way to combat bureaucratism.*" [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 196]

Unsurprisingly, Lenin's "anti-bureaucratic" policies in the last years of his live were "*organisational ones. He purposes the formation of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection to correct bureaucratic deformations in the party and state -- and this body falls under Stalin's control and becomes highly bureaucratic in its own right. Lenin then suggests that the size of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection be reduced and that it be merged with the Control Commission. He advocates enlarging the Central Committee. Thus it rolls along; this body to be enlarged, this one to be merged with another, still a third to be modified or abolished. The strange ballet of organisational forms continues up to his very death, as though the problem could be resolved by organisational means.*" [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 205]

Failing to understand the links between centralism and bureaucracy, Lenin had to find another source for the bureaucracy. He found one. He "*argued that the low cultural level of the working class prevented mass involvement in management and this led to bureaucratism . . . the new state could only reply on a minuscule layer of workers while the rest were backward because of the low cultural level of the country.*" However, such an explanation is by no means convincing: "*Such culturalist assertions, which could neither be proved or disproved but which were politically highly effective in explaining the gulf, served to blur the political and structural causes of the problem. The working class was thus held responsible for the failings of the bureaucracy. At the end of the civil war the theme of the backwardness of the proletariat was given greater elaboration in Lenin's theory of the declassing of the proletariat.*" [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 195] Given that the bureaucracy had existed from the start, it is hard to say that a more "*cultured*" working class would have been in a better position to control the officials of a highly centralised state bureaucracy. Given the problems workers in "developed" nations have in controlling their (centralised) union bureaucracies, Lenin's explanation seems simply inadequate and, ultimately, self-serving.

Nor was this centralism particularly efficient. You need only read Goldman's or Berkman's accounts of their time in Bolshevik Russia to see how inefficient and wasteful centralisation and its resultant bureaucracy was in practice (see **My Disillusionment in Russia** and **The Bolshevik Myth**, respectively). This can be traced, in part, to the centralised economic structures favoured by the Bolsheviks. Rejecting the alternative vision of socialism advocated and, in part created, by the factory committees (and supported wholeheartedly by the Russian Anarchists at the time), the Bolsheviks basically took over and used the "*state capitalist*" organs created under Tsarism as the basis of their "socialism" (see [section 5](#)). As Lenin promised **before** seizing power:

*"Forced syndicalisation -- that is, forced fusion into unions [i.e. trusts] under the control of the State -- this is what capitalism has prepared for us -- this is what the Banker State has realised in Germany -- this is what will be completely realisable in Russia by the*

*Soviets, by the dictatorship of the proletariat.*" [**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 53]

In practice, Lenin's centralised vision soon proved to be a disaster (see [section 11](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)" for details). It was highly inefficient and simply spawned a vast bureaucracy. There was an alternative, as we discuss in [section 12](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)", the only reason that industry did not totally collapse in Russia during the early months of the revolution was the activity of the factory committees. However, such activity was not part of the Bolshevik vision of centralised socialism and so the factory committees were **not** encouraged. At the very moment when mass participation and initiative is required (i.e. during a revolution) the Bolsheviks favoured a system which killed it. As Kropotkin argued a few years later:

*"production and exchange represented an undertaking so complicated that the plans of the state socialists, which lead to a party directorship, would prove to be absolutely ineffective as soon as they were applied to life. No government would be able to organise production if the workers themselves through their unions did not do it in each branch of industry; for in all production there arise daily thousands of difficulties which no government can solve or foresee . . . Only the efforts of thousands of intelligences working on the problems can co-operate in the development of a new social system and find the best solutions for the thousands of local needs."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, pp. 76-7]

No system is perfect. Any system will take time to develop fully. Of course the factory committees made mistakes and, sometimes, things were pretty chaotic with different factories competing for scarce resources. But that does not prove that factory committees and their federations were not the most efficient way of running things under the circumstances. Unless, of course, you share the Bolsheviks a dogmatic belief that central planning is always more efficient. Moreover, attacks on the factory committees for lack of co-ordination by pro-Leninists seem less than sincere, given the utter lack of encouragement (and, often, actual barriers) the Bolsheviks placed in the way of the creation of federations of factory committees (see [section 9](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)" for further details).

Lastly, Bolshevik centralism (as well as being extremely inefficient) also ensured that the control of production and the subsequent surplus would be in the hands of the state and, so, class society would continue. In Russia, capitalism became state capitalism under Lenin and Trotsky (see sections [5](#) and [6](#) for more discussion of this).

So Bolshevik support for centralised power ensured that minority power replaced popular power, which, in turn, necessitated bureaucracy to maintain it. Bolshevism retained statist and capitalist social relations and, as such, could not develop socialist ones which, by their very nature, imply egalitarianism in terms of social influence and power (i.e. the abolition of concentrated power, both economic and political). Ironically, by being centralists, the Bolsheviks systematically eliminated mass participation and ensured

the replacement of popular power with party power. This saw the rebirth of non-socialist social relationships within society, so ensuring the defeat of the socialist tendencies and institutions which had started to grow during 1917.

It cannot be said that this centralism was a product of the civil war. As best it could be argued that the civil war extenuated an existing centralist spirit into ultra-centralism, but it did not create it. After all, Lenin was stressing that the Bolsheviks were "*convinced centralists . . . by their programme and the tactics of the whole of their party*" in 1917. Ironically, he never realised (nor much cared, after the seizure of power) that this position precluded his call for "*the deepening and extension of democracy in the administration of a State of the of the proletarian type.*" [**Can the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 74 and p. 55] Given that centralism exists to ensure minority rule, we should not be to surprised that party power replaced popular participation and self-government quickly after the October Revolution. Which it did. Writing in September 1918, a Russian anarchist portrays the results of Bolshevik ideology in practice:

*"Within the framework of this dictatorship [of the proletariat] . . . we can see that the centralisation of power has begun to crystallise and grow firm, that the apparatus of the state is being consolidated by the ownership of property and even by an anti-socialist morality. Instead of hundreds of thousands of property owners there is now a single owner served by a whole bureaucratic system and a new 'statised' morality.*

*"The proletariat is gradually being enserfed by the state. The people are being transformed into servants over whom there has risen a new class of administrators -- a new class . . . Isn't this merely a new class system looming on the revolutionary horizon . . .*

*"The resemblance is all too striking . . . And if the elements of class inequality are as yet indistinct, it is only a matter of time before privileges will pass to the administrators. We do not mean to say . . . that the Bolshevik party set out to create a new class system. But we do say that even the best intentions and aspirations must inevitably be smashed against the evils inherent in any system of centralised power. The separation of management from labour, the division between administrators and workers flows logically from, centralisation. It cannot be otherwise . . . we are presently moving not towards socialism but towards state capitalism.*

*"Will state capitalism lead us to the gates of socialism? Of this we see not the slightest evidence . . . Arrayed against socialism are . . . thousands of administrators. And if the workers . . . should become a powerful revolutionary force, then it is hardly necessary to point out that the class of administrators, wielding the state apparatus, will be a far from weak opponent. The single owner and state capitalism form a new dam before the waves of our social revolution. . .*

*"Is it at all possible to conduct the social revolution through a centralised authority? Not even a Solomon could direct the revolutionary struggle or the economy from one centre . . ."* [M. Sergven, cited by Paul Avrich, **Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, pp. 123-5]

Subsequent developments proved this argument correct. Working class revolts were crushed by the state and a new class society developed. little wonder, then, Alexander Berkman's summary of what he saw first hand in Bolshevik Russia a few years later:

*"Mechanical centralisation, run mad, is paralysing the industrial and economic activities of the country. Initiative is frowned upon, free effort systematically discouraged. The great masses are deprived of the opportunity to shape the policies of the Revolution, or take part in the administration of the affairs of the country. The government is monopolising every avenue of life; the Revolution is divorced from the people. A bureaucratic machine is created that is appalling in its parasitism, inefficiency and corruption. In Moscow alone this new class of **sovburs** (Soviet bureaucrats) exceeds, in 1920, the total of office holders throughout the whole of Russia under the Tsar in 1914 . . . The Bolshevik economic policies, effectively aided by this bureaucracy, completely disorganise the already crippled industrial life of the country. Lenin, Zinoviev, and other Communist leaders thunder philippics against the new Soviet bourgeoisie, - and issue ever new decrees that strengthen and augment its numbers and influence."* [**The Russian Tragedy**, p. 26]

Bakunin would not have been remotely surprised. As such, the Bolshevik revolution provided a good example to support Malatesta's argument that *"if . . . one means government action when one talks of social action, then this is still the resultant of individual forces, but only of those individuals who form the government . . . it follows. . . that far from resulting in an increase in the productive, organising and protective forces in society, it would greatly reduce them, limiting initiative to a few, and giving them the right to do everything without, of course, being able to provide them with the gift of being all-knowing."* [**Anarchy**, pp. 36-7]

By confusing *"state action"* with collective working class action, the Bolsheviks effectively eliminated the latter in favour of the former. The usurpation of all aspects of life by the centralised bodies created by the Bolsheviks left workers with no choice but to act as isolated individuals. Can it be surprising, then, that Bolshevik policies aided the atomisation of the working class by replacing collective organisation and action by state bureaucracy? The potential for collective action **was** there. You need only look at the strikes and protests directed **against** the Bolsheviks to see that was the case (see [section 5](#) of the appendix on ["What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?"](#) for details). Ironically, Bolshevik policies and ideology ensured that the collective effort and action of workers was directed not at solving the revolution's problems but resisting Bolshevik tyranny.

That centralism concentrates power in a few hands can be seen even in Leninist accounts of the Russian revolution. To take one example, Tony Cliff may assert that the *"mistakes of the masses were themselves*

*creative*" but when push comes to shove, he (like Lenin) simply does not allow the masses to make such mistakes and, consequently, learn from them. Thus he defends Lenin's economic policies of "*state capitalism*" and "*one-man management*" (and in the process misleadingly suggests that these were **new** ideas on Lenin's part, imposed by objective factors, rather than, as Lenin acknowledged, what he had advocated all along -- see [section 5](#)). Thus we discover that the collapse of industry (which had started in the start of 1917) meant that "[d]rastic measures had to be taken." But never fear, "*Lenin was not one to shirk responsibility, however unpleasant the task.*" He called for "*state capitalism*," and there "*were more difficult decisions to be accepted. To save industry from complete collapse, Lenin argued for the need to impose one-man management.*" So much for the creative self-activity of the masses, which was quickly dumped -- precisely at the time when it was most desperately needed. And it is nice to know that in a workers' state it is not the workers who decide things. Rather it is Lenin (or his modern equivalent, like Cliff) who would have the task of not shirking from the responsibility of deciding which drastic measures are required. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 21, p. 71 and p. 73] So much for "workers' power"!

Ultimately, centralism is designed to exclude the mass participation anarchists have long argued is required by a social revolution. It helped to undermine what Kropotkin considered the key to the success of a social revolution -- "*the people becom[ing] masters of their destiny.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 133] In his words:

*"We understand the revolution as a widespread popular movement, during which in every town and village within the region of revolt, the masses will have to take it upon themselves **the work of construction upon communistic bases**, without awaiting any orders and directions from above . . . As to representative government, whether self-appointed or elected . . . , we place in it no hopes whatever. We know beforehand that it will be able to do nothing to accomplish the revolution as long as the people themselves do not accomplish the change by working out on the spot the necessary new institutions . . . nowhere and never in history do we find that people carried into government by a revolutionary wave, have proved equal to the occasion.*

*"In the task of reconstructing society on new principles, separate men . . . are sure to fail. The collective spirit of the masses is necessary for this purpose . . . a socialist government . . . would be absolutely powerless without the activity of the people themselves, and that, necessarily, they would soon begin to act fatally as a bridle upon the revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 188-190]

The Bolshevik revolution and its mania for centralism proved him right. The use of centralisation helped ensure that workers' lost any meaningful say in their revolution and helped alienate them from it. Instead of the mass participation of all, the Bolsheviks ensured the top-down rule of a few. Unsurprisingly, as mass participation is what centralism was designed to exclude. Wishful thinking on behalf of the Bolshevik leaders (and their later-day followers) could not (and can not) overcome the structural imperatives of centralisation and its role in society. Nor could it stop the creation of a bureaucracy around these new centralised institutions.

## 8 How did the aim for party power undermine the revolution?

As well as a passion for centralisation and state capitalism, Bolshevism had another aim which helped undermine the revolution. This was the goal of party power (see [section 5](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)" for details). Given this, namely that the Bolsheviks had, from the start, aimed for party power it should not come as too surprising that Bolshevik dictatorship quickly replaced soviet democracy.

Given this obvious fact, it seems strange for modern day Leninists to blame the civil war for the Bolsheviks substituting their rule for the masses. After all, when the Bolshevik Party took power in October 1917, it did "substitute" itself for the working class and did so deliberately and knowingly. As we note in [section 2](#), this usurpation of power by a minority was perfectly acceptable within the Marxist theory of the state, a theory which aided this process no end.

Thus the Bolshevik party would be in power, with the "*conscious workers*" ruling over the rest. The question instantly arises of what happens if the masses turn against the party. If the Bolsheviks embody "*the power of the proletariat*," what happens if the proletariat reject the party? The undermining of soviet power by party power and the destruction of soviet democracy in the spring and summer of 1918 answers that specific question (see [section 6](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)"). This should have come as no surprise, given the stated aim (and implementation) of party power plus the Bolshevik identification of party power with workers' power. It is not a great step to party dictatorship **over** the proletariat from these premises (particularly if we include the underlying assumptions of vanguardism -- see [section H.5.3](#)). A step, we must stress, that the Bolsheviks quickly took when faced with working class rejection in the soviet elections of spring and summer of 1918.

Nor was this destruction of soviet democracy by party power just the result of specific conditions in 1917-8. This perspective had been in Russian Marxist circles well before the revolution. As we discuss in [section H.5](#), vanguardism implies party power (see, as noted, [section H.5.3](#) in particular). The ideas of Lenin's **What is to be Done?** give the ideological justification for party dictatorship over the masses. Once in power, the logic of vanguardism came into its own, allowing the most disgraceful repression of working class freedoms to be justified in terms of "Soviet Power" and other euphemisms for the party.

The identification of workers' power with party power has deeply undemocratic results, as the experience of the Bolshevik proves. However, these results were actually articulated in Russian socialist circles before hand. At the divisive 1903 congress of the Russian Social Democrats, which saw the split into two factions (Bolshevik and Menshevism) Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism, argued as follows:

*"Every particular democratic principle must be considered not in itself, abstractly, . . . the success of the revolution is the highest law. And if, for the success of the revolution's*



*success, we need temporarily to restrict the functioning of a particular democratic principle, then it would be criminal to refrain from imposing that restriction. . . And we must take the same attitude where the question of the length of parliaments is concerned. If, in an outburst of revolutionary enthusiasm, the people elect a very good parliament . . . it would suit us to try and make that a **long Parliament**; but if the elections turned out badly for us, we should have to try and disperse the resulting parliament not after two years but, if possible, after two weeks."* [RSDLP, **Minutes of the Second Congress of the RSDLP**, p. 220]

Another delegate argued that "[t]here is not a single one among the principles of democracy which we ought not to subordinate **to the interests of our Party** . . . we must consider democratic principles exclusively from the standpoint of the most rapid achievement of that aim [i.e. revolution], from the standpoint of the interests of our Party. If any particular demand is against our interests, we must not include it." To which, Plekhanov replied, "I fully associate myself with what Comrade Posadovksy has said." [Op. Cit., p. 219 and p. 220] Lenin "agreed unreservedly with this subordination of democratic principles to party interests." [Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, p. 211]

Plekhanov at this time was linked with Lenin, although this association lasted less than a year. After that, he became associated with the Mensheviks (before his support for Russia in World War I saw him form his own faction). Needless to say, he was mightily annoyed when Lenin threw his words back in his face in 1918 when the Bolsheviks disbanded the Constituent Assembly. Yet while Plekhanov came to reject this position (perhaps because the elections had not "*turned out badly for*" his liking) it is obvious that the Bolsheviks embraced it and keenly applied it to elections to soviets and unions as well as Parliaments once in power (see [section 6](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)" for example). But, at the time, he sided with Lenin against the Mensheviks and it can be argued that the latter applied these teachings of that most respected pre-1914 Russian Marxist thinker.

This undemocratic perspective can also be seen when, in 1905, the St. Petersburg Bolsheviks, like most of the party, opposed the soviets. They argued that "*only a strong party along class lines can guide the proletarian political movement and preserve the integrity of its program, rather than a political mixture of this kind, an indeterminate and vacillating political organisation such as the workers council represents and cannot help but represent.*" [quoted by Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, p. 77] Thus the soviets could not reflect workers' interests because they were elected by the workers!

The Bolsheviks saw the soviets as a rival to their party and demanded it either accept their political program or simply become a trade-union like organisation. They feared that it pushed aside the party committee and thus led to the "*subordination of consciousness to spontaneity*" and under the label "*non-party*" allow "*the rotten goods of bourgeois ideology*" to be introduced among the workers. [quoted by Anweiler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 78 and p. 79] In this, the St. Petersburg Bolsheviks were simply following Lenin's **What is to be Done?**, in which Lenin had argued that the "*spontaneous development of the labour movement leads to it being subordinated to bourgeois ideology.*" [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 82] Lenin in 1905, to his credit, rejected these clear conclusions of his own theory and was more

supportive of the soviets than his followers (although *"he sided in principle with those who saw in the soviet the danger of amorphous nonpartisan organisation."* [Anweiler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 81]).

This perspective, however, is at the root of all Bolshevik justifications for party power after the October revolution. The logical result of this position can be found in the actions of the Bolsheviks in 1918 and onwards. For the Bolsheviks in power, the soviets were less than important. The key for them was to maintain Bolshevik party power and if soviet democracy was the price to pay, then they were more than willing to pay it. As such, Bolshevik attitudes in 1905 are significant:

*"Despite the failure of the Bolshevik assault on the non-partisanship of the [St.] Petersburg Soviet, which may be dismissed as a passing episode . . . the attempt . . . is of particular significance in understanding the Bolshevik's mentality, political ambitions and **modus operandi**. First, starting in [St.] Petersburg, the Bolshevik campaign was repeated in a number of provincial soviets such as Kostroma and Tver, and, possibly, Sormovo. Second, the assault reveals that from the outset the Bolsheviks were distrustful of, if not hostile towards the Soviets, to which they had at best an instrumental and always party-minded attitude. Finally, the attempt to bring the [St.] Petersburg Soviet to heel is an early and major example of Bolshevik take-over techniques hitherto practised within the narrow confines of the underground party and now extended to the larger arena of open mass organisations such as soviets, with the ultimate aim of controlling them and turning them into one-party organisations, or, failing that, of destroying them."* [Israel Getzler, *"The Bolshevik Onslaught on the Non-Party 'Political Profile' of the Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies October-November 1905"*, **Revolutionary History**, pp. 123-146, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 124-5]

The instrumentalist approach of the Bolsheviks post-1917 can be seen from their arguments and attitudes in 1905. On the day the Moscow soviet opened, a congress of the northern committees of the Social Democratic Party passed a resolution stating that a *"council of workers deputies should be established only in places where the party organisation has no other means of directing the proletariat's revolutionary action . . . The soviet of workers deputies must be a technical instrument of the party for the purpose of giving political leadership to the masses through the RSDWP [the Social-Democratic Party]. It is therefore imperative to gain control of the soviet and prevail upon it to recognise the program and political leadership of the RSDWP."* [quoted by Anweiler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 79]

This perspective that the party should be given precedence can be seen in Lenin's comment that while the Bolsheviks should *"go along with the unpoliticalised proletarians, but on no account and at no time should we forget that animosity among the proletariat toward the Social Democrats is a remnant of bourgeois attitudes . . . Participation in unaffiliated organisations can be permitted to socialists only as an exception . . . only if the independence of the workers party is guaranteed and if within unaffiliated organisations or soviets individual delegates or party groups are subject to unconditional control and guidance by the party executive."* [quoted by Anweiler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 81] These comments have clear links to Lenin's argument in 1920 that working class protest against the Bolsheviks showed that they had

become "*declassified*" (see [section 5](#) of the appendix on "[What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?](#)"). It similarly allows soviets to be disbanded if Bolsheviks are not elected (which they were, see [section 6](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)"). It also ensures that Bolshevik representatives to the soviets are not delegates from the workplace, but rather a "transmission belt" (to use a phrase from the 1920s) for the decisions of the party leadership. In a nutshell, Bolshevik soviets would represent the party's central committee, not those who elected them. As Oskar Anweiler summarised:

*"The 'revolutionary genius' of the people, which Lenin had mentioned and which was present in the soviets, constantly harboured the danger of 'anarcho-syndicalist tendencies' that Lenin fought against all his life. He detected this danger early in the development of the soviets and hoped to subdue it by subordinating the soviets to the party. The drawback of the new 'soviet democracy' hailed by Lenin in 1906 is that he could envisage the soviets only as **controlled** organisations; for him they were the instruments by which the party controlled the working masses, rather than true forms of a workers democracy." [Op. Cit., p. 85]*

As we noted in [section H.3.11](#), Lenin had concluded in 1907 that while the party could "*utilise*" the soviets "*for the purpose of developing the Social-Democratic movement,*" the party "*must bear in mind that if Social-Democratic activities among the proletarian masses are properly, effectively and widely organised, such institutions may actually become superfluous.*" [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 210] Thus the means by which working class can manage their own affairs would become "*superfluous*" once the party was in power. As Samuel Farber argues, Lenin's position before 1917 was "*clearly implying that the party could normally fulfil its revolutionary role without the existence of broad class organisations . . . Consequently, Lenin's and the party's eventual endorsement of the soviets in 1905 seems to have been tactical in character. That is, the Bolshevik support for the soviets did not at the time signify a theoretical and/or principled commitment to these institutions as revolutionary organs to overthrow the old society, let alone as key structural ingredients of the post-revolutionary order. Furthermore, it is again revealing that from 1905 to 1917 the concept of soviets did not play an important role in the thinking of Lenin or of the Bolshevik Party . . . [T]hese strategies and tactics vis-a-vis the soviets . . . can be fairly seen as expressing a predisposition favouring the party and downgrading the soviets and other non-party class organisations, at least in relative terms.*" [**Before Stalinism**, p. 37] Such a perspective on the soviets can be seen once the party was in power when they quickly turned them, without concern, into mere fig-leaves for party power (see [section 6](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)" for more details).

It cannot be mere coincidence that the ideas and rhetoric against the soviets in 1905 should resurface again once the Bolsheviks were in power. For example, in 1905, in St. Petersburg "*the Bolsheviks pressed on*" with their campaign and, "*according to the testimony of Vladimir Voitinskii, then a young Bolshevik agitator, the initial thrust of the Bolshevik 'plan' was to push the SRs [who were in a minority] out of the Soviet, while 'the final blow' would be directed against the Mensheviks. Voitinskii also recalled the heated argument advanced by the popular agitator Nikolai Krylenko ('Abram') for the*

*'dispersal of the Soviet' should it reject the 'ultimatum' to declare its affiliation with the RSDP.*" [Getzler, **Op., Cit.**, pp. 127-8] This mirrored events in 1918. Then *"at the local political level"* Bolshevik majorities were attained (*"by means fair, foul and terrorist"*) *"in the plenary assemblies of the soviets, and with the barring of all those not 'completely dedicated to Soviet power' [i.e. Mensheviks and SRs] from the newly established network of soviet administrative departments and from the soviet militias. Soviets where Bolshevik majorities could not be achieved were simply disbanded."* A similar process occurred at the summit (see [section 7](#)). Thus *"the October revolution marked [the soviets] transformation from agents of democratisation into regional and local administrative organs of the centralised, one-party Soviet state."* [Israel Getzler, **Soviets as Agents of Democratisation**, p. 27 and pp. 26-7]

Can such an outcome really have **no** link at all with the Bolshevik position and practice in period before 1917 and, in particular, during the 1905 revolution? Obviously not. As such, we should not be too surprised or shocked when Lenin replied to a critic who assailed the "dictatorship of one party" in 1919 by clearly and unashamedly stating: *"Yes, the dictatorship of one party! We stand upon it and cannot depart from this ground, since this is the party which in the course of decades has won for itself the position of vanguard of the whole factory and industrial proletariat."* [quoted by E.H. Carr, **The Bolshevik Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 236] Or when he replied to a critic in 1920 that *"[h]e says we understand by the words dictatorship of proletariat what is actually the dictatorship of its determined and conscious minority. And that is the fact."* This *"minority . . . may be called a party,"* Lenin stressed. [quoted by Arthur Ransome, **The Crisis in Russia 1920**, p. 35]

This perspective can be traced back to the underlying ideology expounded by the Bolsheviks before and during 1917. For example, mere days after seizing power in the October Revolution Lenin was stressing that the Bolsheviks' *"present slogan is: No compromise, i.e. for a homogeneous Bolshevik government."* He did not hesitate to use the threat to *"appeal to the sailors"* against the other socialist parties, stating *"[i]f you get the majority, take power in the Central Executive Committee and carry one. But we will go to the sailors."* [quoted by Tony Cliff, **Lenin**, vol. 3, p. 26] Clearly soviet power was far from Lenin's mind, rejecting soviet democracy if need be in favour of party power. Strangely, Cliff (a supporter of Lenin) states that Lenin *"did not visualise one-party rule"* and that the *"first decrees and laws issued after the October revolution were full of repetitions of the word 'democracy.'" [Op. Cit., p. 161 and p. 146]* He goes on to quote Lenin stating that *"[a]s a democratic government we cannot ignore the decision of the masses of the people, even though we disagree with it."* Cliff strangely fails to mention that Lenin also applied this not only to the land decree (as Cliff notes) but also to the Constituent Assembly. *"And even if,"* Lenin continued, *"the peasants continue to follow the Socialist Revolutionaries, even if they give this party a majority in the Constituent Assembly, we shall still say -- what of it?"* [Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 26, pp. 260-1] But the Bolsheviks disbanded the Constituent Assembly after one session. The peasants had voted for the SRs and the Assembly went the same way as Lenin's promises. And if Lenin's promises of 1917 on the Assembly proved to be of little value, then why should his various comments to soviet democracy be considered any different? In a clash between soviet democracy and party power, the Bolsheviks consistently favoured the latter.

Thus Bolshevik ideology had consistently favoured party power and had a long term ideological

preference for it. Combine this aim of party power with a vanguardism position (see [section H.5](#)) and party dictatorship will soon result. Neil Harding summarises the issue well:

*"There were a number of very basic axioms that lay at the very heart of the theory and practice of Leninism with regard to the party . . . It was the party that disposed of scientific or objective knowledge. Its analysis of the strivings of the proletariat was, therefore, privileged over the proletariat's own class goals and a single discernible class will was, similarly, axiomatic to both Marxism and Leninism. Both maintained that it was the communists who alone articulated these goals and this will -- that was the party's principal historical role.*

*"At this point, Leninism (again faithful to the Marxist original) resorted to a little-noticed definitional conjuring trick -- one that proved to be of crucial importance for the mesmeric effect of the ideology. The trick was spectacularly simple and audacious -- the class was defined as class only to the extent that it conformed to the **party's** account of its objectives, and mobilised itself to fulfil them. . . . The messy, real proletarians -- the aggregation of wage workers with all their diverse projects and aspirations -- were to be judged by their progress towards a properly class existence by the party that had itself devised the criteria for the class existence." [Leninism, pp. 173-4]*

This authoritarian position, which allows "socialism" to be imposed by force upon the working class, lies at the core of Leninism. Ironically, while Bolshevism claims to be **the** party of the working class, representing it essentially or exclusively, they do so in the name of possessing a theory that, qua theory, can be the possession of intellectuals and, therefore, has to be "introduced" to the working class from outside (see [section H.5.1](#) for details).

This means that Bolshevism is rooted in the identification of "class consciousness" with supporting the party. Given the underlying premises of vanguardism, unsurprisingly the Bolsheviks took "class consciousness" to mean this. If the workers protested against the policies of the party, this represented a fall in class consciousness and, therefore, working class resistance placed "class" power in danger. If, on the other hand, the workers remained quiet and followed the party's decision then, obviously, they showed high levels of class consciousness. The net effect of this position was, of course, to justify party dictatorship. Which, of course, the Bolsheviks did create **and** justified ideologically.

Thus the Bolshevik aim for party power results in disempowering the working class in practice. Moreover, the assumptions of vanguardism ensure that only the party leadership is able to judge what is and is not in the interests of the working class. Any disagreement by elements of that class or the whole class itself can be dismissed as "wavering" and "vacillation." While this is perfectly acceptable within the Leninist "from above" perspective, from an anarchist "from below" perspective it means little more than pseudo-theoretical justification for party dictatorship **over** the proletariat and the ensuring that a socialist society will **never** be created. Ultimately, socialism without freedom is meaningless -- as the Bolshevik regime proved time and time again.

As such, to claim that the Bolsheviks did not aim to "substitute" party power for working class power seems inconsistent with both Bolshevik theory and practice. Lenin had been aiming for party power from the start, identifying it with working class power. As the party was the vanguard of the proletariat, it was duty bound to seize power and govern on behalf of the masses and, moreover, take any actions necessary to maintain the revolution -- even if these actions violated the basic principles required to have any form of meaningful workers' democracy and freedom. Thus the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* had long become equated with party power and, once in power, it was only a matter of time before it became the *"dictatorship of the party."* And once this did occur, none of the leading Bolsheviks questioned it. The implications of these Bolshevik perspectives came clear after 1917, when the Bolsheviks raised the need for party dictatorship to an ideological truism.

Thus it seems strange to hear some Leninists complain that the rise of Stalinism can be explained by the rising "independence" of the state machine from the class (i.e. party) it claimed to be in service of. Needless to say, few Leninists ponder the links between the rising *"independence"* of the state machine from the proletariat (by which most, in fact, mean the *"vanguard"* of the proletariat, the party) and Bolshevik ideology. As noted in [section H.3.8](#), a key development in Bolshevik theory on the state was the perceived need for the vanguard to ignore the wishes of the class it claimed to represent and lead. For example, Victor Serge (writing in the 1920s) considered it a truism that the *"party of the proletariat must know, at hours of decision, how to break the resistance of the backward elements among the masses; it must know how to stand firm sometimes against the masses . . . it must know how to go against the current, and cause proletarian consciousness to prevail against lack of consciousness and against alien class influences."* [**Year One of the Russian Revolution**, p. 218]

The problem with this is that, by definition, **everyone** is backward in comparison to the vanguard party. Moreover, in Bolshevik ideology it is the party which determines what is and is not *"proletarian consciousness."* Thus we have the party ideologue presenting self-justifications for party power **over** the working class. Now, if the vanguard is to be able to ignore the masses then it must have power **over** them. Moreover, to be independent of the masses the machine it relies on to implement its power must also, by definition, be independent of the masses. Can we be surprised, therefore, with the rise of the "independent" state bureaucracy in such circumstances? If the state machine is to be independent of the masses then why should we expect it not to become independent of the vanguard? Surely it must be the case that we would be far more surprised if the state machine did **not** become "independent" of the ruling party?

Nor can it be said that the Bolsheviks learned from the experience of the Russian Revolution. This can be seen from Trotsky's 1937 comments that the *"proletariat can take power only through its vanguard. In itself the necessity for state power arises from the insufficient cultural level of the masses and their heterogeneity."* Thus *"state power"* is required **not** to defend the revolution against reaction but from the working class itself, who do not have a high enough *"cultural level"* to govern themselves. At best, their role is that of a passive supporter, for "[w]ithout the confidence of the class in the vanguard, without support of the vanguard by the class, there can be no talk of the conquest of power." While soviets *"are the only organised form of the tie between the vanguard and the class"* it does not mean that they are

organs of self-management. No, a "*revolutionary content can be given . . . only by the party. This is proved by the positive experience of the October Revolution and by the negative experience of other countries (Germany, Austria, finally, Spain).*" [**Stalinism and Bolshevism**]

Sadly, Trotsky failed to explicitly address the question of what happens when the "*masses*" stop having "*confidence in the vanguard*" and decides to support some other group. After all, if a "*revolutionary content*" can only be given by "*the party*" then if the masses reject the party then the soviets can no only be revolutionary. To save the revolution, it would be necessary to destroy the democracy and power of the soviets. Which is **exactly** what the Bolsheviks did do in 1918. By equating popular power with party power Bolshevism not only opens the door to party dictatorship, it invites it in, gives it some coffee and asks it to make itself a home! Nor can it be said that Trotsky ever appreciated Kropotkin's "*general observation*" that "*those who preach dictatorship do not in general perceive that in sustaining their prejudice they only prepare the way for those who later on will cut their throats.*" [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 244]

In summary, it cannot be a coincidence that once in power the Bolsheviks acted in ways which had clear links to the political ideology it had been advocating before hand. As such, the Bolshevik aim for party power helped undermine the real power of working class people during the Russian revolution. Rooted in a deeply anti-democratic political tradition, it was ideologically predisposed to substitute party power for soviet power and, finally, to create -- and justify -- the dictatorship **over** the proletariat. The civil war may have shaped certain aspects of these authoritarian tendencies but it did not create them.

# What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?

As is well known, the Russian Revolution failed. Rather than produce socialism, the Bolshevik revolution gave birth to an autocratic party dictatorship residing over a state capitalist economy. In turn, this regime gave rise to the horrors of Stalin's system. While Stalinism was denounced by all genuine socialists, a massive debate has existed within the Marxist movement over when, exactly, the Russian Revolution failed and why it did. Some argue around 1924, others say around 1928, some (libertarian Marxists) argue from the Bolshevik seizure of power. The reasons for the failure tend to be more readily agreed upon: isolation, the economic and social costs of civil war, the "backward" nature of Russian society and economy are usually listed as the key factors. Moreover, what the Stalinist regime was is also discussed heatedly in such circles. Some (orthodox Trotskyists) claiming it was a "degenerated workers state," others (such as the neo-Trotskyist UK SWP) that it was "state capitalist."

For anarchists, however, the failure of Bolshevism did not come as a surprise. In fact, just as with the reformist fate of the Social Democrats, the failure of the Russian Revolution provided empirical evidence for Bakunin's critique of Marx. As Emma Goldman recounts in her memoirs

*"Professor Harold Laski . . . expressed the opinion that I ought to take some comfort in the vindication anarchism had received by the Bolsheviks. I agreed, adding that not only their regime, but their stepbrothers as well, the Socialists in power in other countries, had demonstrated the failure of the Marxian State better than any anarchist argument. Living proof was always more convincing than theory. Naturally I did not regret the Socialist failure but I could not rejoice in it in the face of the Russian tragedy." [Living My Life, vol. 2, p. 969]*

Given that Leninists claim that the Russian revolution was a success (at least initially) and so proves the validity of their ideology, anarchists have a special duty to analysis and understand what went wrong. Simply put, if the Russian Revolution was a "success," Leninism does not need "failures"!

This section of the FAQ will discuss these explanations for the failure of Bolshevism. Simply put, anarchists are not convinced by Leninist explanations on why Bolshevism created a new class system, not socialism.

This subject is very important. Unless we learn the lessons of history we will be doomed to repeat them. Given the fact that many people who become interested in socialist ideas will come across the remnants of Leninist parties it is important that anarchists explains clearly and convincingly why the Russian Revolution failed and the role of Bolshevik ideology in that process. We need to account why a popular revolution became in a few short years a state capitalist party dictatorship. As Noam Chomsky put it:



*"In the stages leading up to the Bolshevik coup in October 1917, there **were** incipient socialist institutions developing in Russia -- workers' councils, collectives, things like that. And they survived to an extent once the Bolsheviks took over -- but not for very long; Lenin and Trotsky pretty much eliminated them as they consolidated their power. I mean, you can argue about the **justification** for eliminating them, but the fact is that the socialist initiatives were pretty quickly eliminated.*

*"Now, people who want to justify it say, 'The Bolsheviks had to do it' -- that's the standard justification: Lenin and Trotsky had to do it, because of the contingencies of the civil war, for survival, there wouldn't have been food otherwise, this and that. Well, obviously the question is, was that true. To answer that, you've got to look at the historical facts: I don't think it was true. In fact, I think the incipient socialist structures in Russia were dismantles **before** the really dire conditions arose . . . But reading their own writings, my feeling is that Lenin and Trotsky knew what they were doing, it was conscious and understandable." [Understanding Power, p. 226]*

As we discussed in the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#), Chomsky's feelings are more than supported by the historical record. The elimination of meaningful working class freedom and self-management started from the start and was firmly in place before the start of the civil war at the end of May, 1918. The civil war simply accelerated processes which had already started, strengthened policies that had already been applied. And it could be argued that rather than impose alien policies onto Bolshevism, the civil war simply brought the hidden (and not-so-hidden) state capitalist and authoritarian politics of Marxism and Leninism to the fore.

Which is why analysing the failure of the revolution is important. If the various arguments presented by Leninists on why Bolshevism failed (and, consequently, Stalinism developed) can be refuted, then we are left with the key issues of revolutionary politics -- whether Bolshevik politics had a decisive negative impact on the development of the Russian Revolution and, if so, there is an alternative to those politics. As regards the first issue, as we discussed in the appendix on ["How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?"](#), anarchists argue that this was the case. Bolshevik ideology itself played a key role in the degeneration of the revolution. And as regards the second one, anarchists can point to the example of the Makhnovists, which proves that alternative policies were possible and could be applied with radically different outcomes (see the appendix on ["Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?"](#) for more on the Makhnovist movement).

This means that anarchists stress the interplay between the "objective factors" and the subjective one (i. e. party ideology). Faced with difficult circumstances, people and parties react in different ways. If they did not then it would imply what they thought has no impact at all on their actions. It also means that the politics of the Bolsheviks played no role in their decisions. As we discussed in the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#), this position simply cannot be maintained. Leninist ideology itself played a key role in the rise of Stalinism. A conclusion Leninists reject. They, of course, try to distance themselves from Stalinism, correctly arguing that it was a brutal and undemocratic system. The

problem is that it was Lenin and Trotsky rather than Stalin who first shot strikers, banned left papers, radical organisations and party factions, sent workers and revolutionaries to the gulags, advocated and introduced one-man management and piece-work in the workplace, eliminated democracy in the military and shut down soviets elected with the "wrong" (i.e. non-Bolshevik) delegates.

Many Leninists know nothing of these facts. Their parties simply do not tell them the whole story of when Lenin and Trotsky were in power. Others do know and attempt to justify these actions. When anarchists discuss why the Russian Revolution failed, these Leninists have basically one reply. They argue that anarchists never seem to consider the objective forces at play during the Russian revolution, namely the civil war, the legacy of World War One, the international armies of counter-revolution and economic disruption. These "*objective factors*" meant that the revolution was, basically, suffocated and where the overriding contribution to the rise of militarism and the crushing of democracy within the soviets.

For anarchists such "*objective factors*" do not (and must not) explain why the Russian Revolution failed. This is because, as we argue in the following sections, almost all revolutions will face the same, or similar, problems. Indeed, in sections [1](#) and [2](#) both anarchists like Kropotkin and Marxists like Lenin argued that this was the case. As we discussed in [section H.2.1](#), Leninists like to claim that they are "*realistic*" (unlike the "*utopian*" anarchists) and recognise civil war is inevitable in a revolution. As [section 3](#) indicates, any defence of Bolshevism based on blaming the impact of the civil war is both factually and logically flawed. As far as economic disruption goes, as we discuss in [section 4](#) this explanation of Bolshevik authoritarianism is unconvincing as **every** revolution will face this problem. Then [section 5](#) analyses the common Leninist argument that the revolution failed because the Russian working class became "*atomised*" or "*declassed*." As that section indicates, the Russian working class was more than capable of collective action throughout the 1918 to 1921 period (and beyond). The problem was that it was directed **against** the Bolshevik party. Finally, [section 6](#) indicates whether the Bolshevik leaders explained their actions in terms of the "objective factors" they faced.

It should be stressed that we are discussing these factors individually simply because it is easier to do so. In reality, it is less hard to do so. For example, civil war will, undoubtedly, mean economic disruption. Economic disruption will mean unemployment and that will affect the working class via unemployment and less goods available (for example). So just because we separate the specific issues for discussion purposes, it should not be taken to imply that we are not aware of their combined impact on the Russian Revolution.

Of course there is the slight possibility that the failure of Bolshevism can be explained **purely** in these terms. Perhaps a future revolution will be less destructive, less isolated, less resisted than the Russian (although, as we noted in the [section 2](#), leading Bolsheviks like Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin doubted this). That **is** a possibility. However, should we embrace an ideology whose basic, underlying, argument is based on the hope that fate will be kinder to them this time? As Lenin argued against the Russian left-communists in early 1918:

*"Yes, we shall see the world revolution, but for the time being it is a very good fairy-tale . . . But I ask, is it proper for a serious revolutionary to believe in fairy-tales? . . . [I]f you tell the people that civil war will break out in Germany and also guarantee that instead of a clash with imperialism we shall have a field revolution on a world-wide scale, the people will say you are deceiving them. In doing this you will be overcoming the difficulties with which history has confronted us only in your minds, by your wishes . . . You are staking everything on this card! If the revolution breaks out, everything is saved . . . But if it does not turn out as we desire, if it does not achieve victory tomorrow -- what then? Then the masses will say to you, you acted like gamblers -- you staked everything on a fortunate turn of events that did not take place . . ." [Collected Works, vol. 27, p. 102]*

Anarchists have always recognised that a revolution would face problems and difficult "objective factors" and has developed our ideas accordingly. We argue that to blame "objective factors" on the failure of the Russian Revolution simply shows that believing in fairy-tales is sadly far too common on the "serious" Leninist "revolutionary" left. And as we discuss in the appendix on "[How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?](#)", the impact of Bolshevik ideology on the failure of the revolution was important and decisive. Even **if** the next revolution is less destructive, it cannot be argued that socialism will be the result if Bolshevik ideology is reapplied. And as Cornelius Castoriadis argues, *"this 'response' [of explaining the failure of the Russian Revolution on "objective factors"] teaches us nothing we could extend beyond the confines of the Russian situation in 1920. The sole conclusion to be drawn from this kind of 'analysis' is that revolutionaries should ardently hope that future revolutions break out in more advanced countries, that they should not remain isolated, and that civil wars should not in the least be devastating."* [**The Role of Bolshevik Ideology in the Birth of the Bureaucracy**, p. 92] While this may be sufficient for the followers of Bolshevism, it cannot be sufficient for anyone who wants to learn from history, not to repeat it.

Ultimately, if difficult times back in 1918-21 justified suppressing working class freedom and self-management, imprisoning and shooting anarchists and other socialists, implementing and glorifying party dictatorship, what might we expect in difficult times in the future? Simply put, if your defence of the Bolsheviks rests simply on "difficult circumstances" then it can only mean one thing, namely if "difficult circumstances" occur again we can expect the same outcome.

One last point. We should stress that libertarians do not think any future revolution will suffer as terrible conditions as that experienced by the Russian one. However, it might and we need to base our politics on the worse case possibility. That said, we argue that Bolshevik policies made things worse -- by centralising economic and political power, they automatically hindered the participation of working class people in the revolution, smothering any creative self-activity under the dead-weight of state officialdom. As a libertarian revolution would be based on maximising working class self-activity (at all levels, locally and upwards) we would argue that it would be better placed to respond to even the terrible conditions facing the Russian Revolution.

That is not all. As we argue in the appendix on ["How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?"](#) we are of the opinion that Bolshevism itself undermined the socialist potential of the revolution, irrespective of the actual circumstances involved (which, to some degree, will affect **any** revolution). For example, the Bolshevik preference for centralisation and nationalisation would negatively affect a revolution conducted in even the best circumstances, as would the seizure of state power rather than its destruction. As is clear from the appendix on ["How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?"](#), only the elimination of what makes Bolshevism Bolshevik would ensure that a revolution would be truly libertarian. So anarchists stress that rather than be forced upon them by "*objective factors*" many of these policies were, in fact, in line with pre-civil war Bolshevik ideas. The Bolshevik vision of socialism, in other words, ensured that they smothered the (libertarian) socialist tendencies and institutions that existed at the time. As Chomsky summarises, "*Lenin and Trotsky, shortly after seizing state power in 1917, moved to dismantle organs of popular control, including factory committees and Soviets, thus proceeding to deter and overcome socialist tendencies.*" [Deterring Democracy, p. 361] That they **thought** their system of state capitalism was a form of "socialism" is irrelevant -- they systematically combated (real) socialist tendencies in favour of state capitalist ones and did so knowingly and deliberately (see sections [H.3.1](#) and [H.3.13](#) on the differences between real socialism and Marxism in its Bolshevik mode and, of course, ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#) on Bolshevik practice itself).

So it is important to stress that even **if** the Russian Revolution had occurred in better circumstances, it is unlikely that Bolshevism would have resulted in socialism rather than state capitalism. Certain Bolshevik principles ensure that any revolution lead by a vanguard party would not have succeeded. This can be seen from the experience of Bolshevism immediately after it seized power, before the start of the civil war and major economic collapse. In the circumstances of post-world war I Russia, these principles were attenuated but their application in even the best of situations would have undermined socialist tendencies in the revolution. Simply put, a statist revolution will have statist, not libertarian, ends.

The focusing on "objective factors" (particularly the civil war) has become the traditional excuse for people with a romantic attachment to Leninism but who are unwilling to make a stand over what the Bolsheviks actually did in power. This excuse is not viable if you seek to build a revolutionary movement today: you need to choose between the real path of Lenin and the real, anarchist, alternative. As Lenin constantly stressed, a revolution will be difficult -- fooling ourselves about what will happen now just undermines our chances of success in the future and ensure that history will repeat itself.

Essentially, the "objective factors" argument is not a defence of Leninism, but rather one that seeks to evade having to make such a defence. This is very typical of Leninist parties today. Revolutionary politics would be much better served by confronting this history and the politics behind it head on. Perhaps, if Leninists did do this, they would probably remain Leninists, but at least then their party members and those who read their publications would have an understanding of what this meant. And they would have to dump Lenin's **State and Revolution** into the same place Lenin himself did when in power -- into the rubbish bin -- and admit that democracy and Bolshevik revolution do not go together.

It is precisely these rationalisations for Bolshevism based on "objective factors" which this section of the FAQ discusses and refutes. However, it is important to stress that it was **not** a case of the Bolshevik regime wanting to introduce communism but, being isolated, ended up imposing state capitalism instead. Indeed, the idea that "objective factors" caused the degeneration of the revolution is only valid if and only if the Bolsheviks were implementing socialist policies during the period immediately after the October revolution. That was not the case. Rather than objective factors undermining socialist policies, the facts of the matter are that the Bolsheviks pursued a statist and (state) capitalist policy from the **start**. As we discuss in the appendix on ["How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?"](#) the likes of Lenin explicitly argued for these policies as essential for building socialism (or, at best, the preconditions of socialism) in Russia and Bolshevik practice flowed from these comments. As we discuss in more detail in the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#), the Bolsheviks happily introduced authoritarian and state capitalist policies **from the start**. Many of the policies denounced as "Stalinist" by Leninists were being advocated and implemented by Lenin in the spring of 1918, i.e. before the start of the civil war and massive economic chaos. In other words, the usual excuses for Bolshevik tyranny do not hold much water, both factually and logically -- as this section of the FAQ seeks to show.

And, ironically, the framework which Leninists use in this discussion shows the importance of Bolshevik ideology and the key role it played in the outcome of the revolution. After all, pro-Bolsheviks argue that the "*objective factors*" forced the **Bolsheviks** to act as they did. However, the proletariat is meant to be the "*ruling class*" in the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*." As such, to argue that the Bolsheviks were forced to act as they did due to circumstances means to implicitly acknowledge that the party held power in Russia, **not** the working class. That a ruling party could become a party dictatorship is not that unsurprising. Nor that **its** vision of what "socialism" was would be given preference over the desires of the working class in whose name it ruled.

Ultimately, the discussion on why the Bolshevik party failed shows the validity of Bakunin's critique of Marxism. As he put it:

*"Nor can we comprehend talk of freedom of the proletariat or true deliverance of the masses within the State and by the State. State signifies domination, and all domination implies subjection of the masses, and as a result, their exploitation to the advantage of some governing minority.*

*"Not even as revolutionary transition will we countenance national Conventions, nor Constituent Assemblies, nor provisional governments, nor so called revolutionary dictatorships: because we are persuaded that revolution is sincere, honest and real only among the masses and that, whenever it is concentrated in the hands of a few governing individuals, it inevitably and immediately turns into reaction."* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 160]

The degeneration of the Russian Revolution can be traced from when the Bolsheviks seized power **on behalf of** the Russian working class and peasantry. The state implies the delegation of power and initiative into the hands of a few leaders who form the "revolutionary government." Yet the power of any revolution, as Bakunin recognised, derives from the decentralisation of power, from the active participation of the masses in the collective social movement and the direct action it generates. As soon as this power passes out of the hands of the working class, the revolution is doomed: the counter-revolution has begun and it matters little that it is draped in a red flag. Hence anarchist opposition to the state.

Sadly, many socialists have failed to recognise this. Hopefully this section of our FAQ will show that the standard explanations of the failure of the Russian revolution are, at their base, superficial and will only ensure that history will repeat itself.

## 1 Do anarchists ignore the objective factors facing the Russian revolution?

It is often asserted by Leninists that anarchists simply ignore the "objective factors" facing the Bolsheviks when we discuss the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. Thus, according to this argument, anarchists present a basically idealistic analysis of the failure of Bolshevism, one not rooted in the material conditions facing (civil war, economic chaos, etc.) facing Lenin and Trotsky.

According to one Trotskyist, anarchists *"do not make the slightest attempt at a serious analysis of the situation"* and so *"other considerations, of a different, 'theoretical' nature, are to be found in their works."* Thus:

*"Bureaucratic conceptions beget bureaucracy just as opium begets sleep by virtue of its sleep-inducing properties. Trotsky was wrong to explain the proliferation and rise of the bureaucracy on the basis of the country's backwardness, low cultural level, and the isolation of the revolution. No, what have rise to a social phenomenon like Stalinism was a conception or idea . . . it is ideas, or deviations from them, that determine the character of revolutions. The most simplistic kind of philosophical idealism has laid low historical materialism."* [Pierre Frank, "Introduction," Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, pp. 22-3]

Many other Trotskyists take a similar position (although most would include the impact of the Civil War on the rise of Bolshevik authoritarianism and the bureaucracy). Duncan Hallas, for example, argues that the account of the Bolshevik counter-revolution given in the Cohn-Bendit brothers' **Obsolete Communism** is marked by a *"complete omission of any consideration of the circumstances in which they [Bolshevik decisions] took place. The ravages of war and civil war, the ruin of Russian industry, the actual disintegration of the Russian working class: all of this, apparently, has no bearing on the outcome."* [**Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Party**, p. 41] Thus the *"degree to which workers can 'make their own history' depends on the weight of objective factors bearing down on them . . . To decide in any given circumstance the weight of the subjective and objective factors demands a concrete analysis*

*of the balance of forces.*" The conditions in Russia meant that the "*subjective factor*" of Bolshevik ideology "*was reduced to a choice between capitulation to the Whites or defending the revolution with whatever means were at hands. Within these limits Bolshevik policy was decisive. But it could not wish away the limits and start with a clean sheet. It is a tribute to the power of the Bolsheviks' politics and organisation that they took the measures necessary and withstood the siege for so long.*" [John Rees, "*In Defence of October*," pp. 3-82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 30]

So, it is argued, by ignoring the problems facing the Bolsheviks and concentrating on their **ideas**, anarchists fail to understand **why** the Bolsheviks acted as they did. Unsurprisingly anarchists are not impressed with this argument. This is for a simple reason. According to anarchist theory the "*objective factors*" facing the Bolsheviks are to be expected in **any** revolution. Indeed, the likes of Bakunin and Kropotkin predicted that a revolution would face the very "*objective factors*" which Leninists use to justify and rationalise Bolshevik actions (see [next section](#)). As such, to claim that anarchists ignore the "*objective factors*" facing the Bolsheviks during the Russian Revolution is simply a joke. How can anarchists be considered to ignore what they consider to be the inevitable results of a revolution? Moreover, these Bolshevik assertions ignore the fact that the anarchists who wrote extensively about their experiences in Russia never failed to note that difficult objective factors facing it. Alexander Berkman in **The Bolshevik Myth** paints a clear picture of the problems facing the revolution, as does Emma Goldman in her **My Disillusionment in Russia**. This is not to mention anarchists like Voline, Arshinov and Maximoff who took part in the Revolution, experiencing the "*objective factors*" first hand (and in the case of Voline and Arshinov, participating in the Makhnovist movement which, facing the same factors, managed **not** to act as the Bolsheviks did).

However, as the claim that anarchists ignore the "*objective circumstances*" facing the Bolsheviks is relatively common, it is important to refute it once and for all. This means that while we have discussed this issue in association with Leninist justifications for repressing the Kronstadt revolt (see [section 12](#) of the appendix "[What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?](#)"), it is worthwhile repeating them here. We are sorry for the duplication.

Anarchists take it for granted that, to quote Bakunin, revolutions "*are not child's play*" and that they mean "*war, and that implies the destruction of men and things.*" The "*Social Revolution must put an end to the old system of organisation based upon violence, giving full liberty to the masses, groups, communes, and associations, and likewise to individuals themselves, and destroying once and for all the historic cause of all violences, the power and existence of the State.*" This meant a revolution would be "*spontaneous, chaotic, and ruthless, always presupposes a vast destruction of property.*" [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 372, p. 373, p. 380] In other words:

*"The way of the anarchist social revolution, which will come from the people themselves, is an elemental force sweeping away all obstacles. Later, from the depths of the popular soul, there will spontaneously emerge the new creative forms of life."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 325]

He took it for granted that counter-revolution would exist, arguing that it was necessary to "*constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces . . . to organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction*" and "*for the purpose of self-defence.*" [Selected Writings, p. 171]

It would, of course, be strange if this necessity for defence and reconstruction would have little impact on the economic conditions in the revolutionised society. The expropriation of the means of production and the land by a free federation of workers' associations would have an impact on the economy. Kropotkin built upon Bakunin's arguments, stressing that a **social** revolution would, by necessity, involve major difficulties and harsh objective circumstances. It is worth quoting one of his many discussions of this at length:

*"Suppose we have entered a revolutionary period, with or without civil war -- it does not matter, -- a period when old institutions are falling into ruins and new ones are growing in their place. The movement may be limited to one State, or spread over the world, -- it will have nevertheless the same consequence: an immediate slackening of individual enterprise all over Europe. Capital will conceal itself, and hundreds of capitalists will prefer to abandon their undertakings and go to watering-places rather than abandon their unfixed capital in industrial production. And we know how a restriction of production in any one branch of industry affects many others, and these in turn spread wider and wider the area of depression.*

*"Already, at this moment, millions of those who have created all riches suffer from want of what must be considered **necessaries** for the life of a civilised man. . . Let the slightest commotion be felt in the industrial world, and it will take the shape of a general stoppage of work. Let the first attempt at expropriation be made, and the capitalist production of our days will at once come to a stop, and millions and millions of 'unemployed' will join the ranks of those who are already unemployed now.*

*"More than that . . . The very first advance towards a Socialist society will imply a thorough reorganisation of industry as **to what we have to produce**. Socialism implies . . . a transformation of industry so that it may be adapted to the needs of the customer, not those of the profit-maker. Many a branch of industry must disappear, or limits its production; many a new one must develop. We are now producing a great deal for export. But the export trade will be the first to be reduced as soon as attempts at Social Revolution are made anywhere in Europe . . .*

*"All that **can** be, and **will** be reorganised in time -- not by the State, of course (why, then, not say by Providence?), but by the workers themselves. But, in the meantime, the worker . . . cannot wait for the gradual reorganisation of industry. . .*

*"The great problem of how to supply the wants of millions will thus start up at once in all its immensity. And the necessity of finding an **immediate solution** for it is the reason we*



*consider that a step in the direction of [libertarian] Communism will be imposed on the revolted society -- not in the future, but as soon as it applies its crowbar to the first stones of the capitalist edifice."* [Act for Yourselves, pp. 57-9]

As noted in [section 12](#) of the appendix on "[What was the Kronstadt Uprising?](#)", the perspective was at the core of Kropotkin's politics. His classic work **Conquest of Bread** was based on this clear understanding of the nature of a social revolution and the objective problems it will face. As he put it, while a *"political revolution can be accomplished without shaking the foundations of industry"* a revolution *"where the people lay hands upon property will inevitably paralyse exchange and production . . . This point cannot be too much insisted upon; the reorganisation of industry on a new basis . . . cannot be accomplished in a few days."* Indeed, he considered it essential to *"show how tremendous this problem is."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, pp. 72-3]

Therefore, *"[o]ne of the great difficulties in every Revolution is the feeding of the large towns."* This was because the *"large towns of modern times are centres of various industries that are developed chiefly for the sake of the rich or for the export trade"* and these *"two branches fail whenever any crisis occurs, and the question then arises of how these great urban agglomerations are to be fed."* This crisis, rather than making revolution impossible, spurred the creation of what Kropotkin terms *"the communist movement"* in which *"the Parisian proletariat had already formed a conception of its class interests and had found men to express them well."* [Kropotkin, **The Great French Revolution**, vol. II, p. 457 and p. 504]

As for self-defence, he reproached the authors of classic syndicalist utopia **How we shall bring about the Revolution** for *"considerably attenuat[ing] the resistance that the Social Revolution will probably meet with on its way."* He stressed that the *"check of the attempt at Revolution in Russia has shown us all the danger that may follow from an illusion of this kind."* ["preface," Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget, **How we shall bring about the Revolution**, p. xxxvi]

It must, therefore, be stressed that the very *"objective factors"* supporters of Bolshevism use to justify the actions of Lenin and Trotsky were predicted correctly by anarchists decades before hand. Indeed, rather than ignore them anarchists like Kropotkin based their political and social ideas on these difficulties. As such, it seems ironic for Leninists to attack anarchists for allegedly ignoring these factors. It is even more ironic as these very same Leninists are meant to know that **any** revolution will involve these exact same *"objective factors,"* something that Lenin and other leading Bolsheviks acknowledged (see [next section](#)).

Therefore, as noted, when anarchists like Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman arrived in Russia they were aware of the problems it, like any revolution, would face. In the words of Berkman, *"what I saw and learned as in such crying contrast with my hopes and expectations as to shake the very foundation of my faith in the Bolsheviki. Not that I expected to find Russia a proletarian Eldorado. By no means. I knew how great the travail of a revolutionary period, how stupendous the difficulties to be overcome. Russia was besieged on numerous fronts; there was counter-revolution within and without; the blockade was starving the country and denying even medical aid to sick women and children. The*

*people were exhausted by long war and civil strife; industry was disorganised, the railroads broken down. I fully realised the dire situation, with Russia shedding her blood on the alter of the Revolution."* [The Bolshevik Myth, p. 329] Emma Goldman expressed similar opinions. [My Disillusionment in Russia, pp. xlvii-xlix]

Unsurprisingly, therefore this extremely realistic perspective can be found in their later works. Berkman, for example, stressed that *"when the social revolution had become thoroughly organised and production is functioning normally there will be enough for everybody. But in the first stages of the revolution, during the process of re-construction, we must take care to supply the people the best we can, and equally, which means rationing."* This was because the *"first effect of the revolution is reduced production."* This would be initially due to the general strike which is its *"starting point."* However, *"[w]hen the social revolution begins in any land, its foreign commerce stops: the importation of raw materials and finished products is suspended. The country may even be blockaded by the bourgeois governments."* In addition, he thought it important not to suppress *"small scale industries"* as they would be essential when *"a country in revolution is attacked by foreign governments, when it is blockaded and deprived of imports, when its large-scale industries threaten to break down or the railways do break down."* [ABC of Anarchism, p. 67, p. 74 p. 78-9 and p. 79]

He, of course, considered it essential that to counteract isolation workers must understand *"that their cause is international"* and that *"the organisation of labour"* must develop *"beyond national boundaries."* However, *"the probability is not to be discounted that the revolution may break out in one country sooner than in another"* and *"in such a case it would become imperative . . . not to wait for possible aid from outside, but immediately to exert all her energies to help herself supply the most essential needs of her people by her own efforts."* [Op. Cit., p. 78]

Emma Goldman, likewise, noted that it was *"a tragic fact that all revolutions have sprung from the loins of war. Instead of translating the revolution into social gains the people have usually been forced to defend themselves against warring parties."* "It seems," she noted, *"nothing great is born without pain and travail"* as well as *"the imperative necessity of defending the Revolution."* However, in spite of these inevitable difficulties she point to how the Spanish anarchists *"have shown the first example in history how Revolutions should be made"* by *"the constructive work"* of *"socialising of the land, the organisation of the industries."* [Vision on Fire, p. 218, p. 222 and p. 55-56]

These opinions were, as can be seen, to be expected from revolutionary anarchists schooled in the ideas of Bakunin and Kropotkin. Clearly, then, far from ignoring the *"objective factors"* facing the Bolsheviks, anarchists have based their politics around them. We have always argued that a social revolution would face isolation, economic disruption and civil war and have, for this reason, stressed the importance of mass participation in order to overcome them. As such, when Leninists argue that these inevitable *"objective factors"* caused the degeneration of Bolshevism, anarchists simply reply that if it cannot handle the inevitable then Bolshevism should be avoided. Just as we would avoid a submarine which worked perfectly well until it was placed in the sea or an umbrella which only kept you dry when it was not raining.

Moreover, what is to be made of this Leninist argument against anarchism? In fact, given the logic of their claims we have to argue we have to draw the conclusion that the Leninists seem to think a revolution **could** happen **without** civil war and economic disruption. As such it suggests that the Leninists have the "*utopian*" politics in this matter. After all, if they argue that civil war is inevitable then how can they blame the degeneration of the revolution on it? Simply put, if Bolshevism cannot handle the inevitable it should be avoided at all costs.

Ironically, as indicated in the [next section](#), we can find ample arguments to refute the Trotskyist case against the anarchist analysis in the works of leading Bolsheviks like Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin. Indeed, their arguments provide a striking confirmation of the anarchist position as they, like Kropotkin, stress that difficult "*objective factors*" will face **every** revolution. This means to use these factors to justify Bolshevik authoritarianism simply results in proving that Bolshevism is simply non-viable or that a liberatory social revolution is, in fact, impossible (and, as a consequence, genuine socialism).

There are, of course, other reasons why the Leninist critique of the anarchist position is false. The first is theoretical. Simply put, the Leninist position is the crudest form of economic determinism. Ideas **do** matter and, as Marx himself stressed, can play a key in how a social process develops. As we discuss in the appendix on "[How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?](#)", Marxist ideology played a key role in the degeneration of the revolution and in laying the groundwork for the rise of Stalinism.

Ultimately, any Leninist defence of Bolshevism based purely on stressing the "*objective factor*" implies that Bolshevik ideology played **no role** in the decisions made by the party leaders, that they simply operated on autopilot from October 1917 onwards. Yet, at the same time, they stress the importance of Leninist ideology in ensuring the "victory" of the revolution. They seek to have it both ways. However, as Samuel Farber puts it:

*"determinism's characteristic and systemic failure is to understand that what the masses of people do and think politically is as much part of the process determining the outcome of history as are the objective obstacles that most definitely limit peoples' choices."* [Before Stalinism, p. 198]

This is equally applicable when discussing the heads of a highly centralised state who have effectively expropriated political, economic and social power from the working class and are ruling in their name. Unsurprisingly, rather than just select policies at random the Bolshevik leadership pursued consistently before, during and after the civil war policies which reflected their ideology. Hence there was a preference in policies which centralised power in the hands of a few (politically **and** economically), that saw socialism as being defined by nationalisation rather than self-management, that stressed that role and power of the vanguard above that of the working class, that saw class consciousness as being determined by how much a worker agreed with the party leadership rather than whether it expressed the actual needs and interests of the class as a whole.

Then there is the empirical evidence against the Trotskyist explanation.

As we indicate in [section 3](#), soviet democracy and workers' power in the workplace was **not** undermined by the civil war. Rather, the process had began before the civil war started and, equally significantly, continued after its end in November 1920. Moreover, the "gains" of October Trotskyists claim that Stalinism destroyed were, in fact, long dead by 1921. Soviet democracy, working class freedom of speech, association and assembly, workers' self-management or control in the workplace, trade union freedom, the ability to strike, and a host of other, elementary, working class rights had been eliminated long before the end of the civil war (indeed, often before it started) and, moreover, the Bolsheviks did not lament this. Rather, *"there is no evidence indicating that Lenin or any mainstream Bolshevik leaders lamented the loss of workers' control or of democracy in the soviets, or at least referred to these losses as a retreat, as Lenin declared with the replacement of War Communism by NEP in 1921."* [Samuel Farber, **Op. Cit.**, p. 44]

And then there is the example of the Makhnovist movement. Operating in the same "objective circumstances," facing the same "objective factors," the Makhnovists did **not** implement the same policies as the Bolsheviks. As we discussed in the appendix on ["Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?"](#), rather than undermine soviet, soldier and workplace democracy and replace all with party dictatorship, the Makhnovists applied these as fully as they could. Now, if "objective factors" explain the actions of the Bolsheviks, then why did the Makhnovists not pursue identical policies?

Simply put, the idea that Bolshevik policies did not impact on the outcome of the revolution is a false assertion, as the Makhnovists show. Beliefs are utopian if subjective ideas are not grounded in objective reality. Anarchists hold that part of the subjective conditions required before socialism can exist is the existence of free exchange of ideas and working class democracy (i.e. self-management). To believe that revolution is possible without freedom, to believe those in power can, through their best and genuine intentions, impose socialism from above, as the Bolsheviks did, is indeed utopian. As the Bolsheviks proved. The Makhnovists shows that the received wisdom is that there was no alternative open to the Bolsheviks is false.

So while it cannot be denied that objective factors influenced how certain Bolshevik policies were shaped and applied, the inspiration of those policies came from Bolshevik ideology. An acorn will grow and develop depending on the climate and location it finds itself in, but regardless of the "objective factors" it will grow into an oak tree. Similarly with the Russian revolution. While the circumstances it faced influenced its growth, Bolshevik ideology could not help but produce an authoritarian regime with no relationship with **real** socialism.

In summary, anarchists do not ignore the objective factors facing the Bolsheviks during the revolution. As indicated, we predicted the problems they faced and developed our ideas to counter them. As the example of the Makhnovists showed, our ideas were more than adequate for the task. Unlike the Bolsheviks.

## 2 Can "*objective factors*" really explain the failure of Bolshevism?

As noted in the [previous section](#) Leninists tend to argue that anarchists downplay (at best) or ignore (at worse) the "*objective factors*" facing the Bolsheviks during the Russian Revolution. As noted in the same section, this argument is simple false. For anarchists have long expected the "*objective factors*" usually used to explain the degeneration of the revolution.

However, there is more to it than that. Leninists claim to be revolutionaries. They claim to know that revolutions face problems, the civil war is inevitable and so forth. It therefore strikes anarchists as being somewhat hypocritical for Leninists to blame these very same "*objective*" but allegedly inevitable factors for the failure of Bolshevism in Russia.

Ironically enough, Lenin and Trotsky agree with these anarchist arguments. Looking at Trotsky, he dismissed the CNT's leaderships' arguments in favour of collaborating with the bourgeois state:

*"The leaders of the Spanish Federation of Labour (CNT) . . . became, in the critical hour, bourgeois ministers. They explained their open betrayal of the theory of anarchism by the pressure of 'exceptional circumstances.' But did not the leaders of the German social democracy invoke, in their time, the same excuse? Naturally, civil war is not a peaceful and ordinary but an 'exceptional circumstance.' Every serious revolutionary organisation, however, prepares precisely for 'exceptional circumstances' . . . We have not the slightest intention of blaming the anarchists for not having liquidated the state with the mere stroke of a pen. A revolutionary party, even having seized power (of which the anarchist leaders were incapable in spite of the heroism of the anarchist workers), is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society. But all the more severely do we blame the anarchist theory, which seemed to be wholly suitable for times of peace, but which had to be dropped rapidly as soon as the 'exceptional circumstances' of the... revolution had begun. In the old days there were certain generals - and probably are now - who considered that the most harmful thing for an army was war. Little better are those revolutionaries who complain that revolution destroys their doctrine."* [Stalinism and Bolshevism]

Thus to argue that the "*exceptional circumstances*" caused by the civil war are the only root cause of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution is a damning indictment of Bolshevism. After all, Lenin did not argue in **State and Revolution** that the application of soviet democracy was dependent only in "*times of peace*." Rather, he stressed that they were for the "*exceptional circumstance*" of revolution and the civil war he considered its inevitable consequence. As such, we must note that Trotsky's followers do not apply this critique to their own politics, which are also a form of the "*exceptional circumstances*" excuse. Given how quickly Bolshevik "*principles*" (as expressed in **The State and Revolution**) were dropped, we can only assume that Bolshevik ideas are also suitable purely for "*times of peace*" as well. As such, we must note the irony of Leninist claims that "*objective circumstances*" explains the failure of the

## Bolshevik revolution.

Saying that, we should not that Trotsky was not above using such arguments himself (making later-day Trotskyists at least ideologically consistent in their hypocrisy). In the same essay, for example, he justifies the prohibition of other Soviet parties in terms of a "measure of defence of the dictatorship in a backward and devastated country, surrounded by enemies on all sides." In other words, an appeal to the exceptional circumstances facing the Bolsheviks! Perhaps unsurprisingly, his followers have tended to stress this (contradictory) aspect of his argument rather than his comments that those *"who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat. The Bolshevik party achieved in the civil war the correct combination of military art and Marxist politics."* [Op. Cit.] Which, of course, suggests that the prohibition of other parties had little impact on levels of soviet "democracy" allowed under the Bolsheviks (see [section 6](#) of the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#) for more on this).

This dismissal of the *"exceptional circumstances"* argument did not originate with Trotsky. Lenin repeatedly stressed that any revolution would face civil war and economic disruption. In early January, 1918, he was pointing to *"the incredibly complications of war and economic ruin"* in Russia and noting that *"the fact that Soviet power has been established . . . is why civil war has acquired predominance in Russia at the present time."* [Collected Works, vol. 26, p. 453 and p. 459]

A few months later he states quite clearly that *"it will never be possible to build socialism at a time when everything is running smoothly and tranquilly; it will never be possible to realise socialism without the landowners and capitalists putting up a furious resistance."* He reiterated this point, acknowledging that the *"country is poor, the country is poverty-stricken, and it is impossible just now to satisfy all demands; that is why it is so difficult to build the new edifice in the midst of disruption. But those who believe that socialism can be built at a time of peace and tranquillity are profoundly mistake: it will be everywhere built at a time of disruption, at a time of famine. That is how it must be."* [Op. Cit., vol. 27, p. 520 and p. 517]

As regards civil war, he noted that *"not one of the great revolutions of history has take place"* without one and *"without which not a single serious Marxist has conceived the transition from capitalism to socialism."* Moreover, *"there can be no civil war -- the inevitable condition and concomitant of socialist revolution -- without disruption."* [Op. Cit., p. 496 and p. 497] He considered this disruption as being applicable to advanced capitalist nations as well:

*"In Germany, state capitalism prevails, and therefore the revolution in Germany will be a hundred times more devastating and ruinous than in a petty-bourgeois country -- there, too, there will be gigantic difficulties and tremendous chaos and imbalance."* [Op. Cit., vol. 28, p. 298]

And from June, 1918:

*"We must be perfectly clear in our minds about the new disasters that civil war brings for every country. The more cultured a country is the more serious will be these disasters. Let us picture to ourselves a country possessing machinery and railways in which civil war is raging., and this civil war cuts off communication between the various parts of the country. Picture to yourselves the condition of regions which for decades have been accustomed to living by the interchange of manufactured goods and you will understand that every civil war brings forth disasters." [Op. Cit., vol. 27, p. 463]*

As we discuss in [section 4](#), the economic state of Germany immediately after the end of the war suggests that Lenin had a point. Simply put, the German economy was in a serious state of devastation, a state equal to that of Russia during the equivalent period of its revolution. If economic conditions made party dictatorship inevitable in Bolshevik Russia (as pro-Leninists argue) it would mean that soviet democracy and revolution cannot go together.

Lenin reiterated this point again and again. He argued that *"we see famine not only in Russia, but in the most cultured, advanced countries, like Germany . . . it is spread over a longer period than in Russia, but it is famine nevertheless, still more severe and painful than here."* In fact, *"today even the richest countries are experiencing unprecedented food shortages and that the overwhelming majority of the working masses are suffering incredible torture."* [Op. Cit., vol. 27, p. 460 and p. 461]

Lenin, unlike many of his latter day followers, did not consider these grim objective conditions are making revolution impossible. Rather, for him, there was *"no other way out of this war"* which is causing the problems *"except revolution, except civil war . . . a war which always accompanies not only great revolutions but every serious revolution in history."* He continued by arguing that we *"must be perfectly clear in our minds about the new disasters that civil war brings for every country. The more cultured a country is the more serious will be these disasters. Let us picture to ourselves a country possessing machinery and railways in which civil war is raging, and this civil war cuts communication between the various parts of the country. Picture to yourselves the condition of regions which for decades have been accustomed to living by interchange of manufactured goods and you will understand that every civil war brings fresh disasters."* [Op. Cit., p. 463] The similarities to Kropotkin's arguments made three decades previously are clear (see [section 1](#) for details).

Indeed, he mocked those who would argue that revolution could occur with *"exceptional circumstances"*:

*"A revolutionary would not 'agree' to a proletarian revolution only 'on the condition' that it proceeds easily and smoothly, that there is, from the outset, combined action on the part of proletarians of different countries, that there are guarantees against defeats, that the road of the revolution is broad, free and straight, that it will not be necessary during the march to victory to sustain the heaviest casualties, to 'bide one's time in a besieged fortress,' or to make one's way along extremely narrow, impassable, winding and dangerous mountain tracks. Such a person is no revolutionary."* [Selected Works, vol. 2,

p. 709]

He then turned his fire on those who failed to recognise the problems facing a revolution and instead simply blamed the Bolsheviks:

*"The revolution engendered by the war cannot avoid the terrible difficulties and suffering bequeathed it by the prolonged, ruinous, reactionary slaughter of the nations. To blame us for the 'destruction' of industry, or for the 'terror', is either hypocrisy or dull-witted pedantry; it reveals an inability to understand the basic conditions of the fierce class struggle, raised to the highest degree of intensity, that is called revolution." [Op. Cit., pp. 709-10]*

Thus industrial collapse and terrible difficulties would face any revolution. It goes without saying that if it was *"hypocrisy"* to blame Bolshevik politics for these problems, it would be the same to blame these problems for Bolshevik politics. As Lenin noted, *"in revolutionary epochs the class struggle has always, inevitably, and in every country, assumed the form of **civil war**, and civil war is inconceivable without the severest destruction, terror and the restriction of formal democracy in the interests of this war."* Moreover, *"[w]e know that fierce resistance to the socialist revolution on the part of the bourgeoisie is inevitable in all countries, and that this resistance will **grow** with the growth of the revolution."* [Op. Cit., p. 710 and p. 712] To blame the inevitable problems of a revolution for the failings of Bolshevism suggests that Bolshevism is simply not suitable for revolutionary situations.

At the 1920 Comintern Congress Lenin lambasted a German socialist who argued against revolution because *"Germany was so weakened by the War"* that if it had been *"blockaded again the misery of the German masses would have been even more dreadful."* Dismissing this argument, Lenin argued as follows:

*"A revolution . . . can be made only if it does not worsen the workers' conditions 'too much.' Is it permissible, in a communist party, to speak in a tone like this, I ask? This is the language of counter-revolution. The standard of living in Russia is undoubtedly lower than in Germany, and when we established the dictatorship, this led to the workers beginning to go more hungry and to their conditions becoming even worse. The workers' victory cannot be achieved without sacrificing, without a temporary deterioration of their conditions. . . If the German workers now want to work for the revolution, they must make sacrifices and not be afraid to do so . . . The labour aristocracy, which is afraid of sacrifices, afraid of 'too great' impoverishment during the revolutionary struggle, cannot belong to the party. Otherwise the dictatorship is impossible, especially in western European countries." [Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920, pp. 382-3]*

In 1921 he repeated this, arguing that *"every revolution entails enormous sacrifice on the part of the class making it. . . The dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia has entailed for the ruling class -- the*



*proletariat -- sacrifices, want and privation unprecedented in history, and the case will, in all probability, be the same in every other country.*" [Collected Works, vol. 32, p. 488] Thus Lenin is on record as saying these "objective factors" will always be the circumstances facing a socialist revolution. Indeed, in November 1922 he stated that "Soviet rule in Russia is celebrating its fifth anniversary, It is now sounder than ever." [Op. Cit., vol. 33, p. 417]

All of which must be deeply embarrassing to Leninists. After all, here is Lenin arguing that the factors Leninist's list as being responsible for the degeneration of the Russian Revolution were inevitable side effects of **any** revolution!

Nor was this perspective limited to Lenin. The inevitability of economic collapse being associated with a revolution was not lost on Trotsky either (see [section 12](#) of the appendix on "[What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?](#)"). Nikolai Bukharin even wrote the (infamous) **The Economics of the Transition Period** to make theoretical sense of (i.e. rationalise and justify) the party's changing policies and their social consequences since 1918 in terms of the inevitability of bad "objective factors" facing the revolution. While some Leninists like to paint Bukharin's book (like most Bolshevik ideas of the time) as "*making a virtue out of necessity*," Bukharin (like the rest of the Bolshevik leadership) did not. As one commentator notes, Bukharin "*believe[d] that he was formulating universal laws of proletarian revolution.*" [Stephan F. Cohen, **In Praise of War Communism: Bukharin's The Economics of the Transition Period**, p. 195]

Bukharin listed four "*real costs of revolution*," namely "*the physical destruction or deterioration of material and living elements of production, the atomisation of these elements and of sectors of the economy, and the need for unproductive consumption (civil war materials, etc.). These costs were interrelated and followed sequentially. Collectively they resulted in 'the curtailment of the process of reproduction' (and 'negative expanded reproduction') and Bukharin's main conclusion: 'the production "anarchy" . . . , "the revolutionary disintegration of industry," is an historically inevitable stage which no amount of lamentation will prevent.*" This was part of a general argument and his "*point was that great revolutions were always accompanied by destructive civil wars . . . But he was more intent on proving that a proletarian revolution resulted in an even greater temporary fall in production than did its bourgeois counterpart.*" To do this he formulated the "*costs of revolution*" as "*a law of revolution.*" [Op. Cit., pp. 195-6 and p. 195]

Cohen notes that while this "*may appear to have been an obvious point, but it apparently came as something of a revelation to many Bolsheviks. It directly opposed the prevailing Social Democratic assumption that the transition to socialism would be relatively painless . . . Profound or not, Bolsheviks generally came to accept the 'law' and to regard it as a significant discovery by Bukharin.*" [Op. Cit., p. 196] To quote Bukharin:

*"during the transition period the labour apparatus of society inevitably disintegrates, that reorganisation presupposes disorganisation, and that there the temporary collapse of productive forces is a law inherent to revolution."* [quoted by Cohen, **Op. Cit.**, p. 196]

It would appear that this "*obvious point*" would **still** come "*as something of a revelation to many Bolsheviks*" today! Significantly, of course, Kropotkin had formulated this law decades previously! How the Bolsheviks sought to cope with this inevitable law is what signifies the difference between anarchism and Leninism. Simply put, Bukharin endorsed the coercive measures of war communism as the means to go forward to socialism. As Cohen summarises, "*force and coercion . . . were the means by which equilibrium was to be forged out of disequilibrium.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 198] Given that Bukharin argued that a workers' state, by definition, could not exploit the workers, he opened up the possibility for rationalising all sorts of abuses as well as condoning numerous evils because they were "*progressive.*" Nor was Bukharin alone in this, as Lenin and Trotsky came out with similar nonsense.

It should be noted that Lenin showed "*ecstatic praise for the most 'war communist' sections*" of Bukharin's work. "*Almost every passage,*" Cohen notes, "*on the role of the new state, statisation in general, militarisation and mobilisation met with 'very good,' often in three languages, . . . Most striking, Lenin's greatest enthusiasm was reserved for the chapter on the role of coercion . . . at the end [of which] he wrote, 'Now this chapter is superb!'*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 202-3] Compare this to Kropotkin's comment that the "*revolutionary tribunal and the guillotine could not make up for the lack of a constructive communist theory.*" [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. II, p. 519]

Ultimately, claims that "objective factors" caused the degeneration of the revolution are mostly attempts to let the Bolsheviks off the hook for Stalinism. This approach was started by Trotsky and continued to this day. Anarchists, unsurprisingly, do not think much of these explanations. For anarchists, the list of "objective factors" listed to explain the degeneration of the revolution are simply a list of factors **every** revolution would (and has) faced -- as Lenin, Bukharin and Trotsky all admitted at the time!

So we have the strange paradox of Leninists dismissing and ignoring the arguments of their ideological gurus. For Trotsky, just as for Lenin, it was a truism that revolutionary politics had to handle "*objective*" factors and "*exceptional circumstances.*" And for both, they thought they had during the Russian revolution. Yet for their followers, these explain the failure of Bolshevism. Tony Cliff, one of Trotsky's less orthodox followers, gives us a means of understanding this strange paradox. Discussing the **Platform of the United Opposition** he notes that it "*also suffered from the inheritance of the exceptional conditions of the civil war, when the one-party system was transformed from a necessity into a virtue.*" [**Trotsky**, vol. 3, pp. 248-9] Clearly, "*exceptional circumstances*" explain nothing and are simply an excuse for bad politics while "*exceptional conditions*" explain everything and defeat even the best politics!

As such, it seems to us extremely ironic that Leninists blame the civil war for the failure of the revolution as they continually raise the inevitability of civil war in a revolution to attack anarchism (see [section H.2.1](#) for an example). Did Lenin not explain in **State and Revolution** that his "*workers' state*" was designed to defend the revolution and suppress capitalist resistance? If it cannot do its proclaimed task then, clearly, it is a flawed theory. Ultimately, if "*civil war*" and the other factors listed by Leninists (but considered inevitable by Lenin) preclude the implementation of the radical democracy Lenin argued for in 1917 as the means to suppress the resistance of the capitalists then his followers should come

clean and say that that work has no bearing on their vision of revolution. Therefore, given that the usual argument for the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* is that it is required to repress counter-revolution, it seems somewhat ironic that the event it was said to be designed for (i.e. revolution) should be responsible for its degeneration!

As such, anarchists tend to think these sorts of explanations of Bolshevik dictatorship are incredulous. After all, as **revolutionaries** the people who expound these *"explanations"* are meant to know that civil war, imperialist invasion and blockade, economic disruption, and a host of other *"extremely difficult circumstances"* are part and parcel of a revolution. They seem to be saying, "if only the ruling class had not acted as our political ideology predicts they would then the Bolshevik revolution would have been fine"! As Bertrand Russell argued after his trip to Soviet Russia, while since October 1917 *"the Soviet Government has been at war with almost all the world, and has at the same time to face civil war at home"* this was *"not to be regarded as accidental, or as a misfortune which could not be foreseen. According to Marxian theory, what has happened was bound to happen."* [**The Theory and Practice of Bolshevism**, p. 103]

In summary, anarchists are not at all convinced by the claims that *"objective factors"* can explain the failure of the Russian Revolution. After all, according to Lenin and Trotsky these factors were to be expected in **any** revolution -- civil war and invasion, economic collapse and so forth were not restricted to the Russian revolution. That is why they say they want a "dictatorship of the proletariat," to defend against counter-revolution (see [section H.3.8](#) on how, once in power, Lenin and Trotsky revised this position). Now, if Bolshevism cannot handle what it says is inevitable, then it should be avoided. To use an analogy:

**Bolshevik:** *"Join with us, we have a great umbrella which will keep us dry."*

**Anarchist:** *"Last time it was used, it did not work. We all got soaked!"*

**Bolshevik:** *"But what our anarchist friend fails to mention is that it was raining at the time!"*

Not very convincing! Yet, sadly, this is the logic of the common Leninist justification of Bolshevik authoritarianism during the Russian Revolution.

### **3 Can the civil war explain the failure of Bolshevism?**

One of the most common assertions against the anarchists case against Bolshevism is that while we condemn the Bolsheviks, we fail to mention the civil war and the wars of intervention. Indeed, for most Leninists the civil war is usually considered the key event in the development of Bolshevism, explaining and justifying all anti-socialist acts conducted by them after they seized power.

For anarchists, such an argument is flawed on two levels, namely logical and factual. The logical flaw is that Leninist argue that civil war is inevitable after a revolution. They maintain, correctly, that it is unlikely that the ruling class will disappear without a fight. Then they turn round and complain that because the ruling class did what the Marxists predicted, the Russian Revolution failed! And they (incorrectly) harp on about anarchists ignoring civil war (see [section H.2.1](#)).

So, obviously, this line of defence is nonsense. If civil war is inevitable, then it cannot be used to justify the failure of the Bolshevism. Marxists simply want to have their cake and eat it to. You simply cannot argue that civil war is inevitable and then blame it for the failure of the Russian Revolution.

The other flaw in this defence of Bolshevism is the factual one, namely the awkward fact that Bolshevik authoritarianism started **before** the civil war broke out. Simply put, it is difficult to blame a course of actions on an event which had not started yet. Moreover, Bolshevik authoritarianism **increased** after the civil war finished. This, incidentally, caused anarchists like Alexander Berkman to re-evaluate their support for Bolshevism. As he put it, *"I would not concede the appalling truth. Still the hope persisted that the Bolsheviki, though absolutely wrong in principle and practice, yet grimly held on to **some** shreds of the revolutionary banner. 'Allied interference,' 'the blockade and civil war,' 'the necessity of the transitory stage' -- thus I sought to placate my outraged conscience . . . At last the fronts were liquidated, civil war ended, and the country at peace. But Communist policies did not change. On the contrary . . . The party groaned under the unbearable yoke of the Party dictatorship. . . . Then came Kronstadt and its simultaneous echoes throughout the land . . . Kronstadt was crushed as ruthlessly as Thiers and Gallifet slaughtered the Paris Communards. And with Kronstadt the entire country and its last hope. With it also my faith in the Bolsheviki."* [**The Bolshevik Myth**, p. 331]

If Berkman had been in Russia in 1918, he may have realised that the Bolshevik tyranny during the civil war (which climaxed, post civil war, with the attack on Kronstadt -- see the appendix on ["What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?"](#) for more on the Kronstadt rebellion) was not at odds with their pre-civil war activities to maintain their power. The simple fact is that Bolshevik authoritarianism was **not** caused by the pressures of the civil war, rather they started before then. All the civil war did was strengthen certain aspects of Bolshevik ideology and practice which had existed from the start (see the appendix on ["How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?"](#)).

While we discuss the Russian Revolution in more detail in the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#), it is useful to summarise the Bolshevik attacks on working class power and autonomy before the civil war broke out (i.e. before the end of May 1918).

The most important development during this period was the suppression of soviet democracy and basic freedoms. As we discuss in [section 6](#) of the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#), the Bolsheviks pursued a policy of systematically undermining soviet democracy from the moment they seized power. The first act was the creation of a Bolshevik government over the soviets, so marginalising the very organs they claimed ruled in Russia. The process was repeated in the local

soviets, with the executive committees holding real power while the plenary sessions become infrequent and of little consequence. Come the spring of 1918, faced with growing working class opposition they started to delay soviet elections. When finally forced to hold elections, the Bolsheviks responded in two ways to maintain their power. Either they gerrymandered the soviets, packing them with representatives of Bolshevik dominated organisation or they simply disbanded them by force if they lost the soviet elections (and repressed by force any protests against this). This was the situation at the grassroots. At the summit of the soviet system, the Bolsheviks simply marginalised the Central Executive Committee of the soviets. Real power was held by the Bolshevik government. The power of the soviets had simply become a fig-leaf for a "soviet power" -- the handful of Bolsheviks who made up the government and the party's central committee.

It should be stressed that the Bolshevik assault on the soviets occurred in March, April and May 1918. That is, **before** the Czech uprising and the onset of full-scale civil war. So, to generalise, it cannot be said that it was the Bolshevik party that alone whole-heartedly supported Soviet power. The facts are that the Bolsheviks only supported "*Soviet power*" when the soviets were Bolshevik. As recognised by the left-Menshevik Martov, who argued that the Bolsheviks loved Soviets only when they were "*in the hands of the Bolshevik party.*" [quoted by Getzler, **Martov**, p. 174] If the workers voted for others, "*soviet power*" was quickly replaced by party power (the real aim). The Bolsheviks had consolidated their position in early 1918, turning the Soviet State into a de facto one party state by gerrymandering and disbanding of soviets before the start of the Civil War.

Given this legacy of repression, Leninist Tony Cliff's assertion that it was only "*under the iron pressure of the civil war [that] the Bolshevik leaders were forced to move, as the price of survival, to a one-party system*" needs serious revising. Similarly, his comment that the "*civil war undermined the operation of the local soviets*" is equally inaccurate, as his is claim that "*for some time -- i.e. until the armed uprising of the Czechoslovak Legion -- the Mensheviks were not much hampered in their propaganda work.*" Simply put, Cliff's statement that "*it was about a year after the October Revolution before an actual monopoly of political power was held by one party*" is false. Such a monopoly existed **before** the start of the civil war, with extensive political repression existing **before** the uprising of the Czechoslovak Legion which began it. There was a **de facto** one-party state by the spring of 1918. [**Lenin**, vol. 3, p. 163, p. 150, p. 167 and p. 172]

The suppression of Soviet democracy reached it logical conclusion in 1921 when the Kronstadt soviet, heart of the 1917 revolution, was stormed by Bolshevik forces, its leaders executed or forced into exile and the rank and file imprisoned, and scattered all over the USSR. Soviet democracy was not just an issue of debate but one many workers died in fighting for. As can be seen, similar events to those at Kronstadt had occurred three years previously.

Before turning to other Bolshevik attacks on working class power and freedom, we need to address one issue. It will be proclaimed that the Mensheviks (and SRs) were "*counter-revolutionaries*" and so Bolshevik actions against them were justified. However, the Bolsheviks' started to suppress opposition soviets **before** the civil war broke out, so at the time neither group could be called "*counter-revolutionary*" in any meaningful sense of the word. The Civil War started on the 25th of May and the

SRs and Mensheviks were expelled from the Soviets on the 14th of June. While the Bolsheviks *"offered some formidable fictions to justify the expulsions"* there was *"of course no substance in the charge that the Mensheviks had been mixed in counter-revolutionary activities on the Don, in the Urals, in Siberia, with the Czechoslovaks, or that they had joined the worst Black Hundreds."* [Getzler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 181] The charge that the Mensheviks *"were active supporters of intervention and of counter-revolution"* was *"untrue . . . and the Communists, if they ever believed it, never succeeded in establishing it."* [Schapiro, **Op. Cit.**, p. 193] The Bolsheviks expelled the Mensheviks in the context of political losses before the Civil War. As Getzler notes the Bolsheviks *"drove them underground, just on the eve of the elections to the Fifth Congress of Soviets in which the Mensheviks were expected to make significant gains."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 181]

Attacks on working class freedoms and democracy were not limited to the soviets. As well as the gerrymandering and disbanding of soviets, the Bolsheviks had already presented economic visions much at odds with what most people consider as fundamentally socialist. Lenin, in April 1918, was arguing for one-man management and *"[o]bedience, and unquestioning obedience at that, during work to the one-man decisions of Soviet directors, of the dictators elected or appointed by Soviet institutions, vested with dictatorial powers."* [**Six Theses on the Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, p. 44] His support for a new form of wage slavery involved granting state appointed *"individual executives dictatorial powers (or 'unlimited' powers)."* Large-scale industry (*"the foundation of socialism"*) required *"thousands subordinating their will to the will of one,"* and so the revolution *"demands"* that *"the people unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of labour."* Lenin's *"superior forms of labour discipline"* were simply hyper-developed capitalist forms. The role of workers in production was the same, but with a novel twist, namely *"unquestioning obedience to the orders of individual representatives of the Soviet government during the work."* [Lenin, **Selected Writings**, vol. 2, p. 610, p. 611, p. 612]

This simply replaced private capitalism with **state** capitalism. *"In the shops where one-man management (Lenin's own preference) replaced collegial management,"* notes Diane Koenker, *"workers faced the same kinds of authoritarian management they thought existed only under capitalism."* [**Labour Relations in Socialist Russia**, p. 177] If, as many Leninists claim, one-man management was a key factor in the rise of Stalinism and/or *"state-capitalism"* in Russia, then, clearly, Lenin's input in these developments cannot be ignored. After advocating *"one-man management"* and *"state capitalism"* in early 1918, he remained a firm supporter of them. In the light of this it is bizarre that some later day Leninists claim that the Bolsheviks only introduced one-man management because of the Civil War. Clearly, this was **not** the case. It was **this** period (before the civil war) that saw Lenin advocate and start to take the control of the economy out of the hands of the workers and placed into the hands of the Bolshevik party and the state bureaucracy.

Needless to say, the Bolshevik undermining of the factory committee movement and, consequently, genuine worker's self-management of production in favour of state capitalism cannot be gone into great depth here (see the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/1931/append43.html), for a fuller discussion). Suffice to say, the factory committees were deliberately submerged in the trade unions and state control replaced workers' control. This involved practising one-man management and, as Lenin put

in at the start of May 1918, "*our task is to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare **no effort** in copying it and not to shrink from adopting **dictatorial** methods to hasten the copying of it.*" He stressed that this was no new idea, rather he "*gave it **before** the Bolsheviks seized power.*" [**Selected Writings**, vol. 2, p. 635 and p. 636]

It will be objected that Lenin advocated "*workers' control.*" This is true, but a "*workers' control*" of a **very** limited nature. As we discuss in [section H.3.14](#), rather than seeing "workers' control" as workers managing production directly, he always saw it in terms of workers' "*controlling*" those who did and his views on this matter were **radically** different to those of the factory committees. This is not all, as Lenin always placed his ideas in a statist context -- rather than base socialist reconstruction on working class self-organisation from below, the Bolsheviks started "*to build, from the top, its 'unified administration'*" based on central bodies created by the Tsarist government in 1915 and 1916. [Maurice Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 36] The institutional framework of capitalism would be utilised as the principal (almost exclusive) instruments of "socialist" transformation. Lenin's support for "*one-man management*" must be seen in this context, namely his vision of "socialism."

Bolshevik advocating and implementing of "*one-man management*" was not limited to the workplace. On March 30th Trotsky, as Commissar of Military Affairs, set about reorganising the army. The death penalty for disobedience under fire was reintroduced, as was saluting officers, special forms of address, separate living quarters and privileges for officers. Officers were no longer elected. Trotsky made it clear: "*The elective basis is politically pointless and technically inexpedient and has already been set aside by decree.*" [quoted by Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 37-8] The soldiers were given no say in their fate, as per bourgeois armies.

Lenin's proposals also struck at the heart of workers' power in other ways. For example, he argued that "*we must raise the question of piece-work and apply it . . . in practice.*" [**The Immediate Tasks Of The Soviet Government**, p. 23] As Leninist Tony Cliff (of all people) noted, "*the employers have at their disposal a number of effective methods of disrupting th[e] unity [of workers as a class]. Once of the most important of these is the fostering of competition between workers by means of piece-work systems.*" He notes that these were used by the Nazis and the Stalinists "*for the same purpose.*" [**State Capitalism in Russia**, pp. 18-9] Obviously piece-work is different when Lenin introduces it!

Finally, there is the question of general political freedom. It goes without saying that the Bolsheviks suppressed freedom of the press (for left-wing opposition groups as well as capitalist ones). It was also in this time period that the Bolsheviks first used the secret police to attack opposition groups. Unsurprisingly, this was not directed against the right. The anarchists in Moscow were attacked on the night of April 11-12, with armed detachments of the Cheka raiding 26 anarchist centres, killing or wounding 40 and jailing 500. Shortly afterwards the Cheka carried out similar raids in Petrograd and in the provinces. In May **Burevestnik**, **Anarkhiia**, **Golos Truda** and other leading anarchist periodicals closed down. [Paul Avrich, **The Russian Anarchists**, pp. 184-5] It must surely be a coincidence that there had been a "*continued growth of anarchist influence among unskilled workers*" after the October revolution and, equally coincidentally, that "[b]y the spring of 1918, very little was heard from the

*anarchists in Petrograd.*" [David Mandel, **The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power**, p. 357]

All this **before** the Trotsky provoked revolt of the Czech legion at the end of May, 1918, and the consequent "democratic counter-revolution" in favour of the Constituent Assembly (which the right-Socialist Revolutionaries led). This, to repeat, was months before the rise of the White Armies and Allied intervention. In summary, it was **before** large-scale civil war took place, in an interval of relative peace, that we see the introduction of most of the measures Leninists now try and pretend were necessitated by the Civil War itself.

So if anarchists appear to "downplay" the effects of the civil war it is not because we ignore. We simply recognise that if you think it is inevitable, you cannot blame it for the actions of the Bolsheviks. Moreover, when the Bolsheviks eliminated military democracy, undermined the factory committees, started to disband soviets elected with the "wrong" majority, repress the anarchists and other left-wing opposition groups, and so on, **the civil war had not started yet**. So the rot had started before civil war (and consequent White Terror) and "imperialist intervention" started. Given that Lenin said that civil war was inevitable, blaming the inevitable (which had not even started yet!) for the failure of Bolshevism is **not** very convincing.

This factual problem with the "*civil war caused Bolshevik authoritarianism*" is the best answer to it. If the Bolsheviks pursued authoritarian policies before the civil war started, it is hard to justify their actions in terms of something that had not started yet. This explains why some Leninists have tried to muddy the waters somewhat by obscuring when the civil war started. For example, John Rees states that "*[m]ost historians treat the revolution and the civil war as separate processes*" yet "*[i]n reality they were one.*" He presents a catalogue of "*armed resistance to the revolution,*" including such "*precursors of civil war before the revolution*" as the suppression after the July days and the Kornilov revolt in 1917. [John Rees, "*In Defence of October,*" pp. 3-82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 31-2]

Ironically, Rees fails to see how this blurring of when the civil war started actually **harms** Leninism. After all, most historians place the start of the civil war when the Czech legion revolted **because** it marked large-scale conflict between armies. It is one thing to say that authoritarianism was caused by large-scale conflict, another to say **any** form of conflict caused it. Simply put, if the Bolshevik state could not handle relatively minor forms of counter-revolution then where does that leave Lenin's **State and Revolution**? So while the period from October to May of 1918 was not trouble free, it was not one where the survival of the new regime looked to be seriously threatened as it was after that, particularly in 1919 and 1920. Thus "civil war" will be used, as it is commonly done, to refer to the period from the Czech revolt (late May 1918) to the final defeat of Wrangel (November 1920).

So, the period from October to May of 1918, while not trouble free, was not one where the survival of the new regime looked to be seriously threatened as it was to be in 1919 and 1920. This means attempts to push the start of the civil war back to October 1917 (or even earlier) simply weakens the Leninist argument. It still leaves the major problem for the "*blame it on the civil war*" Leninists, namely to



explain why the months **before** May of 1918 saw soviets being closed down, the start of the suppression of the factory committees, restrictions on freedom of speech and association, plus the repression of opposition groups (like the anarchists). Either any level of "civil war" makes Lenin's **State and Revolution** redundant or the source of Bolshevik authoritarianism must be found elsewhere.

That covers the period **before** the start of the civil war. we now turn to the period **after** it finished. Here we find the same problem, namely an **increase** of authoritarianism even after the proclaimed cause for it (civil war) had ended.

After the White General Wrangel was forced back into the Crimea, he had to evacuate his forces to Constantinople in November 1920. With this defeat the Russian civil war had come to an end. Those familiar with the history of the revolution will realise that it was some 4 months **later** that yet another massive strike wave occurred, the Kronstadt revolt took place and the 10th Party Congress banned the existence of factions within the Bolshevik party itself. The repression of the strikes and Kronstadt revolt effectively destroying hope for mass pressure for change from below and the latter closing off the very last "legal" door for those who opposed the regime from the left.

It could be argued that the Bolsheviks were still fighting peasant insurrections and strikes across the country, but this has everything to do with Bolshevik policies and could only be considered "*counter-revolutionary*" if you think the Bolsheviks had a monopoly of what socialism and revolution meant. In the case of the Makhnovists in the Ukraine, the Bolsheviks started that conflict by betraying them once Wrangel had been defeated. As such, any resistance to Bolshevik rule by the working class and peasantry of Russia indicated the lack of democracy within the country rather than some sort of "counter-revolutionary" conflict.

So even the end of the Civil War causes problems for this defence of the Bolsheviks. Simply put, with the defeat of the Whites it would be expected that some return to democratic norms would happen. It did not, in fact the reverse happened. Factions were banned, even the smallest forms of opposition was finally eliminated from both the party and society as a whole. Those opposition groups and parties which had been tolerated during the civil war were finally smashed. Popular revolts for reform, such as the Kronstadt rebellion and the strike wave which inspired it, were put down by force (see "[What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?](#)" on these events). No form of opposition was tolerated, no freedom allowed. If civil war **was** the cause of Bolshevik authoritarianism, it seems strange that it got worse after it was finished.

So, to conclude. Bolshevik authoritarianism did not begin with the start of the civil war. Anti-socialist policies were being implemented before it started. Similarly, these policies did not stop when the civil war ended, indeed the reverse happened. This, then, is the main factual problem with the "*blame the civil war*" approach. Much of the worst of the suppression of working class democracy either happened **before** the Civil War started or **after** it had finished.

As we discuss in "[How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?](#)", the root

causes for Bolshevik authoritarian post-October was Bolshevik ideology combined with state power. After all, how "democratic" is it to give all power to the Bolshevik party central committee? Surely socialism involves more than voting for a new government? Is it not about mass participation, the kind of participation centralised government precludes and Bolshevism fears as being influenced by "*bourgeois ideology*"? In such circumstances, moving from party rule to party dictatorship is not such leap.

That "civil war" cannot explain what happened can be shown by a counter-example which effectively shows that civil war did not inevitably mean party dictatorship over a state capitalist economy (and protesting workers and peasants!). The Makhnovists (an anarchist influenced partisan army) managed to defend the revolution and encourage soviet democracy, freedom of speech, and so on, while doing so (see the appendix ["Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?"](#) discusses the Makhnovists in some detail). In fact, the Bolsheviks tried to **ban** their soviet congresses. Which, of course, does not really fit in with the Bolsheviks being forced to be anti-democratic due to the pressures of civil war.

So, in summary, civil war and imperialist intervention cannot be blamed for Bolshevik authoritarianism simply because the latter had started before the former existed. Moreover, the example of the Makhnovists suggests that Bolshevik policies during the civil war were also not driven purely by the need for survival. As Kropotkin argued at the time, "*all foreign armed intervention necessarily strengthens the dictatorial tendencies of the government . . . The evils inherent in a party dictatorship have been accentuated by the conditions of war in which this party maintains its power. This state of war has been the pretext for strengthening dictatorial methods which centralise the control of every detail of life in the hands of the government, with the effect of stopping an immense part of the ordinary activity of the country. The evils natural to state communism have been increased ten-fold under the pretext that all our misery is due to foreign intervention.*" [Kropotkin's **Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 253]

In other words, while the civil war may have increased Bolshevik authoritarianism, it did not create it nor did it end with the ending of hostilities.

## 4 Did economic collapse and isolation destroy the revolution?

One of the most common explanations for the failure revolution is that the Bolsheviks faced a terrible economic conditions, which forced them to be less than democratic. Combined with the failure of the revolution to spread to more advanced countries, party dictatorship, it is argued, was inevitable. In the words of one Leninist:

*"In a country where the working class was a minority of the population, where industry had been battered by years of war and in conditions of White and imperialist encirclement, the balance gradually tilted towards greater coercion. Each step of the way was forced on the Bolsheviks by dire and pressing necessities."* [John Rees, "*In Defence of*

October," **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 41]

He talks of "*economic devastation*" [p. 31] and quotes various sources, including Victor Serge. According to Serge, the "*decline in production was uninterrupted. It should be noted that this decline had already begun before the revolution. In 1916 the output of agricultural machinery, for example, was down by 80 per cent compared with 1913. The year 1917 had been marked by a particularly general, rapid and serious downturn. The production figures for the principal industries in 1913 and 1918 were, in millions of **poods**: coal, from 1,738 to 731 (42 per cent); iron ore, from 57, 887 to 1,686; cast-iron, from 256 to 31.5 (12.3 per cent); steel, from 259 to 24.5; rails, from 39.4 to 1.1. As a percentage of 1913 production, output of linen fell to 75 per cent, of sugar to 24 per cent, and tobacco to 19 per cent.*" Moreover, production continued "*to fall until the end of civil war . . . For 1920, the following indices are given as a percentage of output in 1913: coal, 27 per cent; cast iron, 2.4 per cent; linen textiles, 38 per cent.*" [**Year One of the Russian Revolution**, p. 352 and p. 425]

According to Tony Cliff (another of Rees's references), the war-damaged industry "*continued to run down*" in the spring of 1918: "*One of the causes of famine was the breakdown of transport . . . Industry was in a state of complete collapse. Not only was there no food to feed the factory workers; there was no raw material or fuel for industry . . . The collapse of industry meant unemployment for the workers.*" Cliff provides economic indexes. For large scale industry, taking 1913 as the base, 1917 saw production fall to 77%. In 1918, it was at 35% of the 1913 figure, 1919 it was 26% and 1920 was 18%. Productivity per worker also fell, from 85% in 1917, to 44% in 1918, 22% in 1919 and then 26% in 1920. [**Lenin**, vol. 3, pp. 67-9, p. 86 and p. 85]

In such circumstances, it is argued, how can you expect the Bolsheviks to subscribe to democratic and socialist norms? This meant that the success or failure of the revolution depended on whether the revolution spread to more advanced countries. Leninist Duncan Hallas argues that the "*failure of the German Revolution in 1918-19 . . . seems, in retrospect, to have been decisive . . . for only substantial economic aid from an advanced economy, in practice from a socialist Germany, could have reversed the disintegration of the Russian working class.*" ["Towards a revolutionary socialist party," pp. 38-55, **Party and Class**, Alex Callinicos (ed.), p. 44]

Anarchists are not convinced by these arguments. This is for two reasons.

Firstly, we are aware that revolutions are disruptive no matter where they occur (see [section 1](#)) Moreover, Leninists are meant to know this to. Simply put, there is a certain incredulous element to these arguments. After all, Lenin himself had argued that "*[e]very revolution . . . by its very nature implies a crisis, and a very deep crisis at that, both political and economic. This is irrespective of the crisis brought about by the war.*" [**Collected Works**, vol. 30, p. 341] Serge also considered crisis as inevitable, arguing that the "*conquest of production by the proletariat was in itself a stupendous victory, one which saved the revolution's life. Undoubtedly, so thorough a recasting of all the organs of production is impossible without a substantial decline in output; undoubtedly, too, a proletariat cannot labour and fight at the same time.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 361] As we discussed in detail in [section 2](#), this was a

common Bolshevik position at the time (which, in turn, belatedly echoed anarchist arguments -- see [section 1](#)). And if we look at other revolutions, we can say that this is the case.

Secondly, and more importantly, every revolution or near revolutionary situation has been accompanied by economic crisis. For example, as we will shortly prove, Germany itself was in a state of serious economic collapse in 1918 and 1919, a collapse which would have got worse if a Bolshevik-style revolution had occurred there. This means that **if** Bolshevik authoritarianism is blamed on the state of the economy, it is not hard to conclude that **every** Bolshevik-style revolution will suffer the same fate as the Russian one.

As we noted in [section 1](#), Kropotkin had argued from the 1880s that a revolution would be accompanied by economic disruption. Looking at subsequent revolutions, he has been vindicated time and time again. Every revolution has been marked by economic disruption and falling production. This suggests that the common Leninist idea that a successful revolution in, say, Germany would have ensured the success of the Russian Revolution is flawed. Looking at Europe during the period immediately after the first world war, we discover great economic hardship. To quote one Trotskyist editor:

*"In the major imperialist countries of Europe, production still had not recovered from wartime destruction. A limited economic upswing in 1919 and early 1920 enabled many demobilised soldiers to find work, and unemployment fell somewhat. Nonetheless, in 'victorious' France overall production in 1920 was still only two-thirds its pre-war level. In Germany industrial production was little more than half its 1914 level, human consumption of grains was down 44 per cent, and the economy was gripped by spiralling inflation. Average per capita wages in Prague in 1920, adjusted for inflation, were just over one-third of pre-war levels."* [John Riddell, "Introduction," **Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920**, vol. I, p. 17]

Now, if economic collapse was responsible for Bolshevik authoritarianism and the subsequent failure of the revolution, it seems hard to understand why an expansion of the revolution into similarly crisis ridden countries would have had a major impact in the development of the revolution. Since most Leninists agree that the German Revolution, we will discuss this in more detail before going onto other revolutions.

By 1918, Germany was in a bad state. Victor Serge noted *"the famine and economic collapse which caused the final ruin of the Central Powers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 361] The semi-blockade of Germany during the war badly effected the economy, the *"dynamic growth"* of which before the war *"had been largely dependent on the country's involvement in the world market"*. The war *"proved catastrophic to those who had depended on the world market and had been involved in the production of consumer goods . . . Slowly but surely the country slithered into austerity and ultimately economic collapse."* Food production suffered, with *"overall food production declined further after poor harvests in 1916 and 1917. Thus grain production, already well below its prewar levels, slumped from 21.8 million to 14.9 million tons in those two years."* [V. R. Berghahn, **Modern Germany**, p. 47, pp. 47-8, p. 50]

The parallels with pre-revolution Russia are striking and it is hardly surprising that revolution did break out in Germany in November 1918. Workers' councils sprang up all across the country, inspired in part by the example of the Russian soviets (and what people **thought** was going on in Russia under the Bolsheviks). A Social-Democratic government was founded, which used the Free Corps (right-wing volunteer troops) to crush the revolution from January 1919 onwards. This meant that Germany in 1919 was marked by extensive civil war within the country. In January 1920, a state of siege was re-introduced across half the country.

This social turmoil was matched by economic turmoil. As in Russia, Germany faced massive economic problems, problems which the revolution inherited. Taking 1928 as the base year, the index of industrial production in Germany was slightly lower in 1913, namely 98 in 1913 to 100 in 1928. In other words, Germany effectively lost 15 years of economic activity. In 1917, the index was 63 and by 1918 (the year of the revolution), it was 61 (i.e. industrial production had dropped by nearly 40%). In 1919, it fell again to 37, rising to 54 in 1920 and 65 in 1921. Thus, in 1919, the *"industrial production reached an all-time low"* and it *"took until the late 1920s for [food] production to recover its 1912 level . . . In 1921 grain production was still . . . some 30 per cent below the 1912 figure."* Coal production was 69.1% of its 1913 level in 1920, falling to 32.8% in 1923. Iron production was 33.1% in 1920 and 25.6% in 1923. Steel production likewise fell to 48.5% in 1920 and fell again to 36% in 1923. [V. R. Berghahn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 258, pp. 67-8, p. 71 and p. 259]

Significantly, one of the first acts of the Bolshevik government towards the new German government was to *"the offer by the Soviet authorities of two trainloads of grain for the hungry German population. It was a symbolical gesture and, in view of desperate shortages in Russia itself, a generous one."* The offer, perhaps unsurprisingly, was rejected in favour of grain from America. [E.H. Carr, **The Bolshevik Revolution**, vol. 3, p. 106]

The similarities between Germany and Russia are clear. As noted above, in Russia, the index for large scale industry fell to 77 in 1917 from 100 in 1913, falling again to 35 in 1918, 26 in 1919 and 18 in 1920. [Tony Cliff, **Lenin**, vol. 3, p. 86] In other words, a fall of 23% between 1913 and 1917, 54.5% between 1917 and 1918, 25.7% in 1918 and 30.8% in 1919. A similar process occurred in Germany, where the fall production was 37.7% between 1913 and 1917, 8.2% between 1917 and 1918 and 33.9% between 1918 and 1919 (the year of revolution). While production did rise in 1920 by 45.9%, production was still around 45% less than before the war.

Thus, comparing the two countries we discover a similar picture of economic collapse. In the year the revolution started, production had fallen by 23% in Russia (from 1913 to 1917) and by 43% in Germany (from 1913 to 1918). Once revolution had effectively started, production fell even more. In Russia, it fell to 65% of its pre-war level in 1918, in Germany it fell to 62% of its pre-war level in 1919. Of course, in Germany revolution did not go as far as in Russia, and so production did rise somewhat in 1920 and afterwards. What is significant is that in 1923, production fell dramatically by 34% (from around 70% of its pre-war level to around 45% of that level). This economic collapse did not deter the Communists from trying to provoke a revolution in Germany that year, so suggesting that economic disruption played

no role in their evaluation of the success of a revolution.

This economic chaos in Germany is never mentioned by Leninists when they discuss the "*objective factors*" facing the Russian Revolution. However, once these facts are taken into account, the superficiality of the typical Leninist explanation for the degeneration of the revolution becomes obvious. The very problems which, it is claimed, forced the Bolsheviks to act as they did also were rampant in Germany. If economic collapse made socialism impossible in Russia, it would surely have had the same effect in Germany (and any social revolution would also have faced more disruption than actually faced post 1919 in Germany). This means, given that the economic collapse in both 1918/19 and 1923 was as bad as that facing Russia in 1918 and that the Bolsheviks had started to undermine soviet and military democracy along with workers' control by spring and summer of that year (see [section 5](#)), to blame Bolshevik actions on economic collapse would mean that any German revolution would have been subject to the same authoritarianism **if** the roots of Bolshevik authoritarianism were forced by economic events rather than a product of applying a specific political ideology via state power. Few Leninists draw this obvious conclusion from their own arguments although there is no reason for them not to.

So the German Revolution was facing the same problems the Russian one was. It seems unlikely, therefore, that a successful German revolution would have been that much aid to Russia. This means that when John Rees argues that giving machinery or goods to the peasants in return for grain instead of simply seizing it required "*revolution in Germany, or at least the revival of industry*" in Russia, he completely fails to indicate the troubles facing the German revolution. "*Without a successful German revolution,*" he writes, "*the Bolsheviks were thrown back into a bloody civil war with only limited resources. The revolution was under siege.*" [John Rees, "*In Defence of October,*" pp. 3-82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 40 and p. 29] Yet given the state of the German economy at the time, it is hard to see how much help a successful German revolution would have been. As such, his belief that a successful German Revolution would have mitigated Bolshevik authoritarianism seems exactly that, a belief without any real evidence to support it (and let us not forget, Bolshevik authoritarianism had started before the civil war broke out -- see [section 3](#)). Moreover, **if** the pro-Bolshevik argument Rees is expounding **is** correct, then the German Revolution would have been subject to the same authoritarianism as befell the Bolshevik one simply because it was facing a similar economic crisis. Luckily, anarchists argue, that this need not be the case if libertarian principles are applied in a revolution:

*"The first months of emancipation will inevitably increase consumption of goods and production will diminish. And, furthermore, any country achieving social revolution will be surrounded by a ring of neighbours either unfriendly or actually enemies . . . The demands upon products will increase while production decreases, and finally famine will come. There is only one way of avoiding it. We should understand that as soon as a revolutionary movement begins in any country the only possible way out will consist in the workingmen [and women] and peasants from the beginning taking the whole national economy into their hands and organising it themselves . . . But they will not be convinced of this necessity except when all responsibility for national economy, today in the hands of*

*a multitude of ministers and committees, is presented in a simple form to each village and city, in every factory and shop, as their own affair, and when they understand that they must direct it themselves.*" [Kropotkin's **Revolutionary Pamphlets**, pp. 77-8]

So, as regards the Russian and German revolution, Kropotkin's arguments were proven correct. The same can be said of other revolutions as well. Basing himself on the actual experiences of both the French Revolution and the Paris Commune, we can see why Kropotkin argued as he did. The Paris Commune, for example, was born after a four-month-long siege *"had left the capital in a state of economic collapse. The winter had been the severest in living memory. Food and fuel had been the main problems . . . Unemployment was widespread. Thousands of demobilised soldiers wandered loose in Paris and joined in the general hunt for food, shelter and warmth. For most working men the only source of income was the 1.50 francs daily pay of the National Guard, which in effect had become a form of unemployment pay."* The city was *"near starving"* and by March it was *"in a state of economic and political crisis."* [Stewart Edwards, *"Introduction," The Communards of Paris, 1871*, p. 23] Yet this economic collapse and isolation did not stop the commune from introducing and maintaining democratic forms of decision making, both political and economic. A similar process occurred during the French Revolution, where mass participation via the *"sections"* was not hindered by economic collapse. It was finally stopped by state action organised by the Jacobins to destroy popular participation and initiative (see Kropotkin's **The Great French Revolution** for details).

During the Spanish Revolution, *"overall Catalan production fell in the first year of war by 30 per cent, and in the cotton-working sector of the textile industry by twice as much. Overall unemployment (complete and partial) rose by nearly a quarter in the first year, and this despite the military mobilisation decreed in September 1936. The cost of living quadrupled in just over two years; wages . . . only doubled."* [Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 234] Markets, both internally and externally, for goods and raw materials were disrupted, not to mention the foreign blockade and the difficulties imposed in trying to buy products from other countries. These difficulties came on top of problems caused by the great depression of the 1930s which affected Spain along with most other countries. Yet, democratic norms of economic and social decision making continued in spite of economic disruption. Ironically, given the subject of this discussion, it was only once the Stalinist counter-revolution got going were they fatally undermined or destroyed.

Thus economic disruption need not automatically imply authoritarian policies. And just as well, given the fact that revolution and economic disruption seem to go hand in hand.

Looking further afield, even **revolutionary** situations can be accompanied with economic collapse. For example, the Argentine revolt which started in 2001 took place in the face of massive economic collapse. The economy was a mess, with poverty and unemployment at disgusting levels. Four years of recession saw the poverty rate balloon from 31 to 53 percent of the population of 37 million, while unemployment climbed from 14 to 21.4 percent, according to official figures. Yet in the face of such economic problems, working class people acted collectively, forming popular assemblies and taking over workplaces.

The Great Depression of the 1930s in America saw a much deeper economic contradiction. Indeed, it was as bad as that associated with revolutionary Germany and Russia after the first world war. According to Howard Zinn, after the stock market crash in 1929 *"the economy was stunned, barely moving. Over five thousand banks closed and huge numbers of businesses, unable to get money, closed too. Those that continued laid off employees and cut the wages of those who remained, again and again. Industrial production fell by 50 percent, and by 1933 perhaps 15 million (no knew exactly) -- one-fourth or one-third of the labour force -- were out of work."* [**A People's History of the United States**, p. 378]

Specific industries were badly affected. For example, total GNP fell to 53.6% in 1933 compared to its 1929 value. The production of basic goods fell by much more. Iron and Steel saw a 59.3% decline, machinery a 61.6% decline and *"non-ferrous metals and products"* a 55.9% decline. Transport was also affected, with transportation equipment declining by 64.2% railroad car production dropping by 73.6% and locomotion production declining by 86.4%. Furniture production saw a decline of 57.9%. The workforce was equally affected, with unemployment reaching 25% in 1933. In Chicago 40% of the workforce was unemployed. Union membership, which had fallen from 5 million in 1920 to 3.4 million in 1929 fell to less than 3 million by 1933. [Lester V. Chandler, **America's Greatest Depression, 1929-1941**, p. 20, p. 23, p. 34, p. 45 and p. 228]

Yet in the face of this economic collapse, no Leninist proclaimed the impossibility of socialism. In fact, the reverse was the case. Similar arguments could apply to, say, post-world war two Europe, when economic collapse and war damage did not stop Trotskyists looking forward to, and seeking, revolutions there. Nor did the massive economic that occurred after the fall of Stalinism in Russia in the early 1990s deter Leninist calls for revolution. Indeed, you can rest assured that any drop in economic activity, no matter how large or small, will be accompanied by Leninist articles arguing for the immediate introduction of socialism. And this was the case in 1917 as well, when economic crisis had been a fact of Russian life throughout the year. Lenin, for example, argued at the end of September of that *"Russia is threatened with an inevitable catastrophe . . . A catastrophe of extraordinary dimensions, and a famine, are unavoidably threatening . . . Half a year of revolution has passed. The catastrophe has come still closer. Things have come to a state of mass unemployment. Think of it: the country is suffering from a lack of commodities."* [**The Threatening Catastrophe and how to Fight It**, p. 5] This did not stop him calling for revolution and seizing power. Nor did this crisis stop the creation of democratic working class organisations, such as soviets, trade unions and factory committees being formed. It did not stop mass collective action to combat those difficulties. It appears, therefore, that while the economic crisis of 1917 did not stop the development of socialist tendencies to combat it, the seizure of power by a socialist party did.

Given that no Leninist has argued that a revolution could take place in Germany after the war or in the USA during the darkest months of the Great Depression, the argument that the grim economic conditions facing Bolshevik Russia made soviet democracy impossible seem weak. By arguing that both Germany and the USA could create a viable socialist revolution in economic conditions just as bad as those facing Soviet Russia, the reasons why the Bolsheviks created a party dictatorship must be looked for elsewhere. Given this support for revolution in 1930s America and post-world war I and II Europe, you would have to conclude that, for Leninists, economic collapse only makes socialism impossible



once **they** are in power! Which is hardly convincing, or inspiring.

## 5 Was the Russian working class atomised or "declassified"?

A standard Leninist explanation for the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party (and subsequent rise of Stalinism) is based on the "atomisation" or "declassing" of the proletariat. John Rees summarises this argument as follows:

*"The civil war had reduced industry to rubble. The working class base of the workers' state, mobilises time and again to defeat the Whites, the rock on which Bolshevik power stood, had disintegrated. The Bolsheviks survived three years of civil war and wars in intervention, but only at the cost of reducing the working class to an atomised, individualised mass, a fraction of its former size, and no longer able to exercise the collective power that it had done in 1917 . . . The bureaucracy of the workers' state was left suspended in mid-air, its class base eroded and demoralised. Such conditions could not help but have an effect on the machinery of the state and organisation of the Bolshevik Party." ["In Defence of October," pp. 3-82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 65]*

It is these objective factors which, it is argued, explain why the Bolshevik party substituted itself for the Russian working class. "Under such conditions," argues Tony Cliff, "the class base of the Bolshevik Party disintegrated -- not because of some mistakes in the policies of Bolshevism, not because of one or another conception of Bolshevism regarding the role of the party and its relation to the class -- but because of mightier historical factors. The working class had become declassified . . . Bolshevik 'substitutionism' . . . did not jump out of Lenin's head as Minerva out of Zeus's, but was born of the objective conditions of civil war in a peasant country, where a small working class, reduced in weight, became fragmented and dissolved into the peasant masses." [**Trotsky on Substitutionism**, pp. 62-3] In other words, because the working class was so decimated the replacement of class power by party power was inevitable.

Before discussing this argument, we should point out that this argument dates back to Lenin. For example, he argued in 1921 that the proletariat, "owning to the war and to the desperate poverty and ruin, has become declassified, i.e. dislodged from its class groove, and had ceased to exist as proletariat . . . the proletariat has disappeared." [**Collected Works**, vol. 33, p. 66] However, unlike his later-day followers, Lenin was sure that while it "would be absurd and ridiculous to deny that the fact that the proletariat is declassified is a handicap" it could still "fulfil its task of winning and holding state power." [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 32, p. 412] As we will see, the context in which Lenin started to make these arguments is important.

Anarchists do not find these arguments particularly convincing. This is for two reasons. Firstly, it seems incredulous to blame the civil war for the "substitution" of Bolshevik power for working class power as party power had been Lenin's stated aim in 1917 and October saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, **not** the soviets. As we saw in [section 3](#), the Bolsheviks started to gerrymander and disband

soviets to remain in power **before** the civil war started. As such, to blame the civil war and the problems it caused for the usurpation of power by the Bolsheviks seems unconvincing. Simply put, the Bolsheviks had "*substituted*" itself for the proletariat from the start, from the day it seized power in the October revolution.

Secondly, the fact is the Russian working class was far from "*atomised*." Rather than being incapable of collective action, as Leninists assert, Russia's workers were more than capable of taking collective action throughout the civil war period. The problem is, of course, that any such collective action was directed **against** the Bolshevik party. This caused the party no end of problems. After all, if the working class **was** the ruling class under the Bolsheviks, then who was it striking against? Emma Goldman explains the issue well:

*"In my early period the question of strikes had puzzled me a great deal. People had told me that the least attempt of that kind was crushed and the participants sent to prison. I had not believed it, and, as in all similar things, I turned to Zorin [a Bolshevik] for information. 'Strikes under the dictatorship of the proletariat!' he had proclaimed; 'there's no such thing.' He had even upbraided me for crediting such wild and impossible tales. Against whom, indeed, should the workers strike in Soviet Russia, he argued. Against themselves? They were the masters of the country, politically as well as industrially. To be sure, there were some among the toilers who were not yet fully class-conscious and aware of their own true interests. These were sometimes disgruntled, but they were elements incited by . . . self-seekers and enemies of the Revolution."* [Living My Life, vol. 2, p. 872]

This, unfortunately, still seems to be the case in pro-Bolshevik accounts of the Revolution and its degeneration. After the Bolshevik seizure of power, the working class as an active agent almost immediately disappears from the accounts. This is unsurprising, as it does not bode well for maintaining the Bolshevik Myth to admit that workers were resisting the so-called "*proletarian dictatorship*" from the start. The notion that the working class had "*disappeared*" fits into this selective blindness well. Why discuss the actions of a class which did not exist? Thus we have a logical circle from which reality can be excluded: the working class is "*atomised*" and so cannot take industrial action, evidence of industrial action need not be looked for because the class is "*atomised*."

This can be seen from Lenin. For example, he proclaimed in October 1921 that "*the proletariat had disappeared*." Yet this non-existent class had, in early 1921, taken collective action which "*encompassed most of the country's industrial regions*." [J. Aves, **Workers Against Lenin**, p. 111] Significantly, the Communists (then and now) refused to call the movement a strike, preferring the word "*volynka*" which means "*go-slow*." The Menshevik leader Dan explained why: "*The Bolshevik press carefully tried, at first, to hush up the movement, then to hide its real size and character. Instead of calling the strike a strike, they thought up various new terms -- volynka, buza and so on.*" [quoted by Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 112] As Russian anarchist Ida Mett succinctly put it: "*And if the proletariat was that exhausted how come it was still capable of waging virtually total general strikes in the largest and most heavily industrialised cities?*" [Ida Mett, **The Kronstadt Rebellion**, p. 81]

The year after Lenin proclaimed the proletariat "*disappeared*" we discover similar evidence of working class collective action. Ironically, it is Leninist Tony Cliff who presents the evidence that "*the number of workers involved in labour conflicts was three and a half million, and in 1923, 1,592,800.*" Strikes in state-owned workplaces in 1922 involved 192,000 workers. [**State Capitalism in Russia**, p. 28] Given that Cliff states that in 1921 there was only "*one and a quarter million*" industrial workers "*proper*" (compared to over three million in 1917), this level of strikes is extremely large -- particular for members of a class which did not, according to Lenin which had "*disappeared*"!

Before providing more evidence for the existence of working class collective struggle throughout the period 1918 to 1923, it is necessary to place Lenin's comments on the "*declassing*" of the working class in context. Rather than being the result of a lack of industrial protest, Lenin's arguments were the product of its opposite -- the rise in collective struggle by the Russian working class. As one historian notes: "*As discontent amongst workers became more and more difficult to ignore, Lenin . . . began to argue that the consciousness of the working class had deteriorated . . . workers had become 'declassed.'*" "*Lenin's analysis,*" he continues, "*had a superficial logic but it was based on a false conception of working-class consciousness. There is little evidence to suggest that the demands that workers made at the end of 1920 . . . represented a fundamental change in aspirations since 1917 . . . [Moreover] an analysis of the industrial unrest in 1921 shows that long-standing workers were prominent in protest.*" [J. Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 90 and pp. 90-1]

Lenin's pessimistic analysis of 1921 is in sharp contrast to the optimistic mood of early 1920, reproduced by the defeat of the White armies, in Bolshevik ranks. For example, writing in May, 1920, Trotsky seemed oblivious to the "*atomisation*" of the Russian working class, arguing that "*in spite of political tortures, physical sufferings and horrors, the labouring masses are infinitely distinct from political decomposition, from moral collapse, or from apathy . . . Today, in all branches of industry, there is going on an energetic struggle for the establishment of strict labour discipline, and for the increase of the productivity of labour. The party organisations, the trade unions, the factory and workshop administrative committees, rival each one another in this respect, with the undivided support of the working class as a whole.*" Indeed, they "*concentrate their attention and will on collective problems*" ("*Thanks to a regime which . . . given their life a pursue*"!). Needless to say, the party had "*the undivided support of the public opinion of the working class as a whole.*" [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 6]

The turn around in perspective after this period did not happen by accident, independently of the working class resistance to Bolshevik rule. After all, the defeat of the Whites in early of 1920 saw the Bolsheviks take "*victory as a sign of the correctness of its ideological approach and set about the task of reconstruction on the basis of an intensification of War Communism policies with redoubled determination.*" This led to "*an increase in industrial unrest in 1920,*" including "*serious strikes.*" The resistance was "*becoming increasingly politicised.*" Thus, the stage was set for Lenin's turn around and his talk of "*declassing.*" In early 1921 "*Lenin argued that workers, who were no more demoralised than they were in early 1920, had become 'declassed' in order to justify a political clamp-down.*" [J. Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 37, p. 80 and p. 18]

Other historians also note this context. For example, while the *"working class had decreased in size and changed in composition, . . . the protest movement from late 1920 made clear that it was not a negligible force and that in an inchoate way it retained a vision of socialism which was not identified entirely with Bolshevik power . . . Lenin's arguments on the declassing of the proletariat was more a way of avoiding this unpleasant truth than a real reflection of what remained, in Moscow at least, a substantial physical and ideological force."* [Richard Sakwa, *Soviet Communists in Power*, p. 261] In the words of Diane Koenker, *"[i]f Lenin's perceptions of the situation were at all representative, it appears that the Bolshevik party made deurbanisation and declassing the scapegoat for its political difficulties, when the party's own policies and its unwillingness to accept changing proletarian attitudes were also to blame."* Ironically, this was not the first time that the Bolsheviks had blamed its problems on the lack of a *"true"* proletariat and its replacement by *"petty-bourgeois"* elements, *"[t]his was the same argument used to explain the Bolsheviks' lack of success in the early months of 1917 -- that the cadres of conscious proletarians were diluted by non-proletarian elements."* [*Urbanisation and Deurbanisation in the Russian Revolution and Civil War*," pp. 424-450, **The Journal of Modern History**, vol. 57, no. 3, p. 449 and p. 428]

It should be noted that the *"declassing"* argument does have a superficial validity if you accept the logic of vanguardism. After all, if you accept the premise that the party alone represents socialist consciousness and that the working class, by its own efforts, can only reach a reformist level of political conscious (at best), then any deviation in working class support for the party obviously represents a drop in class consciousness or a *"declassing"* of the proletariat (see section H.5.1 -- ["Why are vanguard parties anti-socialist?"](#)). Thus working class protest against the party can be dismissed as evidence of *"declassing"* which has to be suppressed rather than what it really is, namely evidence of working class autonomy and collective struggle for what it considers **its** interests to be against a new master class. In fact, the *"declassing"* argument is related to the vanguardist position which, in turn, justifies the dictatorship of the party **over** the class (see section H.5.3 -- ["Why does vanguardism imply party power?"](#)).

So the *"declassing"* argument is not some neutral statement of fact. It was developed as a weapon on the class struggle, to justify Bolshevik repression of collective working class struggle. To justify the continuation of Bolshevik party dictatorship **over** the working class. This in turn explains why working class struggle during this period generally fails to get mentioned by later day Bolsheviks -- it simply undermines their justifications for Bolshevik dictatorship. After all, how can they say that the working class could not exercise *"collective power"* when it was conducting mass strikes throughout Russia during the period 1918 to 1923?

As such, it does not seem that strange that in most Leninist account of the revolution post-October rarely, if ever, mention what the working class was actually doing. We do get statistics on the drop of the numbers of industrial workers in the cities (usually Petrograd and Moscow), but any discussion on working class protest and strikes is generally, at best, mentioned in passing or, usually, ignored utterly. Given this was meant to be a *"proletarian"* dictatorship, it seems strange this silence. It could be argued

that this silence is due to the working class being decimated in number and/or "*declassed*" in terms of itself perspective. This, however, seems unlikely, as collective working class protest was common place in Bolshevik Russia. The silence can be better understood by the fact this protest was directed **against** the Bolsheviks.

Which shows the bankruptcy of what can be called the "*statistical tendency*" of analysing the Russian working class. While statistics can tell us how many workers remained in Russia in, say, 1921, it does not prove any idea of their combativeness or their ability to take collective decisions and action. If numbers alone indicated the ability of workers to take part in collective struggle, then the massive labour struggles in 1930s American would not have taken place. Millions had been made redundant. At the Ford Motor Company, 128,000 workers had been employed in the spring of 1929. There were only 37,000 by August of 1931 (only 29% of the 1929 figure). By the end of 1930, almost half of the 280,000 textile mill workers in New England were out of work. [Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, p. 378] Yet in the face of these massive redundancies, the workers organised themselves and fought back. As we will indicate, the reduction in the number of Russian workers did not restrict their ability to make collective decisions and act collectively on them -- Bolshevik repression **did**.

Moreover, while Leninists usually point to the fall in population in Petrograd and Moscow during the civil war, concentrating on these cities can be misleading. "*Using the Petrograd figures,*" notes Daniel R. Bower, "*historians have painted a lurid picture of flight from the cities. In 1918 alone the former capital lost 850,000 people and was by itself responsible for one-half of the total urban population decline of the Civil War years. If one sets aside aggregate figures to determine the trend characteristic of most cities, however, the experiences of Petrograd appears exception. Only a handful of cities . . . lost half their population between 1917 and 1920, and even Moscow, which declined by over 40 percent, was not typical of most towns in the northern, food-importing areas. A study of all cities . . . found that the average decline in the north (167 towns in all, excluding the capital cities) amounted to 24 percent between 1917 and 1920. Among the towns in the food-producing areas in the southern and eastern regions of the Russian Republic (a total of 128), the average decline came to only 14 percent.*" ["*The city in danger': The Civil War and the Russian Urban Population,*" **Party, State, and Society in the Russian Civil War**, Diane P. Koenker, William G. Rosenberg and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.), p. 61] Does this mean that the possibility of soviet democracy declined less in these towns? Yet the Bolsheviks applied their dictatorships even there, suggesting that declining urban populations was not the source of their authoritarianism.

Equally, what are we to make of towns and cities which increased their populations? Some towns and cities actually grew in size. For example, Minsk, Samara, Khar'kov, Tiflis, Baku, Rostov-on-don, Tsaritsyn and Perm all grew in population (often by significant amounts) between 1910 and 1920 while other cities shrunk. [Diane Koenker, "*Urbanisation and Deurbanisation in the Russian Revolution and Civil War,*" pp. 424-450, **The Journal of Modern History**, vol. 57, no. 3, p. 425] Does that mention soviet democracy was possible in those towns but not in Petrograd or Moscow? Or does the fact that the industrial workforce grew by 14.8% between October 1920 and April 1921 mean that the possibility for soviet democracy also grew by a similar percentage? [J. Aves, **Workers Against Lenin**, p. 159]

Then there is the question of when the reduction of workers makes soviet democracy impossible. After all, between May 1917 and April 1918 the city of Moscow lost 300,000 of its two million inhabitants. Was soviet democracy impossible in April 1918 because of this? During the civil war, Moscow lost another 700,000 by 1920 (which is basically the same amount per year). [Diane Koenker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 424] When did this fall in population mean that soviet democracy was impossible? Simply put, comparing figures of one year to another simply fails to understand the dynamics at work, such as the impact of "*reasons of state*" and working class resistance to Bolshevik rule. It, in effect, turns the attention away from the state of working class autonomy and onto number crunching.

Ultimately, the question of whether the working class was too "*atomised*" to govern can only be answered by looking at the class struggle in Russia during this period, by looking at the strikes, demonstrations and protests that occurred. Something Leninists rarely do. Needless to say, certain strike waves just cannot be ignored. The most obvious case is in Petrograd just before the Kronstadt revolt in early 1921. After all, the strikes (and subsequent Bolshevik repression) inspired the sailors to revolt in solidarity with them. Faced with such events, the scale of the protest and Bolshevik repression is understated and the subject quickly changed. As we noted in [section 10](#) of the appendix on "[What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?](#)", John Rees states that Kronstadt was "*preceded by a wave of serious but quickly resolved strikes.*" [Rees, **Op. Cit.**, p. 61] Needless to say, he does not mention that the strikes were "*resolved*" by "*serious*" force. Nor does he explain how "*an atomised, individualised mass*" **could** conduct such "*serious*" strikes, strikes which required martial law to break. Little wonder, then, Rees does expound on the strikes and what they meant in terms of the revolution and his own argument.

Similarly, we find Victor Serge arguing that the "*working class often fretted and cursed; sometimes it lent an ear to the Menshevik agitators, as in the great strikes at Petrograd in the spring of 1919. But once the choice was posed as that between the dictatorship of the White Generals and the dictatorship of its own party -- and there was not and could not be any other choice -- every fit man . . . came to stand . . . before the windows of the local party offices.*" [**Year One of the Russian Revolution**, pp. 365-6] An exhausted and atomised working class capable of "*great strikes*"? That seems unlikely. Significantly, Serge does not mention the Bolshevik acts of repression used against the rebel workers (see below). This omission cannot help distort any conclusions to be drawn from his account.

Which, incidentally, shows that the civil war was not all bad news for the Bolsheviks. Faced with working class protest, they could play the "*White card*" -- unless the workers went back to work, the Whites would win. This explains why the strikes of early 1921 were larger than before and explains why they were so important. As the "*White card*" could no longer be played, the Bolshevik repression could not be excused in terms of the civil war. Indeed, given working class opposition to the party, it would be fair to say that civil war actually **helped** the Bolsheviks remain in power. Without the threat of the Whites, the working class would **not** have tolerated the Bolsheviks longer than the Autumn of 1918.

The fact is that working class collective struggle against the new regime and, consequently, Bolshevik repression, started before the outbreak of the civil war. It continued throughout the civil war period and reached a climax in the early months of 1921. Even the repression of the Kronstadt rebellion did not stop

it, with strikes continuing into 1923 (and, to a lesser degree, afterward). Indeed, the history of the "*workers' state*" is a history of the state repressing the revolt of the workers.

Needless to say, it would be impossible to give a full account of working class resistance to Bolshevism. All we can do here is give a flavour of what was happening and the sources for further information. What should be clear from our account is that the idea that the working class in this period was incapable of collective organisation and struggle is false. As such, the idea that Bolshevik "*substitutionism*" can be explained in such term is also false. In addition, it will become clear that Bolshevik repression explicitly aimed to break the ability of workers to organise and exercise collective power. As such, it seems hypocritical for modern-day Leninists to blame Bolshevik power on the "*atomisation*" of the working class when Bolshevik power was dependent on smashing working class collective organisation and resistance. Simply put, to remain in power Bolshevism, from the start, had to crush working class power. This is to be expected, given the centralised nature of the state and the assumptions of vanguardism. If you like, October 1917 did not see the end of "*dual power*." Rather the Bolshevik state replaced the bourgeois state and working class power (as expressed in its collective struggle) came into conflict with it.

This struggle of the "*workers' state*" against the workers started early in 1918. "*By the early summer of 1918,*" records one historian, "*there were widespread anti-Bolshevik protests. Armed clashes occurred in the factory districts of Petrograd and other industrial centres. Under the aegis of the Conference of Factory and Plant Representatives . . . a general strike was set for July 2.*" [William Rosenberg, "*Russian labour and Bolshevik Power,*" pp. 98-131, **The Workers' revolution in Russia**, 1917, Daniel H. Kaiser (ed.), p. 107] According to another historian, economic factors "*were soon to erode the standing of the Bolsheviks among Petrograd workers . . . These developments, in turn, led in short order to worker protests, which then precipitated violent repressions against hostile workers. Such treatment further intensified the disenchantment of significant segments of Petrograd labour with Bolshevik-dominated Soviet rule.*" [Alexander Rabinowitch, **Early Disenchantment with Bolshevik Rule**, p. 37]

The reasons for these protest movement were both political and economic. The deepening economic crisis combined with protests against Bolshevik authoritarianism to produce a wave of strikes aiming for political change. Feeling that the soviets were distant and unresponsive to their needs (with good reason, given Bolshevik postponement of soviet elections and gerrymandering of the soviets), workers turned to direct action and the initially Menshevik inspired "*Conference of Factory and Plant Representatives*" (also known as the "*Extraordinary Assembly of Delegates from Petrograd Factories and Plants*") to voice their concerns. At its peak, reports "*estimated that out of 146,000 workers still in Petrograd, as many as 100,000 supported the conference's goals.*" [Op. Cit., p. 127] The aim of the Conference (as per Menshevik policy) was to reform the existing system "*from within*" and, as such, the Conference operated openly. As Alexander Rabinowitch notes, "*[F]or the Soviet authorities in Petrograd, the rise of the Extraordinary Assembly of Delegates from Petrograd Factories and Plants was an ominous portent of worker defection.*" [Op. Cit., p. 37]

The first wave of outrage and protests occurred after Bolshevik Red Guards opened fire on a demonstration for the Constituent Assembly in early January (killing 21, according to Bolshevik

sources). This demonstration *"was notable as the first time workers came out actively against the new regime. More ominously, it was also the first time forces representing soviet power used violence against workers."* [David Mandel, **The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power**, p. 355] It would not be the last -- indeed repression by the *"workers' state"* of working class protest became a recurring feature of Bolshevism.

By April *"it appeared that the government was now ready to go to whatever extremes it deemed necessary (including sanctioning the arrest and even shooting of workers) to quell labour unrest. This in turn led to intimidation, apathy, lethargy and passivity of other workers. In these circumstances, growth in support of the Assembly slowed down."* [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 40] The Assembly aborted its plans for a May Day demonstration to protest the government's policies were cancelled because of workers did not respond to the appeals to demonstrate (in part because of *"Bolshevik threats against 'protesters'"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 40-1]).

This apathy did not last long. After early May events *"served to reinvigorate and temporarily radicalise the Assembly. These developments included yet another drastic drop in food supplies, the shooting of protesting housewives and workers in the Petrograd suburb of Kolpino, the arbitrary arrest and abuse of workers in another Petrograd suburb, Sestroresk, the closure of newspapers and the arrests of individuals who had denounced the Kolpino and Sestroresk events, the intensification of labour unrest and conflict with the authorities in the Obukhov plant and in other Petrograd factories and districts."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 41]

So the next major protest wave occurred in early May, 1918, after armed guards opened fire on protesting workers in Kolpino -- *"while the incident was hardly the first of its kind, it triggered a massive wave of indignation."* Work temporarily stopped in a number of plants. Between Kolpino and early July, more than seventy incidents occurred in Petrograd, including strikes, demonstrations and anti-Bolshevik meetings. Many of these meetings *"were protests against some form of Bolshevik repression: shootings, incidents of 'terroristic activities,' and arrests."* In some forty incidents *"worker's protests focused on these issues, and the data is surely understate the actual number by a wide margin. There were as well some eighteen separate strikes or some other work stoppages with an explicitly anti-Bolshevik character."* [Rosenberg, **Op. Cit.**, p. 123 and pp. 123-4] Then, *"[a]t the very end of May and the beginning of June, when a wave of strikes to protest at bread shortages broke out in the Nevskii district, a majority of Assembly delegates . . . resolved to call on striking Nevskii district workers to return to work and continue preparation for a general city-wide strike."* [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 42] Unfortunately, for the Assembly postponing the strikes until a *"better time"* rather than encouraging them gave the authorities time to prepare.

Things came to a head during and after the soviet elections in June. On June 20th the Obukhov works issued an appeal to the Conference of Factory and Plant Representatives *"to declare a one-day strike of protest on June 25th"* against Bolshevik reprisals for the assassination of a leading Bolshevik. *"The Bolsheviks responded by 'invading' the whole Nevskii district with troops and shutting down Obukhov completely. Meetings everywhere were forbidden."* The workers were not intimidated and *"[i]n scores of additional factories and shops protests mounted and rapidly spread along the railroads."* At the June



26th "extraordinary session" of the Conference a general strike was declared for July 2nd. Faced with this, the Bolsheviks set up "machine guns . . . at main points throughout the Petrograd and Moscow railroad junctions, and elsewhere in both cities as well. Controls were tightened in factories. Meetings were forcefully dispersed." [Rosenberg, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 126-7 and p. 127] In other words, "as a result of extreme government intimidation, the response to the Assembly's strike call on 2 July was negligible." [Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 42] This repression was not trivial:

*"Among other things, all newspapers were forced to print on their front pages Petrograd soviet resolutions condemning the Assembly as part of the domestic and foreign counter-revolution. Factories participating in the strike were warned that they would be shut down and individual strikers were threatened with the loss of work -- threats that were subsequently made good. Printing plants suspected of opposition sympathies were sealed, the offices of hostile trade unions were raided, martial law declared on rail lines, and armed strike-breaking patrols with authority to take whatever action was necessary to prevent work stoppages were formed and put on 24-hour duty at key points throughout Petrograd."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 45]

Needless to say, "the Petrograd authorities drew on the dubious mandate provided by the stacked soviet elections to justify banning the Extraordinary Assembly." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 42] While the Bolsheviks had won around 50% of workplace votes, as we note in [section 6](#) of the appendix on "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)" they had gerrymandered the soviet making the election results irrelevant. The fact the civil war had started undoubtedly aided the Bolsheviks during this election and the fact that the Mensheviks and SRs had campaigned on a platform to win the soviet elections as the means of replacing soviet democracy by the Constituent Assembly. Many workers still viewed the soviets as **their** organisations and aimed for a functioning soviet system rather than its end.

The Bolsheviks turned on the Conference, both locally and nationally, and arrested its leading activists, so decapitating the only independent working class organisation left in Russia. As Rabinowitch argues, "the Soviet authorities were profoundly worried by the threat posed by the Assembly and fully aware if their growing isolation from workers (their only real social base) . . . Petrograd Bolsheviks developed a siege mentality and a corresponding disposition to consider any action -- from suppression of the opposition press and manipulation of elections to terror even against workers -- to be justified in the struggle to retain power until the start of the imminent world revolution." [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 43-4]

Similar events happened in other cities. As we discuss in [section 6](#) of the appendix on "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)", the Bolsheviks had disbanded soviets elected with non-Bolshevik majorities all across Russia and suppressed the resulting working class protest. In Moscow, workers also organised a "Conference" movement and "[r]esentment against the Bolsheviks was expressed through strikes and disturbances, which the authorities treated as arising from supply difficulties, from 'lack of consciousness,' and because of the 'criminal demagoguery' of certain elements. Lack of support for current Bolshevik practices was treated as the absence of worker consciousness altogether, but the causes of the unrest was more complicated. In 1917 political issues gradually came to be perceived through the lens

*of party affiliation, but by mid-1918 party consciousness was reversed and a general consciousness of workers' needs restored. By July 1918 the protest movement had lost its momentum in the face of severe repression and was engulfed by the civil war."* In the light of the fate of workers' protest, the May 16th resolution by the Bogatyr' Chemical Plant calling (among other things) for "*freedom of speech and meeting, and an end to the shooting of citizens and workers*" seems to the point. Unsurprisingly, "[f]aced with political opposition within the soviets and worker dissatisfaction in the factories Bolshevik power increasingly came to reply on the party apparatus itself." [Richard Sakwa, "*The Commune State in Moscow in 1918*," pp. 429-449, **Slavic Review**, vol. 46, no. 3/4, p. 442-3, p. 442 and p. 443]

Repression occurred elsewhere: "*In June 1918 workers in Tula protested a cut in rations by boycotting the local soviet. The regime declared martial law and arrested the protestors. Strikes followed and were suppressed by violence. In Sormovo, when a Menshevik-Social Revolutionary newspaper was closed, 5,000 workers went on strike. Again firearms were used to break the strike.*" Other techniques were used to break resistance. For example, the regime often threatened rebellious factories with a lock out, which involved numerous layoffs, new rules of discipline, purges of workers' organisations and the introduction of piece work. [Thomas F. Remington, **Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia**, p. 105 and p. 107]

Rather than the Civil War disrupting the relationship between the vanguard party and the class it claimed to lead, it was in fact the Bolsheviks who did so in face of rising working class dissent and disillusionment in the spring of 1918. In fact, "*after the initial weeks of 'triumph' . . . Bolshevik labour relations after October*" changed and "*soon lead to open conflict, repression, and the consolidation of Bolshevik dictatorship over the proletariat in place of proletarian dictatorship itself.*" [Rosenberg, **Op. Cit.**, p. 117]

Given this, the outbreak of the civil war consolidated workers support for the Bolsheviks and saved it from even more damaging workers' unrest. As Thomas F. Remington puts it:

*"At various times groups of workers rebelled against Bolshevik rule But for the most part, forced to choose between 'their' regime and the unknown horrors of a White dictatorship, most willingly defended the Bolshevik cause. The effect of this dilemma may be seen in the periodic swings in the workers' political temper. When Soviet rule stood in peril, the war simulated a spirit of solidarity and spared the regime the defection of its proletarian base. During lulls in the fighting, strikes and demonstrations broke out."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 101]

Which, as we will discuss, explains the increased repression in 1921 and onwards. Without the Whites, the Bolsheviks had to enforce their rule directly onto workers who did not want it. Ironically, the Whites **helped** the Bolsheviks remain in power. Without the start of the civil war, labour protest would have either ended Bolshevik rule or exposed it as a dictatorial regime.

This process of workers protest and state repression continued in 1919 and subsequent years. It followed a cyclical pattern. There was a "*new outbreak of strikes in March 1919 after the collapse of Germany*

*and the Bolshevik re-conquest of the Ukraine. The pattern of repression was also repeated. A strike at a galosh factory in early 1919 was followed by the closing of the factory, the firing of a number of workers, and the supervised re-election of its factory committee. The Soviet garrison at Astrakhan mutinied after its bread ration was cut. A strike among the city's workers followed in support. A meeting of 10,000 Astrakhan workers was suddenly surrounded by loyal troops, who fired on the crowd with machine guns and hand grenades, killing 2,000. Another 2,000, taken prisoner, were subsequently executed. In Tula, when strikes at the defence factories stopped production for five days, the government responded by distributing more grain and arresting the strike organisers . . . strikes at Putilov again broke out, at first related to the food crisis . . . The government treated the strike as an act of counter-revolution and responded with a substantial political purge and re-organisation. An official investigation . . . concluded that many shop committees were led by [Left] Social Revolutionaries . . . These committees were abolished and management representatives were appointed in their stead." [Remington, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 109-10]*

The strikes in Petrograd centred around the Putilov shows the response of the authorities to the "atomised" workers who were taking collective action. *"In March fifteen factories struck together (roughly 35,000 workers were involved) . . . workers at Putilov assembled and sent a delegation to the works committee . . . and put forward a number of demands . . . On 12 March Putilov stopped work. Its workers called to others to join them, and some of them came out in a demonstration where they were fired upon by Cheka troops. Strikes then broke out at fourteen other enterprises . . . On Sunday 16 March an appeal was made to the Putilovtsy to return to normal working the following day or . . . the sailors and soldiers would be brought in. After a poor showing on the Monday, the sailor went in, and 120 workers were arrested; the sailors remained until the 21st and by the 22nd normal work had been resumed."* In July strikes broke out again in response to the cancellation of holidays which involved 25,000 workers in 31 strikes. [Mary McAuley, **Bread and Justice**, pp. 251-253 and p. 254]

In the Moscow area, while it is *"impossible to say what proportion of workers were involved in the various disturbances,"* following the lull after the defeat of the workers' conference movement in mid-1918 *"each wave of unrest was more powerful than the last, culminating in the mass movement from late 1920."* For example, at the end of June 1919, *"a Moscow committee of defence (KOM) was formed to deal with the rising tide of disturbances . . . KOM concentrated emergency power in its hands, overriding the Moscow Soviet, and demanding obedience from the population. The disturbances died down under the pressure of repression."* [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 94 and pp. 94-5]

Vladimir Brovkin summarises the data he provides in his essay *"Workers' Unrest and the Bolshevik Response in 1919"* (reproduced along with data from other years in his book **Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War**) as follows:

*"Data on one strike in one city may be dismissed as incidental. When, however, evidence is available from various sources on simultaneous independent strikes in different cities and overall picture begins to emerge . . . Workers' unrest took place in Russia's biggest and most important industrial centres: Moscow, Petrograd, Tver', Tula, Briansk, and*

*Sormovo. Strikes affected the largest industries . . . Workers' demands reflected their grievances . . . The greatest diversity was in workers' explicitly political demands or expression of political opinion . . . all workers' resolutions demanded free and fair elections to the soviets . . . some workers . . . demanded the Constituent Assembly . . .*

*"The strikes of 1919 . . . fill an important gap in the development of the popular movement between October 1917 and February 1921. On the one hand, they should be seen as antecedents of similar strikes in February 1921, which forced the Communists to abandon war communism. In the capitals, workers, just as the Kronstadt sailors had, still wanted fairly elected soviets and not a party dictatorship. On the other hand, the strikes continued the protests that had begun in the summer of 1918. The variety of behavioural patterns displayed during the strikes points to a profound continuity. . .*

*"In all known cases the Bolsheviks' initial response to strikes was to ban public meetings and rallies . . . In several cities . . . the authorities confiscated strikers' food rations in order to suppress the strike. In at least five cities . . . the Bolsheviks occupied the striking plant and dismissed the strikers en masse . . . In all known cases the Bolsheviks arrested strikers . . . In Petrograd, Briansk, and Astrakhan' the Bolsheviks executed striking workers." [Slavic Review, vol. 49, no. 3, pp. 370-2]*

Nor was this collective struggle stop in 1919 -- *"strike action remained endemic in the first nine months of 1920"* and *"in the first six months of 1920 strikes had occurred in seventy-seven per cent of middle-sized and large works."* For the Petrograd province, soviet figures state that in 1919 there were 52 strikes with 65,625 participants and in 1920 73 strikes with 85,645, both high figures as according to one set of figures, which are by no means the lowest, there were 109,100 workers there. *"Strikes in 1920,"* recounts Aves, *"were frequently a direct protest against the intensification of War Communist labour policies, the militarisation of labour, the implementation of one-man management and the struggle against absenteeism, as well as food supply difficulties. The Communist Party press carried numerous articles attacking the slogan of 'free labour.'"* [J. Aves, **Workers Against Lenin**, p. 69 and p. 74]

The spring of 1920 *"saw discontent on the railways all over the country."* This continued throughout the year. For example, the Aleksansrovskii locomotive works at the end of August, workers sent three representatives to the works commissar who had them arrested. Three days later, the workers stopped work and demanded their release. The authorities locked the workers out of the works and a guard of 70 sailors were placed outside the enterprise. The Cheka arrested the workers' soviet delegates (who were from the SR (Minority) list) as well as thirty workers. *"The opportunity was taken to carry out a general round-up"* and arrests were made at other works. After the arrests, *"a meeting was held to elect new soviet delegates but the workers refused to co-operate and a further 150 were arrested and exiled to Murmansk or transferred to other workshops."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 44 and pp. 46-7]

Strikes occurred in other places, such as Tula were the workforce *"contained a high proportion of skilled, long-standing, hereditary workers."* The *"all-out strike"* started at the start of June and on 8 June

the local newspaper published a declaration from the Tula soviet threatening the strikers with *"the most repressive measures, including the application of the highest measure of punishment"* (i.e. executions). The following day the city was declared to be under a *"state of siege"* by the local military authorities. The strikers lost ration cards and by 11 June there had been a return to work. Twenty-three workers were sentenced to a forced labour camp until the end of the war. However, the *"combined impact of these measures did not prevent further unrest and the workers put forward new demands."* On 19 June, the soviet approved *"a programme for the suppression of counter-revolution"* and *"the transfer of Tula to the position of an armed camp."* The Tula strike *"highlights the way in which workers, particularly skilled workers who were products of long-standing shop-floor subcultures and hierarchies, retained the capability as well as the will to defend their interests."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 50-55]

While strike activity *"was most common in Petrograd, where there had been 2.5 strikers for every workman,"* the figure for Moscow was 1.75 and 1.5 in Kazan. In early March *"a wave of strikes hit the Volga town of Samara"* when a strike by printers in spread to other enterprises. *"Strike action in Moscow did not just include traditionally militant male metal workers."* Textile workers, tram workers and printers all took strike action. [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 69, p. 72 and pp. 77-8]

Thus strike action was a constant feature of civil war Bolshevik Russia. Rather than being an *"atomised"* mass, the workers repeatedly organised themselves, made their demands and took collective action to achieve them. In response, the Bolshevik regime used state repression to break this collective activity. As such, **if** the rise of Stalinism can, as modern-day Leninists argue, be explained by the *"atomisation"* of the working class during the civil war then the Bolshevik regime and its repression should be credited with ensuring this happened.

The end of the civil war did not see the end of working class protest. Quite the reverse. In February and March 1921 *"industrial unrest broke out in a nation-wide wave of discontent . . . General strikes, or very widespread unrest, hit Petrograd, Moscow, Saratov and Ekaterinoslavl."* Only one major industrial region was unaffected. As noted above, the Bolsheviks refused to call this movement a strike wave, preferring the term **volynka** (which means "go-slow"), yet *"the continued use of the term can be justified not to hide its significance but to show that workers' protest consisted not just of strikes but also of factory occupations, 'Italian strikes,' demonstrations, mass meetings, the beating up of communists and so on."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 109 and p. 112]

In Petrograd in the beginning of February *"strikes were becoming an everyday occurrence"* and by *"the third week of February the situation rapidly deteriorated."* The city was rocked by strikes, meetings and demonstrations. In response to the general strike the Bolsheviks replied with a *"military clamp-down, mass arrests and other coercive measures, such as the closure of enterprises, the purging of the workforce and stopping of rations which accompanied them."* As we discuss in ["What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?"](#), these strikes produced the Kronstadt revolt (and, as noted in [section 10](#) of that appendix, the Bolshevik repression ensured the Petrograd workers did not act with the sailors). [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 113, p. 120]

A similar process of workers revolt and state repression occurred in Moscow at the same time. There *"industrial unrest"* also *"turned into open confrontation and protest spilled on to the streets."* Meetings were held, followed by demonstrations and strikes. Over the next few days strikes spread to other districts. Workers demanded now elections to the soviets be held. Striking railway workers sent emissaries along the railway to spread the strike and strikes spread to outside Moscow city itself and into the surrounding provinces. Unsurprisingly, Moscow and Moscow province were put under martial law and SR and menshevik leaders were arrested. [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 130 pp. 139-144] However, *"military units called in"* against striking workers *"refused to open fire, and they were replaced by the armed communist detachments"* who did. *"The following day several factories went on strike"* and troops *"disarmed and locked in as a precaution"* by the government against possible fraternising. On February 23rd, *"Moscow was placed under martial law with a 24-hour watch on factories by the communist detachments and trustworthy army units."* [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 94 and pp. 94-5 and p. 245] The mixture of (economic) concessions and coercion broke the will of the strikers.

Strikes and protests occurred all across Russia at this time (see Aves, **Op. Cit.**). In Saratov, the strike started on March 3 when railroad shop workers did not return to their benches and instead rallied to discuss an anticipated further reduction in food rations. *"Led by a former Communist, the railroad workers debated resolutions recently carried by the Moscow proletariat . . . The next day the strike spread to the metallurgical plants and to most other large factories, as Saratov workers elected representatives to an independent commission charged with evaluating the functioning of all economic organs. When it convened, the body called for the re-election of the soviets and immediate release of political prisoners."* The ration cut *"represent[ed] the catalyst, but not the cause, of the labour unrest."* While *"the turmoil touched all strata of the proletariat, male and female alike, the initiative for the disturbances came from the skilled stratum that the Communists normally deemed the most conscious."* The Communists shut down the commission and they *"expected workers to protest the dissolution of their elected representatives"* and so they *"set up a Provincial Revolutionary Committee . . . which introduced martial law both in the city and the garrison. It arrested the ringleaders of the workers' movement . . . the police crackdown depressed the workers' movement and the activities of the rival socialist parties."* The Cheka sentenced 219 people to death. [Donald J. Raleigh, **Experiencing Russia's Civil War**, p. 379, p. 387, p. 388, pp. 388-9]

A similar *"little Kronstadt"* broke out in the Ukrainian town of Ekaterinoslavl at the end of May. The workers there *"clearly had strong traditions of organisation"* and elected a strike committee of fifteen which *"put out a series of political ultimatums that were very similar in content to the demands of the Kronstadt rebels."* On 1 June, *"by a pre-arranged signal"* workers went on strike throughout the town, with workers joining a meeting of the railway workers. The local Communist Party leader was instructed *"to put down the rebellion without mercy . . . Use Budennyi's cavalry."* The strikers prepared a train and its driver instructed to spread the strike throughout the network. Telegraph operators were told to send messages throughout the Soviet Republic calling for *"free soviets"* and soon an area up to fifty miles around the town was affected. The Communists used the Cheka to crush the movement, carrying out mass arrests and shooting 15 workers (and dumping their bodies in the River Dnepr). [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 171-3]

So faced with an *"atomised"* working class during the period of 1918 and 1921, the Bolsheviks had to respond with martial law, mass arrests and shootings:

*"It is not possible to estimate with any degree of accuracy how many workers were shot by the Cheka during 1918-1921 for participation in labour protest. However, an examination of individual cases suggests that shootings were employed to inspire terror and were not simply used in the occasional extreme case."* [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 35]

Post-Kronstadt, similar Bolshevik responses to labour unrest continued. The economic crisis of 1921 which accompanied the introduction of the NEP saw unemployment rise yet *"[d]espite the heavy toll of redundancies, the ability to organise strikes did not disappear. Strike statistics for 1921 continue to provide only a very rough indicator of the true scale of industrial unrest and appear not to include the first half of the year."* The spring of 1922 saw Soviet Russia *"hit by a new strike wave"* and the strikes *"continued to reflect enterprise traditions."* That year saw 538 strikes with 197,022 participants recorded. [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 183 and p. 184]

The following year saw more strikes: *"In July 1923 more than 100 enterprises employing a total of some 50,000 people were on strike. In August figures totalled some 140 enterprises and 80,00 workers. In September and November the strike wave continued unabated."* As in the civil war, the managers shut down plants, fired the workers and rehired them on an individual basis. In this way, trouble-makers were dismissed and *"order"* restored. *"The pattern of workers' action and Bolshevik reaction played itself out frequently in dozens of other strikes. The Bolsheviks acted with the explicit purpose of rooting out the possibility of further protest. They tried to condition workers that labour protest was futile."* The GPU *"used force to disperse workers demonstrating with the arrested strike leaders."* [Vladimir Brovkin, **Russia After Lenin**, p. 174, pp. 174-5 and p. 175]

In Moscow, for example, *"[b]etween 1921 and 1926, all branches of industry and transport . . . experienced wildcat strikes or other spontaneous labour disturbances. Strike waves peaked in the winter of 1920-21 . . . and in the summer and fall of 1922 and 1923 . . . during July-December 1922, for example, 65 strikes and 209 other industrial disturbances were recorded in Moscow's state enterprises."* Metalworkers were arguably the most active sector at this time while *"a number of large strikes"* took place in the textile industry (where *"strikes were sometimes co-ordinated by spontaneously organised strike committees or 'parallel' factory committees"*). And in spite of repression, *"politicisation continued to characterise many labour struggles"* and, as before, *"spontaneous labour activism hindered not only the party's economic program but also the political and social stabilisation of the factories."* [John B. Hatch, **Labour Conflict in Moscow, 1921-1925**, p. 62, p. 63, p. 65, pp. 66-7 and p. 67]

Given this collective rebellion all across the industrial centres of Russia throughout the Civil War and after, it hard to take seriously claims that Bolshevik authoritarian was the product of an *"atomisation"* or *"declassing"* of the working class or that it had ceased to exist in any meaningful sense. Clearly it had and was capable of collective action and organisation -- until it was repressed by the Bolsheviks and even then it keep returning. This implies that a key factor in rise of Bolshevik authoritarian was political

-- the simple fact that the workers would not vote Bolshevik in free soviet and union elections and so they were not allowed to. As one Soviet Historian put it, *"taking the account of the mood of the workers, the demand for free elections to the soviets [raised in early 1921] meant the implementation in practice of the infamous slogan of soviets without communists,"* although there is little evidence that the strikers actually raised that *"infamous"* slogan. [quoted by Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 123] It should also be noted that Bolshevik orthodoxy at the time stressed the necessity of Party dictatorship **over** the workers (see [section H.1.2](#) for details).

Nor can it be said that this struggle can be blamed on *"declassed"* elements within the working class itself. In her study of this question, Diane Koenker notes that 90% of the change in the number of workers in Moscow *"is accounted for by men. Working women did not leave the city,"* their numbers dropping from 90,000 in 1918 to 80,000 in 1920. Why these 80,000 women workers should be denied a say in their own revolution is not clear, given the arguments of the pro-Bolshevik left. After all, the same workers remained in roughly the same numbers. Looking at the male worker population, their numbers fell from 215,000 to 124,000 during the same period. However, *"the skilled workers whose class consciousness and revolutionary zeal had helped win the October revolution did not entirely disappear, and the women who remained were likely to be family members of these veterans of 1917."* It was *"the loss of young activists rather than all skilled and class conscious urban workers that caused the level of Bolshevik support to decline during the civil war."* Indeed *"the workers who remained in the city were among the most urbanised elements."* In summary, *"the deurbanisation of those years represented a change in quantity but not entirely in quality in the cities. The proletariat declined in the city, but it did not wither away . . . a core of the city's working class remained."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 440, p. 442, p. 447 and p. 449]

As Russian anarchist Ida Mett argued decades before in relation to the strikes in early 1921:

*"The population was drifting away from the capital. All who had relatives in the country had rejoined them. The authentic proletariat remained till the end, having the most slender connections with the countryside.*

*"This fact must be emphasised, in order to nail the official lies seeking to attribute the Petrograd strikes that were soon to break out to peasant elements, 'insufficiently steeled in proletarian ideas.' The real situation was the very opposite. A few workers were seeking refuge in the countryside. The bulk remained. There was certainly no exodus of peasants into the starving towns! . . . It was the famous Petrograd proletariat, the proletariat which had played such a leading role in both previous revolutions, that was finally to resort to the classical weapon of the class struggle: the strike." [The Kronstadt Uprising, p. 36]*

In terms of struggle, links between the events in 1917 and those during the civil war also exist. For example Jonathan Aves writes that there were *"distinct elements of continuity between the industrial unrest in 1920 and 1917. This is not surprising since the form of industrial unrest in 1920, as in the pre-revolutionary period and in 1917, was closely bound up with enterprise traditions and shop-floor sub-*



*cultures. The size of the Russian industrial workforce had declined steeply during the Civil War but where enterprises stayed open . . . their traditions of industrial unrest in 1920 shows that such sub-cultures were still capable of providing the leaders and shared values on which resistance to labour policies based on coercion and Communist Party enthusiasm could be organised. As might be anticipated, the leaders of unrest were often to be found amongst the skilled male workers who enjoyed positions of authority in the informal shop-floor hierarchies." Moreover, "despite intense repression, small groups of politicised activists were also important in initiating protest and some enterprises developed traditions of opposition to the communists." [Op. Cit., p. 39]*

Looking at the strike wave of early 1921 in Petrograd, the "*strongest reason for accepting the idea that it was established workers who were behind the **volynka** [i.e. the strike wave] is the form and course of protest. Traditions of protest reaching back through the spring of 1918 to 1917 and beyond were an important factor in the organisation of the **volynka**. . . . There was also a degree of organisation . . . which belies the impression of a spontaneous outburst.*" [Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 126]

Clearly, then, the idea that the Russian working class was atomised or declassed cannot be defended given this series of struggles and state repression. In fact, as noted, the notion that the workers were "*declassed*" was used to justify state repression of collective working class struggle. "*The thought oppressed me,*" wrote Emma Goldman, "*that what [the Bolsheviks] called 'defence of the Revolution' was really only the defence of [their] party in power.*" [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 57] She was right -- the class struggle in Bolshevik Russia did not stop, it continued except the ruling class had changed from bourgeoisie to Bolshevik dictatorship.

Faced with this collective resistance to Bolshevism, the Leninist could argue that while the working class was capable of collective decision making and action, the nature of that action was suspect. This argument rests on the premise that the "*advanced*" workers (i.e. party members) left the workplace for the front or for government posts, leaving the "*backward*" workers behind. This argument is often used, particularly in regard to the Kronstadt revolt of 1921 (see [section 8](#) of the appendix on "[What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?](#)").

Of course, this argument raises more problems than it solves. In **any** revolution the "*most politically consciousness*" tend to volunteer to go to the front first and, of course, tend to be elected as delegates to committees of various kinds (local, regional and national). There is little that can be done about it. Needless to say, if "*soviet democracy*" depends on the "*advanced*" workers being there in order for it to work, then it suggests that the commitment to democracy is lacking in those who argue along these lines. It suggests that if the "*backward*" masses reject the "*advanced*" ones then the latter have the right, even the duty, to impose their will on the former. And it also begs the question of who determines what constitutes "*backward*" -- if it means "*does not support the party*" then it becomes little more than a rationale for party dictatorship (as it did under Lenin and Trotsky).

Writing in 1938, Trotsky inadvertently exposes the logic of this position. Asserting that a "*revolution is 'made' directly by a **minority**,*" he argued that the "*success*" of a revolution is "*possible*" when "*this*

*minority finds more or less support, or at least friendly neutrality, on the part of the majority." So what happens if the majority expresses opposition to the party? Unfortunately Trotsky does not raise this question, but he does answer it indirectly. As we discuss in [section 15](#) of the appendix on "[What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?](#)", Trotsky argues that "to free the soviets from the leadership [sic!] of the Bolsheviks would have meant within a short time to demolish the soviets themselves. The experience of the Russian soviets during the period of Menshevik and SR domination and, even more clearly, the experience of the German and Austrian soviets under the domination of the Social Democrats, proved this. Social Revolutionary-anarchist soviets could only serve as a bridge from the proletarian dictatorship. They could play no other role, regardless of the 'ideas' of their participants." [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 85 and p. 90]*

Thus to let the working masses (the "majority") have free soviet elections and reject the vanguard (the "minority") would mean the end of soviet power. Thus allowing the proletariat a say in progress of the revolution means the end of the "proletarian dictatorship"! Which, of course, is interesting logic. The authoritarian core of the Bolshevik vision of revolution is thus exposed.

Victor Serge also presents an insight into the Bolshevik perspective on the revolution. He states that "[a] gitation conducted by the SRs and Mensheviks called demonstrations in the streets and prepared for a general strike. The demands were: free trade, wage increases, payment of wages one, two or three months in advance and 'democracy.' The intention was to incite the working class itself against the revolution." Which only makes sense once you realise that by "the revolution" Serge simply meant "the Bolsheviks" and the obvious truth that the working class was **not** managing the revolution at all, was **not**, in any sense, "in power." "The best elements among the workers," explains Serge, "were away fighting; those in the factories were precisely the less energetic, less revolutionary sections, along with the petty folk, yesterday's small shopkeepers and artisans, who had come there to find refuge. This proletariat of the reserve often allowed itself to fall under the sway of Menshevik propaganda." [**Year One of the Russian Revolution**, p. 229]

Given that Serge is discussing the period **before** the Czechoslovak revolt, a greater indictment of Bolshevism cannot be found. After all, what does "workers' democracy" mean unless the proletariat can vote for its own delegates? Little wonder Daniel Guerin described Serge's book as "largely a justification of the liquidation of the soviets by Bolshevism." [**Anarchism**, p. 97] After all, what point is there having genuine soviet elections if the "less revolutionary sections" (i.e. Trotsky's "majority") will not vote for the vanguard? And can socialism exist without democracy? Can we expect an unaccountable vanguard to govern in the interests of anyone but its own? Of course not!

Thus the Bolsheviks did not solve the answer the questions Malatesta raised in 1891, namely "if you consider these worthy electors as unable to look after their own interests themselves, how is it that they will know how to choose for themselves the shepherds who must guide them? And how will they be able to solve this problem of social alchemy, of producing the election of a genius from the votes of a mass of fools?" [**Anarchy**, p. 53]

Given this, is it surprising that the Bolsheviks revised the Marxist theory of the state to justify elite rule? As discussed in [section H.3.8](#), once in power Lenin and Trotsky stressed that the "workers' state" had to be independent of the working class in order to overcome the "wavering" and "vacillation of the masses themselves." Or, to quote Serge, the "*party of the proletariat must know, at hours of decision, how to break the resistance of the backward elements among the masses; it must know how to stand firm sometimes against the masses . . . it must know how to go against the current, and cause proletarian consciousness to prevail against lack of consciousness and against alien class influences.*" [Op. Cit., p. 218] Of course, by definition, **every** group is "backward" compared to the vanguard and so Serge's argument amounts to little more than a justification for party dictatorship **over** the proletariat.

The reason why such a system would not result in socialism does not take long to discover. For anarchists, freedom is not just a goal, a noble end to be achieved, but rather a necessary part of the process of creating socialism. Eliminate freedom (and, as a necessary result, workplace and community self-management) and the end result will be anything **but** socialism. Ultimately, as Malatesta argued, "*the only way that the masses can raise themselves*" is by freedom "*for it is only through freedom that one educates oneself to be free.*" [Op. Cit., p. 52] Ironically, by using state repression to combat "backward" elements, the Bolsheviks ensured that they stayed that way and, more importantly, disempowered the **whole** working class so ensuring that Bolshevik dictatorship came into constant conflict with it and its continuing struggle for autonomy. Rather than base itself on the creative powers of the masses, Bolshevism crushed it as a threat to its power and so ensured that the economic and social problems affecting Russia increased.

And need it be pointed out that "low" culture and/or "backward" social life have been used by numerous imperialist and authoritarian states to justify their rule over a given population? It matters little whether the population are of the same nationality of the rulers or from a subjugated people, the arguments and the logic are the same. Whether dressed up in racist or classist clothing, the same elitist pedigree lies behind the pro-Bolshevik argument that democracy would have brought "chaos" or "capitalist restoration." The implicit assumption that working class people are not fit for self-government is clear from these rationales. Equally obvious is the idea that the party knows better than working class people what is best for them.

Sounding like Bolshevik Henry Kissingers, the Leninists argue that Lenin and Trotsky had to enforce their dictatorship **over** the proletariat to stop a "capitalist restoration" (Kissinger was the US state's liaison with the Chilean military when it helped their coup in 1973 and infamously stated that the country should not be allowed to turn communist due to the stupidity of its own people). Needless to say, anarchists argue that even if the Bolshevik regime had not already need capitalist (specifically, **state** capitalist) this logic simply represents an elitist position based on "*socialism from above.*" Yes, soviet democracy **may** have resulted in the return of (private) capitalism but by maintaining party dictatorship the possibility of socialism was automatically nullified. Simply put, the pro-Leninist argument implies that socialism can be implemented from above as long as the right people are in power. The authoritarian core of Leninism is exposed by these arguments and the repression of working class revolt which they justified.

Given this, it seems incredulous for Leninists like Chris Harman to argue that it was the "*decimation of the working class*" which caused (by "*necessity*") the "*Soviet institutions*" to take "*on a life independently of the class they had arisen from. Those workers and peasants who fought the Civil War could not govern themselves collectively from their places in the factories.*" [**How the revolution was lost**] Given that this "*independent*" life is required to allow the party to "*go against the current,*" Harman simply fails to understand the dynamics of the revolution, the position of the vanguard and the resistance of the working class subject to it. Moreover, the reason **why** the "*workers and peasants*" could not govern themselves collectively was because the party had seized power for itself and systematically destroyed soviet, workplace and military democracy to remain there. Then there is the way the Bolsheviks reacted to such collective unrest. Simply put, they sought to break the workers as a collective force. The use of lockouts, re-registration was typical, as was the arresting of "*ringleaders.*" It seems ironic, therefore, to blame "*objective factors*" for the "*atomisation*" of the working class when, in fact, this was a key aim of Bolshevik repression of labour protest.

Little wonder, then, that the role of the masses in the Russian Revolution after October 1917 is rarely discussed by pro-Bolshevik writers. Indeed, the conclusion to be reached is simply that their role is to support the party, get it into power and then do what it tells them. Unfortunately for the Bolsheviks, the Russian working class refused to do this. Instead they practised collective struggle in defence of their economic **and** political interests, struggle which inevitably brought them into conflict both with the "*workers' state*" and their role in Bolshevik ideology. Faced with this collective action, the Bolshevik leaders (starting with Lenin) started to talk about the "*declassing*" of the proletariat to justify their repression of (and power **over**) the working class. Ironically, it was the aim of Bolshevik repression to "*atomise*" the working class as, fundamentally, their rule depended on it. While Bolshevik repression did, in the end, win out it cannot be said that the working class in Russia did not resist the usurpation of power by the Bolshevik party. As such, rather than "*atomisation*" or "*declassing*" being the cause for Bolshevik power and repression, it was, in fact, one of **results** of them.

## 6 Did the Bolsheviks blame "*objective factors*" for their actions?

In a word, no. At the time of the revolution and for some period afterwards, the idea that "*objective factors*" were responsible for their policies was one which few, if any, Bolshevik leaders expressed. As we discussed in [section 2](#), Bolsheviks like Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin argued that **any** revolution would face civil war and economic crisis. Lenin **did** talk about the "*declassing*" of the proletariat from 1920 onwards, but that did not seem to affect the proletarian and socialist character of his regime (as we noted in [section 5](#), Lenin's argument was developed in the context of **increasing** working class collective action, **not** its absence).

This is not to say that the Bolshevik leaders were 100% happy with the state of their revolution. Lenin, for example, expressed concern about the rising bureaucratic deformations he saw in the soviet state (particularly after the end of the civil war). Yet Lenin, while concerned about the bureaucracy, was not

concerned about the Party's monopoly of power. Unsurprisingly, he fought the bureaucracy by "top-down" and, ironically, bureaucratic methods, the only ones left to him. A similar position was held by Trotsky, who was quite explicit in supporting the party dictatorship throughout the 1920s (and, indeed, the 1930s). Needless to say, both failed to understand how bureaucracy arises and how it could be effectively fought.

This position started to change, however, as the 1920s drew on and Trotsky was increasingly sidelined from power. Then, faced with the rise of Stalinism, Trotsky had to find a theory which allowed him to explain the degeneration of the revolution and, at the same time, absolve Bolshevik ideology (and his own actions and ideas!) from all responsibility for it. He did so by invoking the objective factors facing the revolution. Since then, his various followers have utilised this argument, with various changes in emphasis, to attack Stalinism while defending Bolshevism.

The problem with this type of argument is that all the major evils usually associated with Stalinism already existed under Lenin and Trotsky. Party dictatorship, one-man management, repression of opposition groups and working class protest, state bureaucracy and so on all existed before Stalin manoeuvred himself into absolute power. And with the exception of state bureaucracy, none of the mainstream Bolshevik leaders found anything to complain about. Indeed, the reverse. Whether it is Lenin or Trotsky, the sad fact of the matter is that a party dictatorship presiding over an essentially state capitalism economy was not considered a bad thing. Which, of course, causes problems for those who seek to distance Lenin and Trotsky from Stalinism and claim that Bolshevism is fundamentally "*democratic*" in nature.

The knots Leninists get into to do this can be ludicrous. A particularly crazy example of this can be seen from the UK's Socialist Workers' Party. For John Rees, it is a truism that "*it was overwhelmingly the force of circumstance which obliged the Bolsheviks to retreat so far from their own goals. They travelled this route in opposition to their own theory, not because of it -- no matter what rhetorical justifications were given at the time.*" ["*In Defence of October,*" pp. 3-82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 70]

However, this sort of position has little substance to it. It is both logically and factually flawed. Logically, it simply makes little sense as anything but an attempt to narrow political discussion and whitewash Bolshevik practice and politics. Rees, in effect, is saying that not only are we **not** to judge the Bolsheviks by their actions, we must also discount what they said -- unless it was something modern day Leninists approve of! Given that Leninists constantly quote from Lenin's (and Trotsky's) post-1918 works, it seems strange that they try to stop others so doing! Strange, but not surprising, given their task is to perpetuate the Bolshevik Myth. Where that leaves revolutionary politics is left unsaid, but it seems to involve worshipping at the shrine of October and treating as a heretic anyone who dares suggest we analysis it in any depth and perhaps learn lessons from it and the Bolshevism that dominated it.

Of course Rees' comments are little more than assertions. Given that he dismisses the idea that we can actually take what any Bolshevik says at face value, we are left with little more than a mind reading operation in trying to find out what the likes of Lenin and Trotsky "*really*" thought. Perhaps the root

explanation of Rees' position is the awkward fact that there are no quotes from any of the leading Bolsheviks which support it? After all, if they were quotes from the hallowed texts expounding the position Rees says the Bolshevik leaders *"really"* held then he would have provided them. The simple fact is that Lenin and Trotsky, like all the Bolshevik leaders, considered a one-party dictatorship ruling over a state capitalist economy as some form of *"socialism."* That was certainly Trotsky's position and he was **not** shy in expressing. But, of course, we can dismiss this simply as *"rhetorical justifications"* rather than an expression of *"their own theory"*! We will never know, as they never expressed *"their own theory"* and instead made do with the *"rhetorical justifications"* Rees is at such pains for us to ignore!

Which shows that a major problem in discussing the failure of the Russian Revolution is the attitude of modern day Leninists. Rees presents us with another example when he asserts that *"what is required of historians, particularly Marxists, is to separate phrase from substance."* The Bolsheviks, Rees argues, were *"inclined to make a virtue of necessity, to claim that the harsh measures of the civil war were the epitome of socialism."* Thus the Bolsheviks cannot be blamed either for what they did or what they said. Indeed, he states that non-Leninists *"take Lenin or Trotsky's shouts of command in the midst of battle and portray them as considered analyses of events."* [Op. Cit., p. 46]

This argument is simply incredulous. After all, neither Lenin nor Trotsky could be said to be anything **but** political activists who took the time to consider events and analyse them in detail. Moreover, they defended their arguments in terms of Marxism. Would Rees consider Lenin's **State and Revolution** as an unimportant work? After all, this was produced in the midst of the events of 1917, in often difficult circumstances. If so, then why not his other, less appealing, political proclamations (never mind actions)? Moreover, looking at some of the works produced in this period it is clear that they are anything **but** *"shouts of command in the midst of battle."* Trotsky's **Terrorism and Communism** is a substantial book, for example It was not an ad hoc comment made during a conference or *"in the midst of battle."* Quite the reverse, it was a detailed, substantial and thought-out reply to the criticism by the influential German social democrat Karl Kaustky (and, before Lenin, the most internationally respected Marxist thinker). Indeed, Trotsky explicitly asks the question *"[i]s there still theoretical necessity to justify revolutionary terrorism?"* and answers yes, his *"book must serve the ends of an irreconcilable struggle against the cowardice, half-measures, and hypocrisy of Kautskianism in all countries."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 9 and p. 10]

Therefore, on the face of it, Rees's comments are hard to take seriously. It is even harder to take when it becomes clear that Rees does not apply his comments consistently or logically. He does not object to quoting Lenin and Trotsky during this period when they say something he **approves** of, regardless of how well it fits into their actions. It would be no exaggeration to say that his *"argument"* is simply an attempt to narrow the area of debate, marking off limits any comments by his heroes which would place his ideology in a bad light. It is hardly convincing, particularly when their *"good"* quotes are so at odds with their practice and their *"bad"* quotes so in line with them. And as Marx argued, we should judge people by what they do, **not** by what they say. This seems a basic principle of scientific analysis and it is significant, if not surprising, that Leninists like Rees want to reject it.

Ultimately, the theoretical problem with this position is that it denies the importance of implementing

ideas. After all, even if it were true that the *"theory"* of Bolshevism was different to its practice and the justifications for that practice, it would leave us with the conclusion that this *"theory"* was not sufficient when faced with the rigours of reality. In other words, that it is impractical. A conclusion that Leninists do not want to draw, hence the stress on *"objective factors"* to explain the failure of Bolshevism. As Marx said, judge people by what they do, not what they say (unless, of course, as with the Bolsheviks post-October, what they said reflects what they did!)

Similarly, there seems to be an idealist tint to Leninist accounts of the Russian Revolution. After all, they seem to think that the Lenin of 1921 was, essentially, the same person as the Lenin of 1917! That seems to violate the basic ideas of materialism. As Herbert Read points out, *"the phrase 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' . . . became fatal through the interventions of two political expedients -- the identification of the proletariat with the Bolshevik Party, and the use of the State as an instrument of revolution. Expedients and compromises may have been necessary for the defeat of the reactionary forces; but there is no doubt whatsoever that what took place was a progressive brutalisation of Lenin's own mind under the corrupting influence of the exercise of power."* [**A One-Man Manifesto**, p. 51] It seems common sense that if a political strategy exposes its followers to the corrupting effects of power we should factor this into any evaluation of it. Sadly, Leninists fail to do this -- even worse, they attempt to whitewash the post-October Lenin (and Trotsky) by excluding the "bad" quotes which reflect their practice, a practice which they are at pains to downplay (or ignore)!

Then, of course, there is the attitude of the Bolshevik leaders themselves to these so-called *"shouts of command in the midst of battle."* Rather than dismiss them as irrelevant, they continued to subscribe to them years later. For example, Trotsky was still in favour of party dictatorship in the late 1930s (see [section H.1.2](#)). Looking at his justly infamous **Terrorism and Communism**, we discover Trotsky in the 1930s reiterating his support for his arguments of 1920. His preface to the 1936 French edition sees him state that it was *"devoted to a clarification of the methods of the proletariat's revolutionary policy in our epoch."* He concluded as follows: *"Victory is conceivable only on the basis of Bolshevik methods, to the defence of which the present work is devoted."* The previous year, in his introduction to the second English edition, he was equally unrepentant. *"The British proletariat,"* he argued, *"will enter upon a period of political crisis and theoretical criticism . . . The teachings of Marx and Lenin for the first time will find the masses as their audience. Such being the case, it may be also that the present book will turn out to be not without its use."* He dismissed the *"consoling illusion"* that *"the arguments of this book [were] true for backward Russia"* but *"utterly without application to advanced lands."* The *"wave of Fascist or militarised police dictatorships"* in the 1920s and 1930s was the reason. It seems ironic that Trotsky's self-proclaimed followers are now repeating the arguments of what he termed *"incurable Fabians."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. xix, p. xxxv, p. xlvi and p. xxxix]

Rather than distance himself from the authoritarian and state capitalist policies modern day Leninists claim were thrust upon an unwilling Bolshevik party by *"objective factors,"* Trotsky defends them! Moreover, as we noted in [section 12](#) of the appendix on ["What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?"](#), Trotsky himself argues that these *"objective factors"* would face **every** revolution. As it is, he argues that it was only the *"slow development of the revolution in the West"* which stopped *"a direct passage from military*

*Communism to a Socialistic system of production.*" Rather than admit to "illusions" caused by the "iron necessity" of wiling the civil war, he talks about "those economic hopes which were bound up with the development of the world revolution." He even links Bolshevik practice with Stalinism, noting that the "idea of five-year plans was not only formulated in that period [1918-1920], but in some economic departments it was also technically worked out." [Op. Cit., p. xliii]

Even his essay outlining what he considers the differences between Stalinism and Bolshevism does not see him fundamentally distancing himself from the positions modern day Leninists like to explain by "objective factors." He stated that the "Bolshevik party achieved in the civil war the correct combination of military art and Marxist politics." What did that involve? Immediately before making that claim he argued that the "Bolshevik party has shown the entire world how to carry out armed insurrection and the seizure of power. Those who propose the abstraction of the Soviets from the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat." Thus the "party dictatorship" is seen as being an example of "Marxist politics" being successfully applied and not something to be opposed. Moreover, "the Bolshevik party was able to carry on its magnificent 'practical' work only because it illuminated all its steps with theory." [Stalinism and Bolshevism] Clearly, rather than denounce the power of the party as being against Bolshevik theory, as Rees claims, for Trotsky it represented its application. While he excuses some Bolshevik actions (such as the banning of opposition groups) as a product of "objective factors," he clearly sees the degeneration of the revolution coming **after** the civil war and its "correct combination" of "Marxist politics" and "military art," which included "party dictatorship" over the soviets.

This lack of distancing is to be expected. After, the idea that "objective factors" caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution was first developed by Trotsky to explain, after his fall from power) the rise of Stalinism. While **he** was head of the Soviet state no such "objective" factors seemed to be required to "explain" the party dictatorship over the working class. Indeed, quite the reverse. As he argued in 1923 "[i]f there is one question which basically not only does not require revision but does not so much as admit the thought of revision, it is the question of the dictatorship of the Party." [Leon Trotsky Speaks, p. 158]

Trotsky was just stating mainstream Bolshevik ideology, echoing a statement made in March 1923 by the Central Committee (of which he and Lenin were members) to mark the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party. It sums up the lessons gained from the revolution and states that "the party of the Bolsheviks proved able to stand out fearlessly against the vacillations within its own class, vacillations which, with the slightest weakness in the vanguard, could turn into an unprecedented defeat for the proletariat." Vacillations, of course, are expressed by workers' democracy. Little wonder the statement rejects it: "The dictatorship of the working class finds its expression in the dictatorship of the party." ["To the Workers of the USSR" in G. Zinoviev, **History of the Bolshevik Party**, p. 213, p. 214] It should be noted that Trotsky had made identical comments before and immediately after the civil war -- as well as long after (see [section H.3.8](#) for details).



So, as with all the leading Bolsheviks, he considered the party dictatorship as an inevitable result of any proletarian revolution. Moreover, he did not question the social relationships within production either. One-man management held no fears for him and he called the state capitalist regime under himself and Lenin as "*socialist*" and defended it as such. He was fully supportive of one-man management. Writing in 1923, he argued that the "*system of actual one-man management must be applied in the organisation of industry from top to bottom. For leading economic organs of industry to really direct industry and to bear responsibility for its fate, it is essential for them to have authority over the selection of functionaries and their transfer and removal.*" These economic organs must "*in actual practice have full freedom of selection and appointment.*" [quoted by Robert V. Daniels, **A Documentary History of Communism**, vol. 1, p. 237]

All of these post-civil war opinions of course, fit in well with his civil war opinions on the matter. Which, incidentally, explains why, to quote a Leninist, Trotsky "*continued to his death to harbour the illusion that somehow, despite the lack of workers' democracy, Russia was a 'workers' state.'*" Simply put, there had been no workers' democracy under Lenin and Trotsky and he considered that regime a "*workers' state.*" The question arises why Harman thinks Lenin's Russia was some kind of "workers' state" if workers' democracy is the criteria by which such things are to be judged. But, then again, he thinks Trotsky's **Left Opposition** "*framed a policy along [the] lines*" of "*returning to genuine workers' democracy*"! [Chris Harman, **Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe**, p. 20 and p. 19]

Now, it seems strange that rather than present what he "*really*" thought, Trotsky expounded what presumably is the **opposite** of it. Surely the simplistic conclusion to draw is that Trotsky said what he really did think and that this was identical to his so-called "*shouts of command*" made during the civil war? But, of course, all these comments can be dismissed as "*rhetorical justifications*" and not reflective of Trotsky's real "*theory.*" Or can they? Ultimately, either you subscribe to the idea that Lenin and Trotsky were able to express their ideas themselves or you subscribe to the notion that they hid their "*real*" politics and only modern-day Leninists can determine what they, in fact, "*really*" meant to say and what they "really" stood for. And as for all those "awkward" quotes which express the **opposite** of the divined true faith, well, they can be ignored.

Which is, of course, hardly a convincing position to take. Particularly as Lenin and Trotsky were hardly shy in justifying their authoritarian policies and expressing a distinct lack of concern over the fate of any **meaningful** working class conquest of the revolution like, say, soviet democracy. As Samuel Farber notes that "*there is no evidence indicating that Lenin or any of the mainstream Bolshevik leaders lamented the loss of workers' control or of democracy in the soviets, or at least referred to these losses as a retreat, as Lenin declared with the replacement of War Communism by NEP in 1921.*" [**Before Stalinism**, p. 44]

The sad fact is that the inter-party conflicts of the 1920s were **not** about "*workers' democracy,*" rather party democracy. The Bolsheviks simply relabelled "*party democracy*" as "*workers' democracy.*" Little wonder in 1925 that Max Eastman, one of Trotsky's main supporters at the time, stated "*this programme of democracy within the party [was] called 'Workers' Democracy' by Lenin*" and that "*Trotsky merely revived this original plea.*" [**Since Lenin Died**, p. 35] Trotsky held this position throughout the 1920s

and 1930s. As we noted in [section 13](#) of the appendix on "[What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?](#)", the 1927 **Platform of the Opposition** restated its belief in party dictatorship and argued that Stalin was undermining it in favour of rule by the bureaucracy. Ironically, Trotskyists in soviet prisons in the early 1930s "*continued to consider that 'Freedom to choose one's party -- that is Menshevism'*" and this was their "*final verdict.*" [Ante Ciliga, **The Russian Enigma**, p. 280] No wonder they seemed surprised to be there!

Trotsky's issue with Stalinism was not based on **real** socialist principles, such as meaningful working class freedoms and power. Rather it was a case of "*the political centre of gravity ha[ving] shifted from the proletarian vanguard to the bureaucracy*" and this caused "*the party*" to change "*its social structure as well as in its ideology.*" [**Stalinism and Bolshevism**] The party dictatorship had been replaced by the dictatorship of the state bureaucracy, in other words. Once this happened, Trotsky sought to explain it. As analysing the impact of Bolshevik ideology and practice were, by definition, out of the question, that left the various objective factors Trotsky turned to to explain developments after 1923. Now the concern for "*objective factors*" appeared, to explain Stalinism while keeping true to Bolshevik ideology **and** practice.

So, in summary, the leading Bolsheviks did not view "objective factors" as explaining the failure of the revolution. Indeed, until Trotsky was squeezed out of power they did not think that the revolution **had** failed. Party dictatorship and one-man management were **not** considered as expressions of a failed revolution, rather a successful one. Trotsky's issue with Stalinism was simply that the bureaucracy had replaced the "*the proletarian vanguard*" (i.e. himself and his followers) as the dominant force in the Soviet State and it had started to use the techniques of political repression developed against opposition parties and groups against him. The idea that "objective factors" caused the failure of the revolution was not used until the late 1920s and even then not used to explain the party dictatorship but rather the usurpation of **its** power by the bureaucracy.

# Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?

The key Leninist defence of the actions of the Bolsheviks in the Russian revolution is that they had no other choice. Complaints against the Bolshevik attacks on the gains of the revolution and the pro-revolutionary Left in Russia are met with a mantra involving the white terror, the primitive state of Russia and the reactionary peasantry, the invading imperialist armies (although the actual number can, and does, vary depending on who you are talking to) and other such "*forces of nature*" which we are to believe could only be met by a centralised authoritarian regime that would flinch at nothing in order to survive.

However, this is not the case. This is for three reasons.

Firstly, there is the slight problem that many of the attacks on the revolution (disbanding soviets, undermining the factory committees, repressing socialists and anarchists, and so on) started **before** the start of the civil war. As such, it's difficult to blame the degeneration of the revolution on an event which had yet to happen (see [section 3](#) of the appendix "[What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?](#)" for details).

Secondly, Leninists like to portray their ideology as "realistic," that it recognises the problems facing a revolution and can provide the necessary solutions. Some even claim, flying in the face of the facts, that anarchists think the ruling class will just "*disappear*" (see [section H.2.1](#)) or that we think "*full-blown*" communism will appear "*overnight*" (see [section H.2.5](#)). Only Bolshevism, it is claimed, recognises that civil war is inevitable during a revolution and only it provides the necessary solution, namely a "*workers state*." Lenin himself argued that "[n]ot a single great revolution in history has escaped civil war. No one who does not live in a shell could imagine that civil war is conceivable without exceptionally complicated circumstances." [**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 81] As such, it's incredulous that modern day followers of Lenin blame the degeneration of the Russian Revolution on the very factors (civil war and exceptional circumstances) that they claim to recognise as inevitable!

Thirdly, and even more embarrassingly for the Leninists, numerous examples exist both from revolutionary Russia at the time and from earlier and later revolutions that suggest far from Bolshevik tactics being the most efficient way of defending the revolution other methods existed which looked to the massive creative energies of the working masses unleashed by the revolution.

During the Russian Revolution the biggest example of this is found in South-Eastern Ukraine. For much of the Civil War this area operated without a centralised state apparatus of the Bolshevik type and was, instead, based on the anarchist idea of Free Soviets. There "*the insurgents raised the black flag of anarchism and set forth on the anti-authoritarian road of the free organisation of the*

workers." [Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 50] The space in which this happened was created by a partisan force that instead of using the "efficiency" of executions for desertion, tsarist officers appointed over the rank and file soldiers' wishes and saluting so loved by the Bolsheviks instead operated as a volunteer army with elected officers and voluntary discipline. This movement was the Makhnovists, named after its leader, the Ukrainian anarchist Nestor Makhno. The Black Flag which floated over the lead wagon of the Insurgent Army was inscribed with the slogans "*Liberty or Death*" and "*The Land to the Peasants, the Factories to the Workers.*" These slogans summarised what the Makhnovist were fighting for -- a libertarian socialist society. At its height in the autumn of 1919, the Makhnovists numbered around 40,000 and its extended area of influence corresponded to nearly one third of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, comprising a population of over seven million.

It is this that explains the importance of the Makhnovists. As historian Christopher Reed notes, the "*Bolsheviks' main claim to legitimacy rested on the argument that they were the only ones capable of preventing a similar disaster [counter-revolution] for the workers and peasants of Russia and that their harsh methods were necessary in the face of a ruthless and unrelenting enemy.*" However, Reed argues that "*the Makhno movement in the Ukraine suggests that there was more than one way to fight against the counter-revolution.*" [From **Tsar to Soviets**, pp. 258-9] This is why the Makhnovist movement is so important, why it shows that there was, and is, an alternative to the ideas of Bolshevism. Here we have a mass movement operating in the same "*exceptional circumstances*" as the Bolsheviks which did **not** implement the same policies. Indeed, rather than suppress soviet, workplace and military democracy in favour of centralised, top-down party power and modify their political line to justify their implementation of party dictatorship, the Makhnovists did all they could to implement and encourage working-class self-government.

As such, it is difficult to blame the development of Bolshevik policies towards state-capitalist and party-dictatorship directions on the problems caused during the revolution when the Makhnovists, facing similar conditions, did all they could to protect working-class autonomy and freedom. Indeed, it could be argued that the problems facing the Makhnovists were greater in many ways. The Ukraine probably saw more fighting in the Russian Civil War than any other area. Unlike the Bolsheviks, the Makhnovists lost the centre of their movement and had to re-liberate it. To do so they fought the Austrian and German armies, Ukrainian Nationalists, Bolsheviks and the White Armies of Denikin and then Wrangel. There were smaller skirmishes involving Cossacks returning to the Don and independent "*Green*" bands. The anarchists fought all these various armies over the four years their movement was in existence. This war was not only bloody but saw constant shifts of fronts, advances and retreats and changes from near conventional war to mobile partisan war. The consequences of this was that no area of the territory was a safe "*rear*" area for any period of time and so little constructive activity was possible. [Section 4](#) presents a summary of the military campaigns of these years. A brief idea of the depth of fighting in these years can be seen by considering the town at the centre of the Makhnovists, Hulyai Pole which changed hands no less than 16 times in the period from 1917-1921.

Clearly, in terms of conflict (and the resulting disruption caused by it), the Makhnovists did not have the relative peace the Bolsheviks had (who never once lost their main bases of Petrograd or Moscow,

although they came close). As such, the problems used to justify the repressive and dictatorial policies of the Bolsheviks also apply to the Makhnovists. Despite this, the activity of the Makhnovists in the Ukraine demonstrated that an alternative to the supposedly necessary methods of the Bolsheviks did exist. Where the Bolsheviks suppressed freedom of speech, assembly and press, the Makhnovists encouraged it. Where the Bolsheviks turned the soviets into mere cyphers of their government and undermined soviet power, the Makhnovists encouraged working-class participation and free soviets. As we discuss in [section 7](#), the Makhnovists applied their ideas of working class self-management whenever and wherever they could.

Sadly, the Makhnovist movement is a relatively unknown event during the revolution. There are few non-anarchist accounts of it and the few histories which do mention it often simply slander it. However, as the Cohn-Bendit brothers correctly argue, the movement, *"better perhaps than any other movement, shows that the Russian Revolution could have been a great liberating force."* Equally, the reason why it has been almost totally ignored (or slandered, when mentioned) by Stalinist and Trotskyist writers is simple: *"It shows the Bolsheviks stifling workers and peasants with lies and calumnies, and then crushing them in a bloody massacre."* [Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, **Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative**, p. 200]

This section of our FAQ will indicate the nature and history of this important social movement. As we will prove, *"the Makhnovshchina . . . was a true popular movement of peasants and workers, and . . . its essential goal was to establish the freedom of workers by means of revolutionary self-activity on the part of the masses."* [Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 209] They achieved this goal in extremely difficult circumstances and resisted all attempts to limit the freedom of the working class, no matter where it came from. As Makhno himself once noted:

*"Our practice in the Ukraine showed clearly that the peasant problem had very different solutions from those imposed by Bolshevism. If our experience had spread to the rest of Russia, a pernicious division between country and city would not have been created. Years of famine would have been avoided and useless struggles between peasant and workers. And what is more important, the revolution would have grown and developed along very different lines . . . We were all fighters and workers. The popular assembly made the decisions. In military life it was the War Committee composed of delegates of all the guerrilla detachments which acted. To sum up, everyone took part in the collective work, to prevent the birth of a managing class which would monopolise power. And we were successful. Because we had succeeded and gave lie to Bolshevik bureaucratic practices, Trotsky, betraying the treaty between the Ukraine and the Bolshevik authorities, sent the Red Army to fight us. Bolshevism triumphed militarily over the Ukraine and at Kronstadt, but revolutionary history will acclaim us one day and condemn the victors as counter-revolutionary grave-diggers of the Russian Revolution."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 88-9]

Two distinct aspects of the anarchist movement existed in the Ukraine at this time, a political and non-

military structure called the Nabat (Alarm) federation which operated through the soviets and collectives and a military command structure usually known after its commander Nestor Makhno as the *Makhnovshchina* (which means the "*Makhno movement*") although its proper name was the *Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine*. This section of the FAQ will cover both, although the Makhnovshchina will be the main focus.

For more information on the Makhnovist movement, consult the following books. Anarchist accounts of the movement can be found in Peter Arshinov's excellent **The History of the Makhnovist Movement** and Voline's **The Unknown Revolution** (Voline's work is based on extensive quotes from Arshinov's work, but does contain useful additional material). For non-anarchist accounts, Michael Malet's **Nestor Makhno in the Russian Revolution** is essential reading as it contains useful information on both the history of the movement, its social basis and political ideas. Malet considers his work as a supplement to Michael Palij's **The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno, 1918-1921** which is primarily a military account of the movement but which does cover some of its social and political aspects. Unfortunately, both books are rare. Paul Avrich's **The Russian Anarchists** contains a short account of the movement and his **Anarchist Portraits** has a chapter on Nestor Makhno. Makhnovist source material is included in Avrich's **The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**. Daniel Guerin includes a section on Makhno and the Makhnovist Movement in volume 2 of **No Gods, No Masters**. As well as extracts from Arshinov's book, it has various manifestos from the movement as well as Makhno's account of his meeting with Lenin. Christopher Read's **From Tsar to Soviets** has an excellent section on the Makhnovists. Serge Cipko presents an excellent overview of works on the Makhnovists in his "*Nestor Makhno: A Mini-Historiography of the Anarchist Revolution in Ukraine, 1917-1921*" (**The Raven**, no. 13). Alexander Skirda presents an overview of perestroika soviet accounts of Makhno in his essay "*The Rehabilitation of Makhno*" (**The Raven**, no. 8). Skirda's biography **Nestor Makhno: Le Cosaque de l'anarchie** is by far the best account of the movement available.

Lastly, a few words on names. There is a large variation on the spelling of names within the source material. For example, Makhno's home town has been translated as Gulyai Pole, Gulyai Polye Hulyai-Pole and Hulyai Pole. Similarly, with other place names. The bandit Grigor'ev has been also translated as Hryhor'iv and Hryhoriyiv. We generally take Michael Malet's translations of names as a basis (i.e. we use Hulyai Pole and Hryhoriyiv, for example).

## 1 Who was Nestor Makhno?

The Makhnovist movement was named after Nestor Makhno, a Ukrainian anarchist who played a key role in the movement from the start. Indeed, Makhnovshchina literally means "*Makhno movement*" and his name is forever linked with the revolution in the South-East of the Ukraine. So who was Makhno?

Nestor Ivanovich Makhno was born on the 27th of October, 1889 in Hulyai Pole, which is situated in Katerynoslav province, in the south east of the Ukraine between the Dnieper River and the Sea of Azov. While it seems to be conventional for many historians to call Hulyai Pole a "village," it was in fact a town with a population of about 30,000 and boasted several factories and schools.

Makhno was the son of a poor peasant family. His father died when he was ten months old, leaving him and his four brothers in the care of their mother. Due to the extreme poverty of his family, he had to start work as a shepherd at the age of seven. At eight he started to attend the Second Hulyai Pole primary school in winter and worked for local landlords during the summer. He left school when he was twelve and took up full-time employment as a farmhand on the estates of nobles and on the farms of the German colonist **kulaks**. At the age of seventeen, he started to work in Hulyai Pole itself, first as an apprentice painter, then as an unskilled worker in a local iron foundry and, finally, as a founder in the same establishment.

It was when he was working in the iron foundry that he became involved in revolutionary politics. In the stormy years following the 1905 revolution, Makhno got involved in revolutionary politics. This decision was based on his experiences of injustice at work and seeing the terror of the Russian regime during the 1905 events (in Hulyai Pole there had been no serious disorder, yet the regime sent a detachment of mounted police to suppress gatherings and meetings in the town, terrorising the population by whipping those caught in the streets and beating prisoners with rifle butts). In 1906, Makhno decided to join the anarchist group in Hulyai Pole (which had been formed the previous year and consisted mainly of sons of poorer peasants).

At the end of 1906 and in 1907, Makhno was arrested and accused of political assassinations, but was released due to lack of evidence. In 1908, due to the denunciation of a police spy within the anarchist group, he was arrested and put in jail. In March, 1910, Makhno and thirteen others were tried by a military court and sentenced to death by hanging. Due to his youth and the efforts of his mother, the death penalty was commuted to life imprisonment with hard labour. He served his time at the Butyrki prison in Moscow, resisting the prison authorities by every means available to him. Due to this resistance, he spent much of his time in chains or in damp and freezing confinement. This experience ensured that Makhno developed an intense hatred of prisons (later, during the revolution, his first act in entering a town or city was to release all prisoners and destroy the prison).

It was during his time in Butyrki that Makhno met Peter Arshinov, a fellow anarchist prisoner and later activist and historian of the Makhnovist movement. Arshinov was born in 1887 in the Ukrainian industrial town of Katerinoslav. His father was a factory worker and he was a metal worker. Originally a Bolshevik, he had become an anarchist in 1906, taking a leading part in organising factory workers and actions against the regime. In 1907 he was arrested and sentenced to death, escaping to Western Europe. In 1909, he returned to Russia and was again arrested and again escaped. In 1910, he was arrested and placed in the Butyrki prison where he met Makhno. The two anarchists established a close personal and political friendship, with Arshinov helping Makhno develop and deepen his anarchist ideas.

On March 2nd, 1917, after eight years and eight months in prison, Makhno was released along with all other political prisoners as a result of the February Revolution. After spending three weeks in Moscow with the Moscow anarchists, Makhno returned to Hulyai Pole. As the only political prisoner who was returned to his family by the revolution, Makhno became very well-respected in his home town. After years of imprisonment, suffering but learning, Makhno was no longer an inexperienced young activist,

but a tested anarchist militant with both a powerful will and strong ideas about social conflict and revolutionary politics. Ideas which he immediately set about applying.

Once home in Hulyai Pole, Makhno immediately devoted himself to revolutionary work. Unsurprisingly, the remaining members of the anarchist group, as well as many peasants, came to visit him. After discussing ideas with them, Makhno proposed beginning organisational work immediately in order to strengthen links between the peasants in Hulyai Pole and its region with the anarchist group. On March 28-29, a Peasant Union was created with Makhno as its chairman. Subsequently, he organised similar unions in other villages and towns in the area. Makhno also played a large part in a successful strike by wood and metal workers at a factory owned by his old boss (this defeat led to the other bosses capitulating to the workers as well). At the same time, peasants refused to pay their rent to the landlords. [Michael Malet, **Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War**, p. 4] Regional assemblies of peasants were called, both at Hulyai Pole and elsewhere, and on August 5-7, the provincial congress at Katerinoslav decided to reorganise the Peasant Unions into Soviets of Peasants' and Workers' Deputies.

In this way, "*Makhno and his associates brought socio-political issues into the daily life of the people, who in turn supported his efforts, hoping to expedite the expropriation of large estates.*" [Michael Palij, **The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno**, p. 71] In Hulyai Pole, the revolution was moving faster than elsewhere (for example, while the Aleksandrovsok soviet supported the actions of the Provisional Government during the July days in Petrograd, a meeting in Hulyai Pole saluted the rebellious soldiers and workers). Peasants were drawn to Hulyai Pole for advice and help from the neighbouring **volosts** (administrative districts). The peasantry wanted to seize the land of the large landowners and the kulaks (rich peasants). Makhno presented this demand at the first sessions of the regional Soviet, which were held in Hulyai Pole. In August, Makhno called all the local landlords and rich peasants (kulaks) together and all documents concerning ownership (of land, livestock and equipment) were taken from them. An inventory of this property was taken and reported to the session of the local soviet and then at a regional meeting. It was agreed that all land, livestock and equipment was to be divided equally, the division to include the former owners. This was the core of the agrarian program of the movement, namely the liquidation of the property of the landowners and kulaks. No-one could own more land than they could work with their own labour. All this was in flat defiance to the Provisional Government which was insisting that all such questions be left to the Constituent Assembly. Free communes were also created on ex-landlord estates.

Unsurprisingly, the implementation of these decisions was delayed because of the opposition of the landlords and kulaks, who organised themselves and appealed to the provisional authorities. When General Kornilov tried to march on Petrograd and take power, the Hulyai Pole soviet took the initiative and formed a local "*Committee for the Salvation of the Revolution*" headed by Makhno. The real aim was to disarm the potential local enemy -- the landlords, bourgeoisie, and kulaks -- as well as to expropriate their ownership of the people's wealth: the land, factories, plants, printing shops, theatres and so on. On 25 September a volost congress of Soviets and peasant organisations in Hulyai Pole proclaimed the confiscation of the landowners' land and its transformation into social property. Raids on the estates of landlords and rich peasants, including German colonists, began and the expropriation of the expropriators began.



Makhno's activities came to a halt the following spring when Lenin's government signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. This treaty gave sizeable parts of the Russian Empire, including the Ukraine, to Germany and Austria in return for peace. The Treaty also saw the invasion of the Ukraine by large numbers of German and Austrian troops, who conquered the entire country in less than three months. Makhno succeeded in forming several military units, consisting of 1700 men, but could not stop Hulyai Pole being taken. After an anarchist congress at the end of April in Taganrog, it was decided to organise small combat units of five to ten peasants and workers, to collect arms from the enemy and to prepare for a general peasant uprising against the Austro-German troops and, finally, to send a small group to Soviet Russia to see at first hand what was happening there to both the revolution and to the anarchists under Bolshevik rule. Makhno was part of that group.

By June, Makhno had arrived in Moscow. He immediately visited a number of Russian anarchists (including his old friend Peter Arshinov). The anarchist movement in Moscow was cowed, due to a Cheka raid in April which broke the backbone of the movement, so ending a political threat to the Bolsheviks from the left. To Makhno, coming from an area where freedom of speech and organisation was taken for granted, the low level of activity came as a shock. He regarded Moscow as the capital of the *"paper revolution,"* whose red tape and meaninglessness had affected even the anarchists. Makhno also visited Peter Kropotkin, asking his advice on revolutionary work and the situation in the Ukraine. To Makhno, *"Moscow appeared as 'the capital of the Paper Revolution,' a vast factory turning out empty resolutions and slogans while one political party, by means of force and fraud, elevated itself into the position of a ruling class."* [David Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 252]

While in Moscow, Makhno met with Lenin. This meeting came about by chance. Visiting the Kremlin to obtain a permit for free board and lodging, he met the chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Soviets, Jakov M. Sverdlov, who arranged for Makhno to meet Lenin. Lenin asked Makhno, *"How did the peasants of your region understand the slogan ALL POWER TO THE SOVIETS IN THE VILLAGES?"* Makhno states that Lenin *"was astonished"* at his reply:

*"The peasants understood this slogan in their own way. According to their interpretation, all power, in all areas of life, must be identified with the consciousness and will of the working people. The peasants understand that the soviets of workers and peasants of village, country and district are neither more nor less than the means of revolutionary organisation and economic self-management of working people in the struggle against the bourgeoisie and its lackeys, the Right socialists and their coalition government."*

To this Lenin replied: *"Well, then, the peasants of your region are infected with anarchism!"* [Nestor Makhno, **My Visit to the Kremlin**, p. 18] Later in the interview, Lenin stated: *"Do the anarchists ever recognise their lack of realism in present-day life? Why, they don't even think of it."* Makhno replied:

*"But I must tell you, comrade Lenin, that your assertion that the anarchists don't understand 'the present' realistically, that they have no real connection with it and so*

*forth, is fundamentally mistaken. The anarchist-communists in the Ukraine . . . the anarchist-communists, I say, have already given many proofs that they are firmly planted in 'the present.' The whole struggle of the revolutionary Ukrainian countryside against the Central Rada has been carried out under the ideological guidance of the anarchist-communists and also in part by the Socialist Revolutionaries . . . Your Bolsheviks have scarcely any presence in our villages. Where they have penetrated, their influence is minimal. Almost all the communes or peasant associations in the Ukraine were formed at the instigation of the anarchist-communists. The armed struggle of the working people against the counter-revolution in general and the Austro-German invasion in particular has been undertaken with the ideological and organic guidance of the anarchist-communists exclusively.*

*"Certainly it is not in your party's interest to give us credit for all this, but these are the facts and you can't dispute them. You know perfectly well, I assume, the effective force and the fighting capacity of the free, revolutionary forces of the Ukraine. It is not without reason that you have evoked the courage with which they have heroically defended the common revolutionary conquests. Among them, at least one half have fought under the anarchist banner. . .*

*"All this shows how mistaken you are, comrade Lenin, in alleging that we, the anarchist-communists, don't have our feet on the ground, that our attitude towards 'the present' is deplorable and that we are too fond of dreaming about the future. What I have said to you in the course of this interview cannot be questioned because it is the truth. The account which I have made to you contradicts the conclusions you expressed about us. Everyone can see we are firmly planted in 'the present,' that we are working and searching for the means to bring about the future we desire, and that we are in fact dealing very seriously with this problem."*

Lenin replied: *"Perhaps I am mistaken."* [Makhno, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 24-5]

The Bolsheviks helped Makhno to return to the Ukraine. The trip was accomplished with great difficulty. Once Makhno was almost killed. He was arrested by Austro-German troops and was carrying libertarian pamphlets at the time. A Jewish inhabitant of Hulyai Pole, who had know Makhno for some time, succeeded in saving him by paying a considerable sum of money for his liberation. Once back in Hulyai-Pole, he started to organise resistance to the occupying forces of the Austro-Germans and their puppet regime led by Hetman Skoropadsky. With the resistance, the Makhno movement can be said to have arisen (see [section 3](#) on way it was named after Makhno). From July 1918 to August 1921, Makhno led the struggle for working class freedom against all oppressors, whether Bolshevik, White or Nationalist. During the course of this struggle, he proved himself to be *"a guerrilla leader of quite outstanding ability."* [David Footman, **Civil War in Russia**, p. 245] The military history of this movement is discussed in [section 4](#), while other aspects of the movement are discussed in other sections.

After the defeat of the Makhnovist movement in 1921, Makhno was exiled in Western Europe. In 1925 he ended up in Paris, where he lived for the rest of his life. While there, he remained active in the anarchist movement, with the pen replacing the sabre (to use Alexander Skirda's colourful expression). Makhno contributed articles to various anarchist journals and in particular to **Delo Truda**, an anarchist-communist paper started in Paris by Peter Arshinov (many of these articles have been published in the book **The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays**). He remained active in the anarchist movement to the end.

In Paris, Makhno met the famous Spanish anarchists Buenaventura Durruti and Francisco Ascaso in 1927. He argued that in Spain "*conditions for a revolution with a strong anarchist content are better than in Russia*" because not only was there "*a proletariat and a peasantry with a revolutionary tradition whose political maturity is shown in its reactions,*" the Spanish anarchists had "*a sense of organisation which we lacked in Russia. It is organisation which assures the success in depth of all revolutions.*" Makhno recounted the activities of the Hulyai Pole anarchist group and the events in revolutionary Ukraine:

*"Our agrarian commune was at once the economic and political vital centre of our social system. These communities were not based on individual egoism but rested on principles of communal, local and regional solidarity. In the same way that the members of a community felt solidarity among themselves, the communities were federated with each other . . . It is said against our system that in the Ukraine, that it was able to last because it was based only on peasant foundations. It isn't true. Our communities were mixed, agricultural-industrial, and, even, some of them were only industrial. We were all fighters and workers. The popular assembly made the decisions. In military life it was the War Committee composed of delegates of all the guerrilla detachments which acted. To sum up, everyone took part in the collective work, to prevent the birth of a managing class which would monopolise power. And we were successful."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 88-9]

As can be seen from the social revolution in Aragon, Durruti took Makhno's advice seriously (see [section I.8](#) for more on the Spanish Revolution). Unsurprisingly, in 1936 a number of veterans of Makhno's Insurgent Army went to fight in the Durruti column. Sadly, Makhno's death in 1934 prevented his own concluding statement to the two Spaniards: "*Makhno has never refused to fight. If I am alive when you start your struggle, I will be with you.*" [quoted by Paz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 90]

Makhno's most famous activity in exile was his association with, and defence of, the **Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists** (known as the "*Platform*"). As discussed in [section J.3.3](#), the Platform was an attempt to analyse what had gone wrong in the Russian Revolution and suggested a much tighter anarchist organisation in future. This idea provoked intense debate after its publication, with the majority of anarchists rejecting it (for Makhno's discussion with Malatesta on this issue, see **The Anarchist Revolution** published by Freedom Press). This debate often resulted in bitter polemics and left Makhno somewhat isolated as some of his friends, like Voline, opposed the Platform. However,

he remained an anarchist to his death in 1934.

Makhno died on the morning of July 25th and was cremated three days later and his ashes placed in an urn within Pere Lachaise, the cemetery of the Paris Commune. Five hundred Russian, French, Spanish and Italian comrades attended the funeral, at which the French anarchist Benar and Voline spoke (Voline used the occasion to refute Bolshevik allegations of anti-Semitism). Makhno's wife, Halyna, was too overcome to speak.

So ended the life of one great fighters for working-class freedom. Little wonder Durruti's words to Makhno:

*"We have come to salute you, the symbol of all those revolutionaries who struggled for the realisation of Anarchist ideas in Russia. We also come to pay our respects to the rich experience of the Ukraine."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 88]

For fuller details of Makhno's life, see the accounts by Peter Arshinov (**The History of the Makhnovist Movement**), Paul Avrich ("*Nestor Makhno: The Man and the Myth*," in **Anarchist Portraits**), Michael Paliy, (**The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno**) and Michael Malet (**Nestor Makhno in the Russian Revolution**).

## 2 Why was the movement named after Makhno?

Officially, the Makhnovist movement was called the **Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of the Ukraine**. In practice, it was usually called the "*Makhno movement*" ("*Makhnovshchina*" in Russian) or the Makhnovists. Unsurprisingly, Trotsky placed great significance on this:

*"The anti-popular character of the Makhno movement is most clearly revealed in the fact that the army of Hulyai Pole is actually called 'Makhno's Army'. **There, armed men are united not around a programme, not around an ideological banner, but around a man.**"* [**The Makhno Movement**]

Ignoring the irony of a self-proclaimed Marxist (and later Leninist and founder of Trotskyism!) making such a comment, we can only indicate why the Makhnovists called themselves by that name:

*"Because, first, in the terrible days of reaction in the Ukraine, we saw in our ranks an unfailing friend and leader, MAKHNO, whose voice of protest against any kind of coercion of the working people rang out in all the Ukraine, calling for a battle against all oppressors, pillagers and political charlatans who betray us; and who is now marching together with us in our common ranks unwavering toward the final goal: liberation of the working people from any kind of oppression."* [contained in Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 272]

The two of the anarchists who took part in the movement and later wrote its history concur. Voline argues that the reason why the movement was known as the "*Makhnovist movement*" was because the "*most important role in this work of unification [of the peasant masses] and in the general development of the revolutionary insurrection in the southern Ukraine was performed by the detachment of partisans guided by a peasant native to the region: Nestor Makhno.*" [**The Unknown Revolution**, p. 551] "*From the first days of the movement,*" Arshinov notes, "*up to its culminating point, when the peasants vanquished the landowners, Makhno played a preponderant and central role to such an extent that the whole insurgent region and the most heroic moments of the struggle are linked to his name. Later, when the insurrection had triumphed completely over the Skoropadsky counter-revolution and the region was threatened by Denikin, Makhno became the rallying point for millions of peasants in several regions.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 50]

It must be stressed that Nestor Makhno was not the boss of the Makhnovists. He was not their ruler or general. As such, the fact that the Makhnovists were (unofficially) named after Makhno does not imply that it was his personal fiefdom, nor that those involved followed him as an individual. Rather, the movement was named after him because he was universally respected within it as a leading militant. This fact also explains why Makhno was nicknamed "*Batko*" (see [next section](#)).

This can be seen from how the movement was organised and was run. As we discuss in [section 5](#), it was organised in a fundamentally democratic way, by means of mass assemblies of insurgents, elected officers, regular insurgent, peasant and worker congresses and an elected "*Revolutionary Military Soviet.*" The driving force in the Makhnovist movement was not, therefore, Makhno but rather the anarchist ideas of self-management. As Trotsky himself was aware, the Makhnovists were influenced by anarchist ideas:

*"Makhno and his companions-in-arms are not non-party people at all. They are all of the Anarchist persuasion, and send out circulars and letters summoning Anarchists to Hulyai Pole so as to organise their own Anarchist power there."* [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**]

As part of this support for anarchist theory, the Makhnovists organised insurgent, peasant and worker conferences to discuss key issues in the revolution and the activities of the Makhno movement itself. Three such conferences had been before Trotsky wrote his diatribe **The Makhno Movement** on June 2nd, 1919. A fourth one was called for June 15th, which Trotsky promptly banned (on pain of death) on June 4th (see [section 13](#) for full details). Unlike the Bolshevik dictatorship, the Makhnovists took every possibility of ensuring the participation of the working people they were fighting for in the revolution. The calling of congresses by the Makhnovists shows clearly that the movement did not, as Trotsky asserted, follow a man, but rather ideas.

As Voline argued, "*the movement would have existed without Makhno, since the living forces, the living masses who created and developed the movement, and who brought Makhno forward merely as their talented military leader, would have existed without Makhno.*" Ultimately, the term "*Makhnovshchina*" is used "*to describe a unique, completely original and independent revolutionary movement of the*

*working class which gradually becomes conscious of itself and steps out on the broad arena of historical activity.*" ["preface," Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 19]

### 3 Why was Makhno called "**Batko**"?

Nestor Makhno was often called in the movement "*Batko*", which is Ukrainian for "*father*." Peter Arshinov explains how and in what circumstances Makhno was given this name:

*"It was . . . in September 1918, that Makhno received the nickname **Batko** -- general leader of the revolutionary insurrection in the Ukraine. This took place in the following circumstances. Local **pomeshchiks** [landed gentry] in the major centres, the **kulaks** [rich peasants], and the German authorities [the Ukraine being occupied by them at the time], decided to eliminate Makhno and his detachment [of partisans] at any cost. The **pomeshchiks** created a special volunteer detachment consisting of their own sons and those of **kulaks** for the decisive struggle against Makhno. On the 30th of September this detachment, with the help of the Austro-Germans, cornered Makhno in the region of Bol'shaya Mihhailovka, setting up strong military posts on all roads. At this time Makhno found himself with only 30 partisans and one machine gun. He was forced to make a fighting retreat, manoeuvring in the midst of numerous enemy forces. Arriving in the forest of Dibrivki, Makhno found himself in an extremely difficult situation. The paths of retreat were occupied by the enemy. It was impossible for the detachment to break through, and escaping individually was beneath their revolutionary dignity. No-one in the detachment would agree to abandon their leader so as to save himself. After some reflection, two days later, Makhno decided to return to the village of Bol'shaya Mikhailovka (Dibrivki). Leaving the forest the partisans met peasants who came to warn them that there were large enemy forces in Dibrivki and that they should make haste to go elsewhere. This information did not stop Makhno and his partisans . . . [and] they set out for Bol'shaya Mikhailovka. They approached the village guardedly. Makhno himself and a few of his comrades went on reconnaissance and saw a large enemy camp on the church square, dozens of machine guns, hundreds of saddle horses, and groups of cavalry. Peasants informed them that a battalion of Austrians and a special **pomeshchik** detachment were in the village. Retreat was impossible. Then Makhno, with his usual stubbornness and determination, said to his companions: 'Well, my friends! We should all be ready to die on this spot . . .' The movement was ominous, the men were firm and full of enthusiasm. All 30 saw only one path before them -- the path toward the enemy, who had about a thousand well-armed men, and they all realised that this meant certain death for them. All were moved, but none lost courage.*

*"It was at this moment that one of the partisans, Shchus', turned to Makhno and said:*

*"From now on you will be **Batko** to all of us, and we vow to die with you in the ranks of the insurgents.'*

*"Then the whole detachment swore never to abandon the insurgent ranks, and to consider Makhno the general **Batko** of the entire revolutionary insurrection. Then they prepared to attack. Shchus' with five to seven men was assigned to attack the flank of the enemy. Makhno with the others attacked from the front. With a ferocious 'Hurrah!' the partisans threw themselves headlong against the enemy, smiting the very centre with sabres, rifles and revolvers. The attack had a shattering effect. The enemy, who were expecting nothing of the kind, were bowled over and began to flee in panic, saving themselves in groups and individually, abandoning arms, machine guns and horses. Without leaving them time to come to themselves, to become aware of the number of attacking forces, and to pass to a counter-attack, the insurgents chased them in separate groups, cutting them down in full gallop. A part of the **pomeshchik** detachment fled to the Volchya River, where they were drowned by peasants who had joined the battle. The enemy's defeat was complete.*

*"Local peasants and detachments of revolutionary insurgents came from all directions to triumphantly acclaim the heroes. They unanimously agreed to consider Makhno as **Batko** of the entire revolutionary insurrection in the Ukraine." [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 59-60]*

This was how Makhno acquired the nickname "*Batko*," which stuck to him thereafter.

It should be stressed that "*Batko*" was a nickname and did not signify any form of autocratic or hierarchical position within the movement:

*"During the civil war, it signified the leadership and control of a specific area and its population in both civil and military fields. The central point of the use of the word, rather than 'leader' or 'dictator' is that the leadership is usually based on respect, as in Makhno's case, and always on intimate knowledge of the home territory." [Michael Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 17]*

That this was a nickname can be seen from the fact that "[a]fter 1920 he was usually called 'Malyi' ('Shorty'), a nickname referring to his short stature, which was introduced by chance by one of the insurgents." [Peter Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 226] To attach significance to the fact that the peasants called Makhno "*Batko*" (as the Bolsheviks did) simply signifies an ignorance of the Makhnovist movement and its social environment.

## 4 Can you give a short overview of the Makhnovist movement?

This section of the FAQ gives a short overview of the Makhnovists from July 1918 (when Makhno returned to the Ukraine) and August 1921, when it was finally defeated by Bolshevik armed force. It will be primarily a military history, with the socio-political aspects of the movement discussed in sections [6](#) (its theory) and [7](#) (its practice). For details of the rise of influence of Makhno after his release from prison in 1917, see [section 1](#).

The history of the Makhno movement can be broken up into roughly four periods -- from July 1918 to February 1919, then the rest of 1919, then January to October 1920 and, finally, from October 1920 to August 1921. This section will give an overview of each period in turn.

By the time Makhno arrived back in the Ukraine in July, 1918, opposition to the German-backed Hetman's regime was mounting and was frequently met with brutal repression, including reprisal executions. Makhno was forced to live underground and on the move, secretly meeting with others, with the Austrians always close behind. Voline recounts Makhno's activities at this time:

*"Back in Hulyai Pole, Makhno came to the decision to die or obtain victory for the peasants . . . He did not delay starting his mission openly among the great masses of peasants, speaking at improvised meetings, writing and distributing letters and tracts. By pen and mouth, he called on the peasants for a decisive struggle against the power of Skoropadsky and the landlords. He declared tirelessly that the workers should now take their fates into their own hands and not let their freedom to act be taken from them . . .*

*"Besides his appeals, Makhno proceeded immediately to direct action. His first concern was to form a revolutionary military unit, sufficiently strong to guarantee freedom of propaganda and action in the villages and towns and at the same time to begin guerrilla operations. This unit was quickly organised . . .*

*"His first unit undertook two urgent tasks, namely, pursuing energetically the work of propaganda and organisation among the peasants and carrying out a stubborn armed struggle against all their enemies. The guiding principle of this merciless struggle was as follows. No lord who persecuted the peasants, no policeman of the Hetman, no Russian or German officer who was an implacable enemy of the peasants, deserved any pity; he must be destroyed. All who participated in the oppression of the poor peasants and workers, all who sought to suppress their rights, to exploit their labour, should be executed.*

*"Within two or three weeks, the unit had already become the terror, not only of the local bourgeoisie, but also of the Austro-German authorities." [The Unknown Revolution, p. 558]*

The night of 26 September saw Hulyai Pole briefly liberated from Hetman and Austrian troops by the actions of Makhno's troops in association with local people. On the retreat from this Makhno's small band grew when he met the partisan troops headed by Schus. When the Austrians cornered them, they launched a surprise counter attack and routed the opposition. This became known as the battle of Dibrivki and it is from this date, 5 October 1918 that Makhno is given the nickname 'Batko', meaning "father" (see [section 3](#) for details). For the next two months already-existing partisan groups sought out and joined the growing army.



In this period, Makhno, with portable printing equipment, was raiding the occupying garrisons and troop trains in the Southern Ukraine. Normal practice was to execute the officers and free the troops. In this period the moral of the occupying troops had crumbled and revolutionary propaganda had made inroads into many units. This was also affecting the nationalist troops and on 20 November the first nationalist unit defected to the Makhnovists. This encouraged them to return to Hulyai Pole on 27 December and there the insurrectionary Staff was formed, this body was to lead the army in the coming years and consisted initially of four old and trusted friends and three political comrades. The Makhnovist presence allowed the setting up of a local soviet and the re-opening of the anarchist clubs. German forces started pulling back to the major cities and on December 14 the Hetman fled Kiyiv. In the resulting vacuum, the Makhnovists rapidly expanded taking in most of the South East Ukraine and setting up fronts against local whites. The Ukrainian nationalists had taken power in the rest of the Ukraine under Petliura and on the 15th December the Makhnovists agreed to make common cause with them against the Whites. In return for arms and ammunition they allowed the nationalists to mobilise in the Makhnovist area (while engaging in propaganda directed at the mobilised troops on their way by train to Katerynoslav).

This was a temporary and pragmatic arrangement directed against the greater enemy of the Whites. However, the nationalists were no friends of working-class autonomy. The nationalists banned elections to the Katerynoslav soviet on 6th of December and the provincial soviet at Kharkiv met with a similar fate on the 22nd. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 22] At the same time as their agreement with the nationalists, the Makhnovists had set up links with Bolshevik partisans to the south and before dawn on the 26th the Bolshevik and Makhnovist forces launched a joint attack on the nationalists at Katerynoslav. The city was taken but held only briefly when a nationalist attack on the 29th drove out all the insurgent forces with heavy losses. In the south, White reinforcements led to the insurgents being pushed North and losing Hulyai Pole.

1919 opened with the Makhnovists organising a congress of front- unit delegates to discuss the progress of the struggle. Over forty delegates attended and a committee of five was elected, along with an operational staff to take charge of the southern front and its rear. It was agreed that local soviets were to be supported in every way, with no military violence directed towards them permitted. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 25]

By the end of January, white reinforcements were landing in the ports of the south. On January 22nd, a worker, peasant and insurgent congress was held at Velyka Mykhailivka. A resolution was passed urging an end to conflict between Makhnovists, Nationalists and Bolsheviks. An alliance was signed between the Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks in early February. This agreement ensured that the Partisan units entered the Red Army as distinct formations, with their internal organisation (including the election of commanders) intact, and the Red Army in the area formed a brigade to be known as "*the third Transdnieper Batko Makhno brigade*" with Makhno as commander. The Whites were repulsed and Hulyai Pole retaken and the front pushed some distance eastwards.

Thus the military situation had improved by the time of the second worker, peasant and insurgent congress held at Hulyai Pole on February 12th. This congress set up a "*Revolutionary Military Soviet*" to co-ordinate civilian affairs and execute its decisions. The congress resolved that "*the land belongs to*

*nobody*" and should be cultivated without the use of hired labour. It also accepted a resolution opposing anti-Jewish pogroms. Also passed was a resolution which sharply attacked the Bolsheviks, caused by their behaviour since their arrival in the Ukraine. [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 154-5] A report by the commander of the 2nd Red Army, Skatchco, indicates the nature of this behaviour:

*"Little local Chekas are undertaking a relentless campaign against the Makhnovists, even when they are shedding their blood at the front. They are hunting them down from the rear and persecuting them solely for belonging to the Makhnovist movement . . . It cannot continue like this: the activity of the local Chekas is deliberately ruining the front, reducing all military successes to nothing, and contributing to the creation of a counter-revolution that neither Denikin nor Krasnov [Hetman of the Don Cossacks] could have achieved. . ."* [quoted by Alexander Skirda, **The Rehabilitation of Makhno**, p. 346]

Unsurprisingly, the peasants reacted strongly to the Bolshevik regime. Their *"agricultural policy and terrorism"* ensured that *"by the middle of 1919, all peasants, rich and poor, distrusted the Bolsheviks."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 156] In April alone, there were 93 separate armed rebellions against the Bolsheviks in the Ukraine. The *"more oppressive the Bolshevik policy, the more the peasants supported Makhno. Consequently, the Bolsheviks began to organise more systematically against the Makhno movement, both as an ideology and as a social movement."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 157]

In mid-March the Red Army attacked eastwards. In the course of this Dybenko, commander of the Trandneiper division, recommended one of Makhno's commanders for a medal. Then the Makhnovists attacked the Donbas (east) to relieve the pressure on the Soviet 8th Army caused by a White advance. They took Mariupol following a White incursion at the beginning of April. A White counter-offensive resulted in the Red 9th division panicking, allowing the Whites into Makhno's rear. Red Commander Dybenko refused orders to come to the Makhnovists aid as he was more interested in the Crimea (south). [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 31]

This period saw the most sustained freedom for the region around Hulyai Pole. It had been free of enemy occupation since January, allowing constructive activity to restart. The inhabitants of the free region *"created new forms of social organisation: free workers' communes and Soviets."* [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 574] The Revolutionary Military Soviet (RMS) called a third regional worker, peasant and insurgent congresses had on April 10th to review progress and to look forward. This was the largest congress to date, with delegates from 72 volosts containing two million people. The Bolshevik military commander Dybenko tried to ban it. The Makhnovists, needless to say, ignored him and the RMS made a famous reply to his arrogance (see [section 13](#) for more details).

It was during this period (late 1918 and early 1919), that the *Nabat* anarchist federation was organised. *"Anarchist influence was reported from Aleksandrovsk and other centres,"* notes David Footman, *"Anarchists were holding a conference in Kursk at about the same time and in one of their resolutions it was stated that 'the Ukrainian Revolution will have great chances of rapidly becoming Anarchist in its ideas.' The position called for renewed Bolshevik measures against the Anarchists. Nabat, the main*

*Anarchist newspaper in the Ukraine, was suppressed, and its editorial board dispersed under threat of arrest.*" [Op. Cit., p. 270] Daniel Guerin has reproduced two documents from the Nabat federation in volume II of his **No Gods, No Masters**.

The anarchist influence in and around Hulyai Pole also worried the Bolsheviks. They started a slander campaign against the Makhnovists, to the alarm of Antonov, the overall front commander, who replied in response to an article in Kharkiv Izvestiya:

*"The article is the most perverted fiction and does not in the least correspond to the existing situation. The insurgents fighting the whites are on a level with the Red Army men, but are in a far worse condition for supplies."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 33]

In a postscript, Antonov added that the press campaign had certainly helped turn Makhno anti-Soviet (i. e. anti-Bolshevik, as Makhno supported free soviets).

At the beginning of May, another partisan commander, Hryhoriyiv, revolted against the Bolsheviks in the central Ukraine. Hryhoriyiv, like the Makhnovists, had joined with the Bolsheviks when they had re-entered the Ukraine, however his social and political background was totally different. Hryhoriyiv was a former Tsarist officer, who had commanded numerous troops under the Petliurist authority and joined the Bolsheviks once that that regime's armed forces had disintegrated. Arshinov notes that he had "*never been a revolutionary*" and that there had been a "*great deal of adventurism in his joining the ranks of the Petliurists and then the ranks of the Red Army.*" His temperament was mixed, consisting of "*a certain amount of sympathy for oppressed peasants, authoritarianism, the extravagance of a Cossack chieftain, nationalist sentiments and anti-Semitism.*" [Op. Cit., p. 110]

Hryhoriyov started his revolt by issuing a Universal, or declaration to the Ukrainian people, which contained a virulent attack on the Bolsheviks as well as one explicit anti-Semitic reference, but without mention of Makhno. The height of the revolt was his appearance in the suburbs of Katerynoslav, which he was stopped from taking. He started a pogrom in Yelyzavethrad which claimed three thousand victims.

Once the Makhnovists had been informed of this rebellion, an enlarged staff and RMS meeting was held. A telegram was sent to the soldiers at the front urging them to hold the front and another to the Bolsheviks with a similar message. A few days latter, when more information had been received, a proclamation was issued against Hyyhoriyiv attacking him for seeking to impose a new authority on the working class, for encouraging toiling people to attack each other, and for inciting pogroms. [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 112 and pp. 114-7]

While it took a fortnight for Red forces to contain Hryhoriyiv without trouble, this involved using all available reserves of all three Ukrainian armies. This left none for Makhno's hard-pressed forces at the front. In addition, Dybenko withdrew a front-line regiment from Makhno for use against the revolt and diverted reinforcements from the Crimea which were intended for Makhno. Despite this Makhnos forces

(now numbering 20,000) were ordered to resume the attack on the whites. This was due to *"unremitting pressure from Moscow to take Taganrog and Rostov."* [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 36] The Makhnovist advance stopped due to the non-fulfilment of an urgent order for ammunition.

On the 19th of May, a White counter-attack not only stopped the advance of the Red Army, it forced the 9th division (and then the Makhnovists) to retreat. On the 29th, the Whites launched a further offensive against the northern Donbas, opening a gap between the 13th and 8th Red Armies. Due to the gravity of the situation, the RSV summoned a fourth congress for June 15th. Trotsky not only banned this congress but took the lead in slandering the Makhnovists and calling for their elimination (see [section 13](#) for details). As well as *"this deliberately false agitational campaign, the [Bolshevik] blockade of the region was carried to the limit . . . The provisioning of shells, cartridges and other indispensable equipment which was used by daily at the front, ceased completely."* [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 118] Palij confirms this, noting that *"the supplies of arms and other war material to Makhno was stopped, thus weakening the Makhno forces vis-a-vis the Denikin troops."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 175] David Footman also notes that the Bolshevik *"hold-back of supplies for the Insurgents developed into a blockade of the area. Makhnovite units at the front ran short of ammunition."* He also mentions that *"[i]n the latter part of May the Cheka sent over two agents to assassinate Makhno."* [**Civil War in Russia**, p. 271]

Needless to say, Trotsky blamed this White success to the Makhnovists, arguing it was retreating constantly before even the slightest attack by the Whites. However, this was not the case. Analysing these events in July 1919, Antonov (the commander of the Southern Front before Trotsky replaced him) wrote:

*"Above all, the facts witness that the affirmations about the weakness of the most contaminated region -- that from Hulyai Pole to Berdiansk -- are without foundation . . . It is not because we ourselves have been better organised militarily, but because those troops were directly defending their native place . . . Makhno stayed at the front, in spite of the flight of the neighbouring 9th division, following by the whole of the 13th army . . . The reasons for the defeat on the southern front do not rest at all in the existence of 'Ukrainian partisans' . . . above all it must be attributed to the machinery of the southern front, in not keeping its fighting spirit and reinforcing its revolutionary discipline."* [quoted by Alexander Skirda, **The Rehabilitation of Makhno**, p. 348]

This, incidentally, tallies with Arshinov's account that *"hordes of Cossacks had overrun the region, **not through the insurrectionary front but from the left flank where the Red Army was stationed."*** [**Op. Cit.**, p. 126] For what it is worth, General Denikin himself concurs with this account of events, noting that by the 4th of June his forces *"repulsed the routed and demoralised contingents of the Eighth and Thirteenth Soviet Armies . . . The resistance of the Thirteenth Army being completely broken."* He notes that an attempt by the Fourteenth Army (which Makhno's troops were part of) to attack on the flank came to nothing. He only mentions Makhno when he recounts that *"General Shkuro's division routed Makhno at Hulyai Pole."* [**The White Armies**, p. 272] With Whites broken through on their flank and with limited ammunition and other supplies (thanks to the Bolsheviks), the Makhnovists had no choice

but to retreat.

It was around this time that Trotsky, in a public meeting in Kharkov, "*announced that it were better to permit the Whites to remain in the Ukraine than to suffer Makhno. The presence of the Whites, he said, would influence the Ukrainian peasantry in favour of the Soviet Government, whereas Makhno and his povstantsi, would never make peace with the Bolsheviks; they would attempt to possess themselves of some territory and to practise their ideas, which would be a constant menace to the Communist Government.*" [Emma Goldman, **My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 63]

Due to this Bolshevik betrayal, the Makhnovist sector was in very grave danger. At Hulyai Pole, a peasant regiment was scraped together in 24 hours in an attempt to save the town. It encountered White Cossacks ten miles away from the town and was mown down. The Whites entered Hulyai Pole the next day (June 6th) and gave it a good going over. On the same day, the Bolsheviks issued an order for Makhno's arrest. Makhno was warned and put in his resignation, arguing that it was "*an inviolable right of the workers and peasants, a right won by the revolution, to call congresses on their own account, to discuss their affairs.*" Combined with the "*hostile attitude*" of the Bolshevik authorities towards him, which would lead "*unavoidably to the creation of a special internal front,*" Makhno believed it was his duty to do what he could to avert it, and so he left his post. [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 129] While Makhno escaped, his staff was not so lucky. Five of them were arrested the same day and shot as a result of Trotsky's order to ban the fourth congress.

Leaving his troops in the frontline, Makhno left with a small cavalry detachment. While leaving the rest under Red command, Makhno made a secret agreement with his regimental commanders to await a message from him to leave the Red Army and join up against with the partisans. On the 9th and 10th of June, Hulyai Pole was retaken by Bolshevik forces, who took the opportunity to attack and sack the Makhnovist communes. [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 86f]

After intense fighting, the Whites finally split the Southern Front into three on June 21st. Needless to say, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks blamed this on the partisan forces (even stating that they had "*opened the front*" to the Whites). This was nonsense, as noted above.

After leaving the front, Makhno took refuge in the Chorno-Znamenski forest before continuing the retreat north and skirmishing with Red Army units. This brought him into the territory held by Hryhoriyiv and this, in turn, meant they had to proceed carefully. While the Makhnovists had made a public denunciation of Hryhoriyiv, Makhno was approaching the centre of Hryhoriyov's remaining influence. Surrounded by enemies, Makhno had little choice but to begin discussions with Hryhoriyiv. This was problematic to say the least. Hryhoriyiv's revolt had been tinged with anti-Semitism and had seen at least one major pogrom. Being faced with Hryhoriyov's anti-Semitism and his proposal for an alliance with the Whites against the Reds led the Makhnovists to plot his downfall at a meeting planned for the 27th July.

This meeting had originally been called to discuss the current tasks of the insurgents in the Ukraine and

was attended by nearly 20,000 insurgents and local peasants. Hryhoriyiv spoke first, arguing that the most urgent task was to chase out the Bolsheviks and that they should ally themselves with any anti-Red forces available (a clear reference to the Whites under Denikin). The Makhnovist Chubenko spoke next, declaring that the *"struggle against the Bolsheviks could be revolutionary only if it were carried out in the name of the social revolution. An alliance with the worst enemies of the people -- with generals -- could only be a counter-revolutionary and criminal adventure."* Following him, Makhno *"demanded before the entire congress"* that Hryhoriyiv *"immediately answer for the appalling pogrom of Jews he had organised in Elisavetgrad in May, 1919, as well as other anti-Semitic actions."* [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 136]

Seeing that things were going badly, Hryhoriyiv went for his revolver, but was shot by a Makhnovist. Makhno finished him off. Makhnovist guards disarmed the leading Hryhoriyivists. Then Makhno, Chubenko and others justified the killing before the mass meeting, which approved the act passing a resolution that stated that Hryhoriyiv's death was *"an historical and necessary fact, for his policy, acts and aims were counter-revolutionary and mainly directed to helping Denikin and other counter-revolutionaries, as is proved by his Jewish pogroms."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 42] The troops under Hryhoriyiv became part of the general Insurrectionary Army.

At the end of July, Makhno recalled the troops he had earlier left in the Red Army and by mid-August the forces met up, becoming an army of some 15,000. At Mykolaiv, the Red Army units were defecting to Makhno in large numbers due in part to the feeling that the Red Army were abandoning the defence of the Ukraine. This was the start of Denikin's massive push north and Petliura's push east. By the end of August, Makhno felt strong enough to go on the offensive against the Whites. Superior White forces pushed the Makhnovists further and further west, away from their home region. *"Denikin,"* in Voline's words, *"not only made war on the army as such, but also on the whole peasant population. In addition to the usual persecutions and beatings, the villages he occupied were burnt and wrecked. The greater part of the peasants' dwellings were looted and wrecked. Hundreds of peasants were shot. The women maltreated, and nearly all the Jewish women . . . were raped."* This repression *"obliged the inhabitants of the villages threatened by the approach of the Denikinists to abandon their hearths and flee. Thus the Makhnovist army was joined and followed in their retreat by thousands of peasant families in flight from their homes with their livestock and belongings. It was a veritable migration. An enormous mass of men, women and children trailed after the army in its slow retreat towards the west, a retreat which gradually extended over hundreds of kilometres."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 607]

Meeting the Nationalists in mid-September, it was agreed on both sides that fighting would only aid the Whites and so the Makhnovists entered a non-aggression pact with Petliura. This enabled them to offload over 1,000 wounded. The Makhnovists continued their propaganda campaign against the Nationalists, however. By the 24th of September, intelligence reports suggested that White forces had appeared to the west of their current position (i.e. where the Nationalists were). The Makhnovists concluded that the only way this could have happened was if the Nationalists had allowed the Whites to cross their territory (the Nationalists disputed this, pointing to the fighting that had started two days before between them and the Whites).

This meant that the Makhnovists were forced to fight the numerically superior Whites. After two days of desperate fighting, the Whites were routed and two regiments were destroyed at the battle of Peregonovka village. Makhno's forces then conducted an incredibly rapid advance in three directions helped by their mobile cart-transported infantry, in three days smashing three reserve regiments and at the greatest point advancing 235 miles east. On the 6th October a drive to the south started which took key White ports and captured a huge quantity of equipment including 600 trucks of British-supplied ammunition and an aeroplane. This was disastrous for Denikin whose forces had reached the northernmost point on their advance on Moscow, for these ports were key for his supply routes. The advance continued, cutting the railway route and so stopping all shells reaching Denikin's Moscow front.

Denikin was forced to send some of his best troops from the Moscow front to drive back the Makhnovists and British boats were sent to towns on the coast where Makhno might retreat through. The key city of Katerinoslav was taken with the aid of a workers' uprising on November 9th and held for a month before the advancing Whites and a typhoid epidemic which was to devastate the Makhnovista ranks by the end of the year forced them out of the city. In December, the Red Army advance made possible by Makhno's devastation of Denikin's supply lines continued.

Thus Voline:

*"It is necessary to emphasise here the historic fact that the honour of having annihilated the Denikinist counter-revolution in the autumn of 1919, belongs entirely to the Makhnovist Insurrectionary Army. If the insurgents had not won the decisive victory of Peregonovka, and had not continued to sap the bases in Denikin's rear, destroying his supply service for artillery, food and ammunition, the Whites would probably have entered Moscow in December 1919 at the latest."* [Op. Cit., p. 625]

In December the Red Army advance made possible by Makhno's devastation of Denikin's supply lines continued. By early January the Reds had split White forces into three and their troops had reached Katerynoslav. The attitude of the Bolsheviks to the Makhnovists had already been decided. On December 12th, 1919, Trotsky stated that when the two forces met, the Bolsheviks had "*an order . . . from which we must not retreat one single step.*" While we discuss this secret order in more depth in [section 13](#), we will note here that it gave partisans the option of becoming "*fully subordinate to [Bolshevik] command*" or "*be subjected to ruthless punishment.*" [How the Revolution Armed, vol. II., pp. 110-1 and p. 442] Another secret order to the 45th division issued on January 4th instructed them to "*annihilate Makhnovist bands*" and "*disarm the population.*" The 41st was sent "*into reserve*" to the Hulyai Pole region. This was "*five days before Makhno was outlawed, and shows that the Bolshevik command had a clear view of Makhno's future, even if the latter did not.*" [Malet, Op. Cit., p. 54]

Unaware of this, the Makhnovista put out propaganda leaflets directed at the Red Army rank and file, appealing to them as comrades. At Aleksandrovsk on December 5th talks occurred between a representative of the Makhnovists and the commander of the 45th division's 1st brigade. These broke down when Makhno was ordered to the Polish front, which the Makhnovists refused. On January 9th,

Yegorov, commander of the Red Army southern front, used this pretext to outlaw Makhno. This outlawing was engineered deliberately by the Bolsheviks:

*"The author of the order realised at that time there was no real war between the Poles and the Bolsheviks at that time and he also knew that Makhno would not abandon his region . . . Uborevich [the author] explained that 'an appropriate reaction by Makhno to this order would give us the chance to have accurate grounds for our next steps' . . . [He] concluded: 'The order is a certain political manoeuvre and, at the very least, we expect positive results from Makhno's realisation of this.'"* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 210]

In addition, war with Poland did not break out until the end of April, over three months later.

Needless to say, the Makhnovists **did** realise the political motivations behind the order. As Arshinov notes, *"[s]ending the insurrectionary army to the Polish front meant removing from the Ukraine the main nerve centre of the revolutionary insurrection. This was precisely what the Bolsheviks wanted: they would then be absolute masters of the rebellious region, and the Makhnovists were perfectly aware of this."* Moreover, the Makhnovists considered the move *"physically impossible"* as *"half the men, the entire staff and the commander himself were in hospital with typhus."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 163]

This was the signal for nine months of bitter fighting between the Red Army and the Makhnovists. Military events in this period are confused, with the Red Army claiming victory again and again, only for the Makhnovists to appear somewhere else. Hulyai Pole changed hands on a couple of occasions. The Bolsheviks did not use local troops in this campaign, due to fear of fraternisation. In addition, they used *"new tactics,"* and *"attacked not only Makhno's partisans, but also the villages and towns in which the population was sympathetic toward Makhno. They shot ordinary soldiers as well as their commanders, destroying their houses, confiscating their properties and persecuting their families. Moreover the Bolsheviks conducted mass arrests of innocent peasants who were suspected of collaborating in some way with the partisans. It is impossible to determine the casualties involved."* They also set up *"Committees of the Poor"* as part of the Bolshevik administrative apparatus, which acted as *"informers helping the Bolshevik secret police in its persecution of the partisans, their families and supporters, even to the extent of hunting down and executing wounded partisans."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 212-3]

In addition to this suffering, the Bolshevik decision to attack Makhno rather than push into the Crimea was also to prolong the civil war by nine more months. The Whites re-organised themselves under General Wrangel, who began a limited offensive in June. Indeed, the Bolshevik *"policy of terror and exploitation turned almost all segments of Ukrainian society against the Bolsheviks, substantially strengthened the Makhno movement, and consequently facilitated the advance of the reorganised anti-Bolshevik force of General Wrangel from the Crimea into South Ukraine, the Makhno region."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 214]

It was widely believed on the White side that Makhno was ready to co-operate with them and, desperate



for men, Wrangel decided to appeal to the Makhnovists for an alliance. Their response was simple and direct, they decided to immediately execute his delegate and publish both his letter and a response in the Makhnovist paper "*The Road to Freedom.*" [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 60] Of course, this did not stop the Bolsheviks later claiming such an alliance existed!

Ironically enough, at a general assembly of insurgents, it was decided that "*the destruction of Wrangel*" would "*eliminate a threat to the revolution*" and so free "*all of Russia*" from "*the counter-revolutionary barrage.*" The mass of workers and peasants "*urgently needed an end to all those wars*" and so they proposed "*to the Communists that hostilities between them and the Makhnovists be suspended in order that they might wipe out Wrangel. In July and August, 1920, telegrams to this effect were sent to Moscow and Kharkov.*" There was no reply and the Bolsheviks "*continued their war against the Makhnovists, and they also continued their previous campaign of lies and calumnies against them.*" [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 176]

In July and August the Makhnovists went on the offensive, raiding the Bolsheviks in three provinces and attacking the Red Army infrastructure. Wrangel began another offensive in September, driving the Red Army back again and again and threatening the Makhnovist area. Faced with Wrangel's success, the Bolsheviks started to rethink their position on Makhno, although on the 24th of September the Bolshevik commander-in-chief Kamenev was still declaring the need for "*the final liquidation of the Makhno band.*" [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 62] A few days later, the Bolsheviks changed their mind and negotiations began.

So, by October 1920, the success of the Wrangel offensive was again forcing the Bolsheviks and Makhnovists to put aside their differences and take on the common enemy. A deal was reached and on October 2nd, Frunze, the new Red Army commander of the Southern Front, ordered a cessation of hostilities against the Makhnovists. A statement from the Soviet of the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovists) explained the treaty as necessitated by the White offensive but also representing a victory over the "*high-handed communists and commissars*" in forcing them to recognise the "*free insurrection.*" [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 64]

The agreement was signed between October 10th and 15th. It consisted of two parts, a Political and a Military agreement (see [section 13](#) for full details). The Political agreement simply gave the Makhnovists and anarchists the rights they should have had according to the Soviet Constitution. The Military agreement resulted in the Makhnovists becoming part of the Red Army, keeping their established internal structure and, significantly, stopped them from accepting into their ranks any Red Army detachments or deserters therefrom. According to Bolshevik sources, "*there was never the slightest intention on the Bolshevik side of keeping to the agreement once its military value had passed.*" [David Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 296]

Even before the agreement came into effect, the Makhnovists were fighting alongside the Bolsheviks and between October 4 and 17, Hulyai Pole was retaken by the Aleksandrovska group, which included 10,000 Makhnovists. On October 22, Aleksandrovska was taken with 4,000 white prisoners and from

then to early November the Makhnovists cut through Wrangel's rear, hoping to cut off his retreat by seizing the Crimean passes. The Whites fought a skilful rearguard which together with the new White fortifications on the peninsula held up the advance. But by the 11th, his hold in the Crimea gone, Wrangel had no choice but to order a general retreat to the ports and an evacuation. Even the Bolsheviks had to acknowledge that the *"Makhnovist units fulfilled their military tasks with no less heroism than the Red Army units."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 69]

On hearing this success on 16th November, the reaction of the Makhnovista still at Hulyai Pole was cynical but realistic: *"It's the end of the agreement. I'll bet you anything that the Bolsheviks will be on us within the week."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 70] They were not wrong. Already Frunze, the Red Army commander, had ordered two entire cavalry armies to concentrate near Hulyai Pole at the same time as he ordered the Makhnovist forces to the Caucasus Front! By 24th November Frunze was preparing for the treachery to come, in Order 00149 (which was not sent to the Makhnovist units) saying if they had not departed to the Caucasus front by the 26th *"the Red regiments of the front, who have now finished with Wrangel, will start speaking a different language to these Makhnovist youths."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 71]

Of course this treachery went right to the top, just before the 26th *"deadline"* (which Makhno, not having seen the orders, was unaware of), Lenin urged Rakovski, head of the Ukrainian government to *"[k]eep a close watch on all anarchists and prepare documents of a criminal nature as soon as possible, on the basis of which charges can be preferred against them."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 71] Indeed, it later appeared the treachery had been prepared from at least 14th or 16th November, as prisoners captured later stated they had received undated anti-Makhnovist proclamations on that date. [Malet, **Ibid.**]

At 3am on the 26th the attacks on the Makhnovists started. Alongside this one of the Makhnovist commanders was lured to a meeting by the Bolsheviks, seized and shot. Some Makhnovist forces managed to break through the encircling Bolsheviks but only after taking heavy losses -- of the 2,000-4,000 cavalry at Simferopol, only 250 escaped. By the 1st December, Rakovski reported the imminent demise of the Makhnovists to the Kharkiv soviet only to have to eat his words when Makhno routed the 42nd division on the 6th, retaking Hulyai Pole and 6,000 prisoners, of whom 2,000 joined his forces. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 72] Simultaneously with the attack on the Makhnovists, the Bolsheviks rounded up all known anarchists in the Ukraine (many of whom were in Kharkiv waiting for a legally organised **Nabat** conference to begin).

In the resulting struggle between the two forces, as Palij notes, the *"support of the population was a significant advantage to Makhno, for they supplied the partisans with needed material, including horses and food, while the Red troops operated among a foreign and hostile people."* The Bolsheviks found that the peasants not only refused to supply them with goods, they also refused to answer their questions or, at best, gave answers which were vague and confusing. *"In contrast to the Bolsheviks, Makhno partisans received detailed, accurate information from the population at all times."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 236-7]

Frunze brought in extra forces and ordered both the *"annihilation of the Makhnovists"* and total disarming of the region. Plagued by desertions, it was also ordered that all Makhnovist prisoners were to be shot, to discourage the local population and Red Army soldiers thinking of joining them. There is also evidence of unrest in the Azov fleet, with acts of sabotage being carried out by sailors to prevent their weapons being used against the Makhnovists. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 73] While it was common practice for the Bolsheviks to shoot all Makhnovist prisoners, the *"existence of roundup detachments at the end of 1920, whose task was to re-collect prisoners freed by the Makhnovists"* shows that the Makhnovists did not reciprocate in kind. [Malet **Op. Cit.**, p. 129]

At the end of 1920, the Makhnovists had ten to fifteen thousand troops and the *"growing strength of the Makhno army and its successes caused serious concern in the Bolshevik regime, so it was decided to increase the number of troops opposing Makhno."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 237] All the pressure exerted by the Bolsheviks was paying off. Although Makhno repeatedly broke through numerous mass encirclements and picked up deserters from the Red Army, his forces were being eroded by the far greater numbers employed against them. In addition, *"the Red command worked out new plans to fight Makhno by stationing whole regiments, primarily cavalry, in the occupied villages, to terrorise the peasants and prevent them from supporting Makhno. . . Also the Cheka punitive units were constantly trailing the partisans, executing Makhno's sympathisers and the partisans' families."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 238] In spite of the difficult conditions, Makhno was still able to attract some Red Army soldiers and even whole units to his side. For example, *"when the partisans were fighting Budenny's Fourth Cavalry Division, their First Brigade, commanded by Maslak, joined Makhno."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 239]

Makhno was forced to leave his home areas of operations and flee east, then west again. By early January his forces had fought 24 battles in 24 days. This pattern continued throughout March and April into May. In June, the Bolsheviks changed their strategy to one of predicting where Makhno was heading and garrisoning troops in that area. In one battle on 15 June, Frunze himself was almost captured. Despite this, the insurgents were very weak and their peasant base was exhausted by years of war and civil war. In the most sympathetic areas, Red Army troops were garrisoned on the peasants. Thus Palij:

*"[T]hrough combat losses, hardship, and sickness, the number of Makhno partisans was diminishing and they were cut off from their main sources of recruits and supplies. The Ukrainian peasants were tried of the endless terror caused by successive occupation of village after village by the Red troops and the Cheka. The continuous fighting and requisitions were leaving the peasants with little food and horses for the partisans. They could not live in a state of permanent revolution. Moreover, there was extreme drought and consequently a bad harvest in Ukraine, especially in the region of the Makhno movement."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 240-1]

The state terrorism and the summer drought caused Makhno to give up the struggle in mid-August and instead fight his way to the Dniester with the last of his forces and cross into Romania on August 26. Some of his forces which stayed behind were still active for a short time. In November 1921 the Cheka seized 20 machine guns and 2,833 rifles in the new Zaporizhya province alone.

For more details of the history of the movement, Michael Malet's **Nestor Makhno in the Russian Revolution** is an excellent summary. Michael Palij's **The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno** is also worth consulting, as are the anarchist histories of Voline and Arshinov.

## 5 How were the Makhnovists organised?

Being influenced by anarchist ideas, the Makhnovists were organised along libertarian lines. This meant that in both civilian and military areas, self-management was practised. This section discusses the military organisation, while the next discusses the social aspect of the movement.

By practising self-management, the Makhnovists offered a completely different model of military organisation to that of both the Red Army and traditional military forces. While the army structure changed depending on its circumstances, the core ideas remained. These were as follows:

*"The Makhnovist insurrectionary army was organised according to three fundamental principles: voluntary enlistment, the electoral principle, and self-discipline.*

*"**Voluntary enlistment** meant that the army was composed only of revolutionary fighters who entered it of their own free will.*

*"**The electoral principle** meant that the commanders of all units of the army, including the staff, as well as all the men who held other positions in the army, were either elected or accepted by the insurgents of the unit in question or by the whole army.*

*"**Self-discipline** meant that all the rules of discipline were drawn up by commissions of insurgents, then approved by general assemblies of the various units; once approved, they were rigorously observed on the individual responsibility of each insurgent and each commander." [Op. Cit., p. 96]*

Voline paints a similar picture. He also notes that the electoral principle was sometimes violated and commanders appointed *"in urgent situations by the commander himself,"* although such people had to be *"accepted without reservation"* by *"the insurgents of the unit in question or by the whole army."* [Op. Cit., p. 584]

Thus the Makhnovist army, bar some deviation provoked by circumstances, was a fundamentally democratic organisation. The guerrillas elected the officers of their detachments, and, at mass assemblies and congresses, decided policy and discipline for the army. In the words of historian Michael Palij:

*"As the Makhno army gradually grew, it assumed a more regular army organisation. Each tactical unit was composed of three subordinate units: a division consisted of three*

*brigades; a brigade, of three regiments; a regiment, of three battalions. Theoretically commanders were elected; in practice, however, the top commanders were usually carefully selected by Makhno from among his close friends. As a rule, they were all equal and if several units fought together the top commanders commanded jointly. The army was nominally headed by a Revolutionary Military Council of about ten to twenty members . . . Like the commanders, the council members were elected, but some were appointed by Makhno . . . There also was an elected cultural section in the army. Its aim was to conduct political and ideological propaganda among the partisans and peasants." [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 108-9]*

The Revolutionary Military Council was elected and directly accountable to the regional workers, peasants and insurgent congresses. It was designed to co-ordinate the local soviets and execute the decisions of the regional congresses.

Hence Voline:

*"This council embraced the whole free region. It was supposed to carry out all the economic, political, social and military decisions made at the congress. It was thus, in a certain sense, the supreme executive of the whole movement. **But it was not at all an authoritarian organ.** Only strictly executive functions were assigned to it. It confined itself to carrying out the instructions and decisions of the congress. At any moment, it could be dissolved by the congress and cease to exist." [Op. Cit., p. 577]*

As such, when Palij notes that this council "*had no decisive voice in the army's actions,*" he misses the point of the council. [Palij, **Ibid.**] It did not determine the military affairs of the army, but rather the interaction of the military and civilians and made sure that the decisions of congresses were executed. Thus the whole army was nominally under the control of the regional congresses of workers, peasants and insurgents. At these congresses, delegates of the toiling people decided upon the policy to be pursued by the Makhnovist Army. The Revolutionary Military Soviet existed to oversee that decisions were implemented, not to determine the military activities of the troops.

It should also be noted that women not only supported the Makhnovists, they also "*fought alongside the men.*" [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 145] However, "*the participation of women in the movement (by all accounts, quite substantial)*" needs "*further investigation.*" [Serge Cipko, "*Nestor Makhno: A Mini-Historiography of the Anarchist Revolution in Ukraine, 1917-1921,*" pp. 57-75, **The Raven**, no. 13, p. 75]

At its height, the army was made up of infantry, cavalry, artillery, machine-gun units, and special branches, including an intelligence service. As the success of partisan warfare depends upon mobility, the army gradually mounted its infantry in light carts (called "*tachanka*") during 1918-19. As Michael Malet notes, this was a "*novel tactic*" and Makhno "*could be described as the inventor of the motorised division before the car came into general use.*" [Op. Cit., p. 85] The tachanka was used to transport as

many troops as possible, giving the Makhnovists mobile infantry which could keep up with the cavalry. In addition, a machine-gun was sometimes mounted in the rear (in autumn 1919, the 1st machine-gun regiment consisted of 120 guns, all mounted on tachanki).

For the most part the Makhnovist army was a volunteer army, unlike all others operating in the Russian Civil War. However, at times of crisis attempts were made to mobilise troops. For example, the Second regional congress agreed that a "*general voluntary and equalitarian mobilisation*" should take place. This meant that this appeal, "*sanctioned by the moral authority of the congress, emphasised the need for fresh troops in the insurrectionary army, no-one was compelled to enlist.*" [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 577] The Congress itself passed a resolution after a long and passionate debate that stated it "*rejected 'compulsory' mobilisation, opting for an 'obligatory' one; that is, each peasant who is able to carry arms, should recognise his obligation to enlist in the ranks of the partisans and to defend the interests of the entire toiling people of Ukraine.*" [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 155] There were far more volunteers than arms, the opposite of what occurred to both the Reds and Whites during the Civil War. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 106]

The third Congress decided to conduct a voluntary mobilisation all those born between 1889 and 1898. This congress told them to assemble at certain points, organise themselves and elect their officers. Another mobilisation decided at the Aleksandrovsk congress never took place. How far the Makhnovists were forced to conscript troops is still a matter of debate. Paul Avrich, for example, states that "*voluntary mobilisation*" in reality "*meant outright conscription, as all able-bodied men were required to serve.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 114] On the other side, surviving leaflets from 1920 "*are in the nature of appeals to join up, not instructions.*" [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 105] Trotsky, ironically, noted that "*Makhno does not have general mobilisations, and indeed these would be impossible, as he lacks the necessary apparatus.*" [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 106] It is probably right to say that the Congresses desired that every able-bodied man join the Makhnovist army, but they simply did not have the means to enforce that desire and that the Makhnovists tried their best to avoid conscription by appealing to the peasants' revolutionary conscience, with some success.

As well as the military organisation, there was also an explicitly anarchist federation operating in the Ukraine at the same time. The first conference to organise a "*Confederation of Anarchist Organisations of the Ukraine*" was held between November 12th to 16th, 1918. The new federation was named "*Nabat*" (Alarm) and had a six-person Secretariat. Kharkiv was chosen as its headquarters, while it had groups in other major Ukrainian cities (including Kyiv, Odessa and Katerynoslav). The final organisation of the Nabat was accomplished at a conference held in April 2-7, 1919. The federation aimed to form a "*united anarchism*" and guaranteed a substantial degree of autonomy for every participating group and individual. A number of newspapers appeared in a Ukrainian towns and cities (mostly entitled **Nabat**), as did leaflets and pamphlets. There was a main weekly paper (called **Nabat**) which was concerned largely with anarchist theory. This completed the Makhnovist papers **Road to Freedom** (which was often daily, sometimes weekly and dealt with libertarian ideas, everyday problems and information on partisan activities) and **The Makhnovist Voice** (which dealt primarily with the interests, problems, and tasks of the Makhnovist movement and its army). The Nabat organisation was also published a pamphlet dealing with the Makhnovist movement's problems, the economic

organisation of the region, the free soviets, the social basis of the society that was to be built, and the problem of defence.

Unsurprisingly, the Nabat federation and the Makhnovists worked together closely, with Nabat members worked in the army (particularly its cultural section). Some of its members were also elected to the Makhnovist Revolutionary Military Soviet. It should be noted that the Nabat federation gained a number of experienced anarchists from Soviet Russia, who fled to the Ukraine to escape Bolshevik repression. The Nabat shared the fortunes of the Makhno movement. It carried on its work freely as long as the region was controlled by the Makhnovist Army, but when Bolshevik or White forces prevailed, the anarchists were forced underground. The movement was finally crushed in November 1920, when the Bolsheviks betrayed the Makhnovists.

As can be seen, the Makhnovists implemented to a large degree the anarchist idea of self-managed, horizontally federated associations (when possible, of course). Both the two major organisational layers to the Makhnovist structure (the army and the congresses) were federated horizontally and the "top" structure was essentially a mass peasant, worker and guerrilla decision-making coalition. In other words, the masses took decisions at the "top" level that the Revolutionary Military Soviet and the Makhnovist army were bound to follow. The army was answerable to the local Soviets and to the congresses of soviets and, as we discuss in [section 7](#), the Makhnovists called working-people and insurgent congresses whenever they could.

The Makhnovist movement was, fundamentally, a working class movement. It was *"one of the very few revolutionary movements to be led and controlled throughout by members of 'the toiling masses.'" [David Footman, Op. Cit., p. 245]* It applied its principles of working class autonomy and self-organisation as far as it could. Unlike the Red Army, it was predominantly organised from the bottom up, rejecting the use of Tsarist officers, appointed commanders, and other "top-down" ways of the Red Army (see [section 14](#) for further discussion of the differences between the two forces).

The Makhnovist army was not by any means a perfect model of anarchist military organisation. However, compared to the Red Army, its violations of principle are small and hardly detract from their accomplishment of applying anarchist ideas in often extremely difficult circumstances.

## 6 Did the Makhnovists have a constructive social programme?

Yes, they did. The Makhnovists spent a great deal of energy and effort in developing, propagating and explaining their ideas on how a free society should be created and run. As Michael Malet noted, the *"leading Makhnovists had definite ideas about the ideal form of social organisation."* [**Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War**, p. 107] Moreover, as we discuss in the [next section](#), they also successfully applied these ideas when and where they could.

So what was their social programme? Being anarchists, it comprised two parts, namely political and

economic aspects. The Makhnovists aimed for a true social revolution in which the working classes (both urban and rural) could actively manage their own affairs and society. As such, their social programme reflected the fact that oppression has its roots in both political and economic power and so aimed at eliminating both the state and private property. As the core of their social ideas was the simple principle of working-class autonomy, the idea that the liberation of working-class people must be the task of the working-class people themselves. This vision is at the heart of anarchism and was expressed most elegantly by Makhno:

*"Conquer or die -- such is the dilemma that faces the Ukrainian peasants and workers at this historic moment . . . But we will not conquer in order to repeat the errors of the past years, the error of putting our fate into the hands of new masters; we will conquer in order to take our destinies into our own hands, to conduct our lives according to our own will and our own conception of the truth."* [quoted by Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 58]

As such, the Makhnovists were extremely hostile to the idea of state power, recognising it simply as a means by which the majority are ruled by the few. Equally, they were opposed to wage slavery (to private or state bosses), recognising that as long as the workers do not manage their own work, they can never be free. As they put it, their goals could only be achieved by an *"implacable revolution and consistent struggle against all lies, arbitrariness and coercion, wherever they come from, a struggle to the death, a struggle for free speech, for the righteous cause, a struggle with weapons in hand. Only through the abolition of all rulers, through the destruction of the whole foundation of their lies, in state affairs as well as in political and economic affairs. And only through the social revolution can the genuine Worker-Peasant soviet system be realised and can we arrive at SOCIALISM."* [contained in Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 273] They, like other anarchists and the Kronstadt rebels, termed this programme of working class self-management the *"third revolution."*

We will discuss the political aspect of the Makhnovist programme first, then its economic one. However, the Makhnovists considered (correctly) that both aspects could not be separated. As they put it: *"We will not lay down our arms until we have wiped out once and for all every political and economic oppression and until genuine equality and brotherhood is established in the land."* [contained in Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 281] We split the aspects simply to aid the presentation of their ideas.

At the core of their ideas was what they termed the *"Free Soviet System"* (or *"free soviets"* for short). It was this system which would allow the working class to create and run a new society. As they put it:

*"[The] Makhnovists realise that the working people are no longer a flock of sheep to be ordered about by anyone. We consider the working people capable of building, on their own and without parties, commissars or generals, their own FREE SOVIET SYSTEM, in which those who are elected to the Soviet will not, as now [under the Bolsheviks], command and order us, but on the contrary, will be only the executors of the decisions made in our own workers' gatherings and conferences."* [contained in Peter Arshinov, **Op.**



**Cit.**, pp. 280-1]

Thus the key idea advocated by the leading Makhnovista for social organisation and decision-making was the *"free toilers' soviet of peasant and worker organisations."* This meant they were to be independent of all central authority and composed of those who worked, and not political parties. They were to federate on a local, then regional and then national level, and power within the federation was to be horizontal and not vertical. [Michael Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 107] Such a system was in opposition to the Bolshevik practice of Soviets defined and dominated by political parties with a vertical decision-making structure that reached its highest point in the Bolshevik Central Committee.

Thus, for the Makhnovists, the soviet system would be a "bottom-up" system, one designed not to empower a few party leaders at the centre but rather a means by which working people could manage their own affairs. As he put it, the *"soviet system is not the power of the social-democratic Communist-Bolsheviks who now call themselves a soviet power; rather it is the supreme form of non-authoritarian anti-state socialism, which expresses itself in the organisation of a free, happy and independent system of social life for the working people."* This would be based on the *"principles of solidarity, friendship and equality."* This meant that in the Makhnovist system of free soviets, the *"working people themselves must freely choose their own soviets, which will carry out the will and desires of the working people themselves, that is to say, ADMINISTRATIVE, not ruling soviets."* [contained in Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 272-3]

As David Footman summarises, Makhno's *"ultimate aims were simple. All instruments of government were to be destroyed. All political parties were to be opposed, as all of them were working for some or other form of new government in which the party members would assume the role of a ruling class. All social and economic affairs were to be settled in friendly discussion between freely elected representatives of the toiling masses."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 247]

Hence the Makhnovist social organisation was a federation of self-managed workers' and peasants' councils (soviets), which would *"be only the executors of the decisions made in our workers' gatherings and conferences."* [contained in Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 281] In other words, an anarchist system based on mass assemblies and decision-making from the bottom up.

Economically, as is to be expected, the Makhnovists opposed private property, capitalism and wage-slavery. Their economic ideas were summarised in a Makhnovist declaration as follows:

*"The lands of the service gentry, of the monasteries, of the princes and other enemies of the toiling masses, with all their livestock and goods, are passed on to the use of those peasants who support themselves solely through their own labour. This transfer will be carried out in an orderly fashion determined in common at peasant assemblies, which must remember in this matter not only each of their own personal interests, but also bear in mind the common interest of all the oppressed, working peasantry."*

*"Factories, workshops, mines and other tools and means of production become the property of the working class as a whole, which will run all enterprises themselves, through their trade unions, getting production under way and striving to tie together all industry in the country in a single, unitary organisation."* [contained in Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 266]

They continually stressed that the *"land, the factories, the workshops, the mines, the railroads and the other wealth of the people must belong to the working people themselves, to those who work in them, that is to say, they must be socialised."* This meant a system of use-rights, as *"the land, the mines, the factories, the workshops, the railroads, and so on, will belong neither to individuals nor to the government, but solely to those who work with them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 273 and p. 281]

In industry, such a system clearly implied a system of worker's self-management within a system of federated factory committees or union branches. On the land, it meant the end of landlordism, with peasants being entitled to as much land and equipment as they could cultivate without the use of hired labour. As a Makhnovist congress in 1919 resolved:

*"The land question should be decided on a Ukraine-wide scale at an all-Ukrainian congress of peasants on the following basis: in the interests of socialism and the struggle against the bourgeoisie, all land should be transferred to the hands of the toiling peasants. According to the principle that 'the land belongs to nobody' and can be used only by those who care about it, who cultivate it, the land should be transferred to the toiling peasantry of Ukraine for their use without pay according to the norm of equal distribution."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 155]

In addition to advocating the abolition of private property in land and the end of wage labour by distributing land to those who worked it, the Makhnovists also supported the forming of *"free"* or *"working"* communes. Like their policy of land distribution, it also aimed to benefit the poorer peasants and rural wage labourers. The *"free commune"* was a voluntary association of rural workers who took over an expropriated estate and managed the land in common. The commune was managed by a general meeting of all its members and based on the liberty, equality and solidarity of its members.

Clearly, in terms of their economic policies, the Makhnovists proposed a clear and viable alternative to both rural and urban capitalism, namely workers' self-management. Industry and land would be socialised, with the actual management of production resting in the hands of the workers themselves and co-ordinated by federated workers' organisations. On the land, they proposed the creation of voluntary communes which would enable the benefits of co-operative labour to be applied. Like their political ideas, their economic ideas were designed to ensure the freedom of working people and the end of hierarchy in all aspects of society.

In summary, the Makhnovist had a constructive social ideas which aimed to ensure the total economic and political emancipation of the working people. Their vision of a free society was based on a

federation of free, self-managed soviets, the socialisation of the means of life and workers' self-management of production by a federation of labour unions or factory committees. As the black flags they carried into battle read, "*liberty or death*" and "*the land to the peasants, the factories to the workers.*"

## 7 Did they apply their ideas in practice?

Yes, the Makhnovists consistently applied their political and social ideas when they had the opportunity to do so. Unlike the Bolsheviks, who quickly turned away from their stated aims of soviet democracy and workers' control in favour of dictatorship by the Bolshevik party, the Makhnovists did all in their power to encourage, create and defend working-class freedom and self-management (see [section 14](#) for further discussion). In the words of historian Christopher Reed:

*"there can be no question that the anarchists did everything they could to free the peasants and workers and give them the opportunity to develop their own forms of collective control over land and factories . . . [T]he Ukrainian anarchists fought under the slogan of land to the peasants, factories to the workers and power to the soviets. Wherever they had influence they supported the setting up of communes and soviets. They introduced safeguards intended to protect direct self-government from organised interference . . . They conducted relentless class war against landlords, officers, factory owners and the commercial classes could expect short shrift from Makhno and his men, especially if they had taken up arms against the people or, like the Whites . . ., had been responsible for looting, pogroms and vicious reprisals against unarmed peasants on a colossal scale."* [From **Tsar to Soviets**, p. 263]

As we discussed in the [last section](#), the core ideas which inspired the Makhnovists were working-class self-determination and self-management. They aimed at the creation of a "*free soviet system*" and the end of capitalism by rural and industrial self-management. It is to the credit of the Makhnovists that they applied these ideas in practice rather than talking about high principles and doing the exact opposite.

In practice, of course, the war left little room for much construction work. As Voline pointed out, one of the key disadvantages of the movement was the "*almost continual necessity of fighting and defending itself against all kinds of enemies, without being able to concentrate on peaceful and truly positive works.*" [The **Unknown Revolution**, p. 571] However, in the disruption of the Civil War the Makhnovists applied their ideas when and where they could.

Within the army, as we discussed in [section 5](#), the insurgent troops elected their own commanders and had regular mass assemblies to discuss policy and the agreed norms of conduct within it. In civilian matters, the Makhnovists **from the start** encouraged working-class self-organisation and self-government. By late 1917, in the area around Hulyai Pole "*the toiling masses proceeded . . . to consolidate their revolution. The little factories functioned . . . under the control of the workers. The estates were split up . . . among the peasants . . . a certain number of agricultural communes were*

*formed.*" [David Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 248]

The aim of the Makhnovists was to *"transfer all the lands owned by the gentry, monasteries, and the state into the hands of peasants or to organise, if they wished, peasant communes."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 70] This policy was introduced from the start, and by the autumn of 1917, all land, equipment and livestock around Hulyai Pole had been expropriated from the gentry and kulaks and placed in the hands of working peasants. Land reform had been achieved by the direct action of the peasantry.

However, *"many of the peasants understood that the task was not finished, that it was not enough to appropriate a plot of land and be content with it. From the hardships of their lives they learned that enemies were watching from all sides, and that they must stick together. In several places there were attempts to organise social life communally."* [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 86]

In line with social anarchist theory, the Makhnovists also tried to introduce collective forms of farming. These experiments in collective working and living were called *"free communes."* Despite the difficult military situation communes were established, principally near Hulyai Pole, in the autumn of 1917. This activity was resumed in February to March of 1918. They re-appeared in early 1919, once the threat of counter-revolution had been (temporarily) defeated.

There were four of these communes within five miles of Hulyai Pole itself and many more further afield. According to Makhno, these agricultural communes *"were in most cases organised by peasants, though sometimes their composition was a mixture of peasants and workmen [sic!]. Their organisation was based on equality and solidarity of the members. All members of these communes -- both men and women -- applied themselves willingly to their tasks, whether in the field or the household."* Unlike many communes, people were given the personal space they desired, so *"any members of the commune who wanted to cook separately for themselves and their children, or to take food from the communal kitchens and eat it in their own quarters, met with no objection from the other members."* The management of each commune *"was conducted by a general meeting of all its members."* In addition, the communes decided to introducing anarchist schooling based on the ideas of Francisco Ferrer (see [section J.5.13](#) for details). Makhno himself worked on one for two days a week for a period. [Makhno, quoted by Paul Avrich, **Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, pp. 131]

They were set up on the former estates of landlords, and consisted of around 10 families or 100 to 300 people and although each had peasant anarchist members not all the members were anarchists. Makhno worked on Commune No. 1, which was on the estate of former landlord Klassen. When re-founded in 1919 this commune was named after Rosa Luxemburg, the Marxist revolutionary who had recently been murdered in the German revolution. It was a success, for by the spring sowing it had grown from nine families to 285 members working 340 acres of land. The communes represented a way that poor and middle peasants could pool resources to work estates that they could not have worked otherwise and, as Michael Malet points out, *"they were organised from the bottom up, not the top down."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 121]

However, as Makhno himself acknowledged, while the *"majority of the toiling population saw in the organisation of rural communes the healthy germ of a new social life"* which could provide a *"model of a free and communal form of life,"* the *"mass of people did not go over to it."* They cited as their reasons *"the advance of the German and Austrian armies, their own lack of organisation, and their inability to defend this order against the new 'revolutionary' [Bolshevik] and counter-revolutionary authorities. For this reason the toiling population of the district limited their revolutionary activity to supporting in every way those bold springs."* [Makhno, quoted by Avrigh, **Op. Cit.**, p. 132] Given that the communes were finally destroyed by White and Red forces in June 1919, their caution was justified. After this, peace did not return long enough for the experiment to be restarted.

As Michael Malet argues:

*"Very few peasant movements in history have been able to show in practice the sort of society and type of landholding they would like to see. The Makhnovist movement is proof that peasant revolutionaries can put forward positive, practical ideas."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 121]

The Makhnovist experiments, it should be noted, have strong similarities to the rural revolution during the Spanish Revolution of 1936 (see sections [I.8.5](#) and [I.8.6](#) for more details).

As well as implementing their economic ideas on workers' self-management, land reform and free communes, the Makhnovists also organised regional congresses as well as local soviets. Most of the activity happened in and around Hulyai Pole, the focal point of the movement. This was in accord with their vision of a *"free soviet system."* Needless to say, the congresses could only be called during periods of relative calm (i.e. the Makhnovist home area was not occupied by hostile forces) and so congresses of insurgents, peasants and workers were called in early 1919 and another in October of that year. The actual dates of the regional congresses were:

23 January 1919 at Velyka Mykhailivka

12 February 1919 at Hulyai Pole

10 April 1919 at Hulyai Pole

20 October 1919 at Aleksandrovsk

A congress for the fifteenth of June 1919 never met because Trotsky unilaterally banned it, under pain of death to anyone even **discussing** it, never mind calling for it or attending as a delegate. Unlike the third congress, which ignored a similar ban by Dybenko, the fourth congress could not go ahead due to the treacherous attack by the Red Army that preceded it. Four Makhnovist commanders were executed by the Red Army for advertising this congress. Another congress planned for Aleksandrovsk in November 1920 was also prevented by Bolshevik betrayal, namely the attack after Wrangel had been defeated. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 108] See [section 13](#) for further details.

The reason for these regional congresses was simple, to co-ordinate the revolution. *"It was indispensable,"* Arshinov notes, *"to establish institutions which unified first a district composed of various villages, and then the districts and departments which composed the liberated region. It was indispensable to find general solutions for problems common to the entire region. It was indispensable to create organs suitable for these tasks. And the peasants did not fail to create them. These organs were the regional congresses of peasants and workers."* [Op. Cit., pp. 87-8] These congresses *"were composed of delegates of peasants, workers and of the insurgent army, and were intended to clarify and record the decisions of the toiling masses and to be regarded as the supreme authority for the liberated area."* [David Footman, Op. Cit., p. 266]

The first congress, which was the smallest, discussed the strengthening of the front, the adoption of a common nomenclature for popular organisations (soviets and the like) and to send a delegation to convince the draftees in the Nationalist forces to return home. It was also decided to organise a second congress. The second congress was larger, having 245 delegates from 350 districts. This congress *"was strongly anti-Bolshevik and favoured a democratic socio-political way of life."* [Palij, Op. Cit., p. 153] One delegate made the issue clear:

*"No party has a right to usurp governmental power into its own hands . . . We want life, all problems, to be decided locally, not by order from any authority above; and all peasants and workers should decide their own fate, while those elected should only carry out the toilers' wish."* [quoted by Palij, Op. Cit., p. 154]

A general resolution was passed, which acknowledged the fact that the Bolshevik party was *"demanding a monopoly of the Revolution."* It also stated:

*"With deep regret the Congress must also declare that apart from external enemies a perhaps even greater danger, arising from its internal shortcomings, threatens the Revolution of the Russian and Ukrainian peasants and workers. The Soviet Governments of Russia and of the Ukraine, by their orders and decrees, are making efforts to deprive local soviets of peasants and workers' deputies of their freedom and autonomy."* [quoted by Footman, Op. Cit., p. 267]

As noted in [section 5](#), the congress also decided to issue an *"obligatory"* mobilisation to gather troops for the Army. It also accepted a resolution on land reform, stating that the land *"belongs to nobody"* and could be used by anyone as long as they did not use wage labour (see [section 6](#) for the full resolution). The congress accepted a resolution against plunder, violence, and anti-Jewish pogroms, recognising it as an attempt by the Tsarist government to *"turn the attention of all toiling people away from the real reason for their poverty,"* namely the Tsarist regime's oppression. [quoted by Palij, Op. Cit., p. 155]

The second congress also elected the Revolutionary Military Soviet of Peasants, Workers and Insurgents, which had *"no powers to initiate policy but designed merely to implement the decisions of*

*the periodic congresses.*" [Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 267]

The third congress was the largest and most representative, with delegates from 72 volosts (in which two million people lived). This congress aimed to "*clarify the situation and to consider the prospects for the future of the region.*" It decided to conduct a voluntary mobilisation of men to fight the Whites and "*rejected, with the approval of both rich and poor peasants, the Bolshevik expropriations.*" [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 158] Toward the end of the congress, it received a telegram from the Bolshevik commander Dybenko calling it "*counter-revolutionary,*" its organisers "*outlaws*" and dissolving it by his order. The congress immediately voted an indignant resolution in reply. This corrected Dybenko's factual mistakes on who called it, informed him why it was called, gave him a history lesson on the Makhnovist region and asked him:

*"Can there exist laws made by a few people who call themselves revolutionaries which permit them to outlaw a whole people who are more revolutionary than they are themselves? . . .*

*"Is it permissible, is it admissible, that they should come to the country to establish laws of violence, to subjugate a people who have just overthrown all lawmakers and all laws?"*

*"Does there exist a law according to which a revolutionary has the right to apply the most severe penalties to a revolutionary mass, of which he calls himself the defender, simply because this mass has taken the good things which the revolution promised them, freedom and equality, without his permission?"*

*"Should the mass of revolutionary people perhaps be silent when such a revolutionary takes away the freedom which they have just conquered?"*

*"Do the laws of the revolution order the shooting of a delegate because he believes he ought to carry out the mandate given him by the revolutionary mass which elected him?"*

*"Whose interests should the revolutionary defend; those of the Party or those of the people who set the revolution in motion with their blood?"* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 103]

As we discuss in [section 13](#), Trotsky's order to ban the fourth congress indicates that such laws do exist, with the "*entire peasant and labouring population are declared guilty of high treason if they dare participate in their own free congress.*" [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 123]

The last congress was held between 20th and 26th of October in Aleksandrovsk. One delegate was to be elected per 3000 people and one delegate per military unit. This gave 270 mostly peasant delegates. Only 18 were workers, of which 6 were Mensheviks, who walked out after Makhno called them "*lapdogs of the bourgeoisie*" during the discussion on "*free socio-economic organisations*"! [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 109] The congress passed a number of resolutions, concentrating on the care of the wounded and

the poorest part of the population, a voluntary mobilisation, voluntary peasant contributions to feed the army and forced levies on the bourgeoisie.

According to Voline, the chairman, Makhnovist ideas were freely discussed:

*"The idea of free Soviets, genuinely functioning in the interests of the working population; the question of direct relationships between peasants and city workers, based on mutual exchange of the products of their labour; the launching of a libertarian and egalitarian social organisation in the cities and the country; all these question were seriously and closely studied by the delegates themselves, with the assistance and co-operation of qualified comrades."* [Op. Cit., p. 640]

He notes that the congress *"decided that the workers, without any authority, would organise their economic, political and administrative life for themselves, by means of their own abilities, and through their own direct organs, united on a federative basis."* [Op. Cit., p. 641]

It is significant to note that the congress also discussed the activities of the Makhnovists within the city itself. One delegate raised the issue of the activities of the Kontrrazvedka, the Makhnovist *"counter-intelligence"* section. As noted in [section 5](#), the Makhnovists, like all the armies in the Russian Civil War, had its intelligence service. It combined a number of functions, such as military reconnaissance, arrest and holding of prisoners, counter-insurgency (*"Originally it had a punitive function, but because of improper treatment of prisoners of war, it was deprived of its punitive function."* [Palij, Op. Cit., p. 300]). The delegate stated that this *"counter-espionage service"* was engaged in *"arbitrary acts and uncontrolled actions -- of which some are very serious, rather like the Bolshevik Cheka."* [quoted by Voline, Op. Cit., p. 643] Immediately a commission of several delegates was created to investigate the situation. Voline argues that *"[s]uch an initiative on the part of workers' delegates would not have been possible under the Bolshevik regime. It was by activity of this kind that the congress gave a preview of the way in which a society should function from the beginning if it is based on a desire for progress and self-realisation."* [Voline, **Ibid.**] Sadly, the commission could not complete its work due to the city being evacuated soon after the congress.

Another incident shows that under the Makhnovists the civilian population was in control. A delegate noted that Klein, the Makhnovist military commander in the city, had become publicly and riotously drunk after issuing proclamations against drunkenness. Klein was called before the congress, which accepted his apology and his request to be sent to the front, away from the boredom of desk work which had driven him to drink! This, according to Voline, showed that the workers and their congress were the masters and the army its servant. [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 645-7]

Outside of the congresses the work of local Soviets was to be co-ordinated through the Revolutionary Military Soviet (RMS), the first RMS was set up by the 2nd congress and consisted of one delegate for each of the 32 volsts the Makhnovista had liberated. The RMS was to be answerable to the congresses and limited to implementing their decisions but the difficult military situation meant this seldom



happened. When it did (the 3rd Congress) the Congress had no problems with its actions in the previous period. After the Aleksandrovsk congress, the RMS consisted of 22 delegates including three known Bolsheviks and four known Makhnovists, the Bolsheviks considered the remaining delegates "*anarchists or anarchist sympathisers*".

The military chaos of 1920 saw the RMS dissolved and replaced by the Soviet of Revolutionary Insurgents of the Ukraine, which consisted of seven members elected by the insurgent army. Its secretary was a left Socialist Revolutionary. The RMS in addition to making decisions between Congresses carried out propaganda work including the editing of the Makhnovist paper "*The Road to Freedom*" and collected and distributed money.

Lastly, we must discuss what happened when the Makhnovists applied their ideas in any cities they liberated as this gives a clear idea of the way they applied their ideas in practice. Anarchist participant Yossif the Emigrant stated that it was "*Makhno's custom upon taking a city or town to call the people together and announce to them that henceforth they are free to organise their lives as they think best for themselves. He always proclaims complete freedom of speech and press; he does not fill the prisons or begin executions, as the Communists do.*" He stressed it was "*the expression of the toilers themselves*" and "*the first great mass movement that by its own efforts seeks to free itself from government and establish economic self-determination. In that sense it is thoroughly Anarchistic.*" [Alexander Berkman, **The Bolshevik Myth**, pp. 193-5]

Arshinov paints a similar picture:

*"As soon as they entered a city, they declared that they did not represent any kind of authority, that their armed forces obliged no one to any sort of obligation and had no other aim than to protect the freedom of the working people. The freedom of the peasants and the workers, said the Makhnovists, resides in the peasants and workers themselves and may not be restricted. In all fields of their lives it is up to the workers and peasants themselves to construct whatever they consider necessary. As for the Makhnovists -- they can only assist them with advice, by putting at their disposal the intellectual or military forces they need, but under no circumstances can the Makhnovists prescribe for them in any manner."* [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 148]

In addition, the Makhnovists "*fully applied the revolutionary principles of freedom of speech, of thought, of the press, and of political association. In all cities and towns occupied by the Makhnovists, they began by lifting all the prohibitions and repealing all the restrictions imposed on the press and on political organisations by one or another power.*" Indeed, the "*only restriction that the Makhnovists considered necessary to impose on the Bolsheviks, the left Socialist-Revolutionaries and other statists was a prohibition on the formation of those 'revolutionary committees' which sought to impose a dictatorship over the people.*" They also took the opportunity to destroy every prison they got their hands on, believing that free people "*have no use for prisons*" which are "*always built only to subjugate the people, the workers and peasants.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 153, p. 154 and p. 153]

The Makhnovists encouraged self-management. Looking at Aleksandrovsk:

*"They immediately invited the working population to participate in a general conference of the workers of the city. When the conference met, a detailed report was given on the military situation in the region and it was proposed that the workers organise the life of the city and the functioning of the factories with their own forces and their own organisations, basing themselves on the principles of labour and equality. The workers enthusiastically acclaimed all these suggestions; but they hesitated to carry them out, troubled by their novelty, and troubled mainly by the nearness of the front, which made them fear that the situation of the town was uncertain and unstable. The first conference was followed by a second. The problems of organising life according to principles of self-management by workers were examined and discussed with animation by the masses of workers, who all welcomed these ideas with the greatest enthusiasm, but who only with difficulty succeeded in giving them concrete forms. Railroad workers took the first step in this direction. They formed a committee charged with organising the railway network of the region . . . From this point, the proletariat of Aleksandrovsk began to turn systematically to the problem of creating organs of self-management."* [Op. Cit., p. 149]

Unfortunately, the Makhnovists occupied only two cities (Alexandrovsk for four weeks and Katerinoslav for two periods of one and five weeks respectively). As a rule the Makhnovist rank and file had little or no experience of life in the cities and this placed severe limits on their ability to understand the specific problems of the workers there. In addition, the cities did not have a large anarchist movement, meaning that the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks had more support than they did. Both parties were, at best, neutral to the Makhnovists and anarchists, so making it likely that they would influence the city workers against the movement. As Voline noted, the *"absence of a vigorous organised workers' movement which could support the peasant insurgents"* was a disadvantage. [Op. Cit., p. 571]

There were minor successes in both cities. In Alexandrovsk, some trains were got running and a few factories reopened. In Katerinoslav (where the city was under a state of siege and constant bombardment by the Whites), the tobacco workers won a collective agreement that had long been refused and the bakers set themselves to preparing the socialisation of their industry and drawing up plans to feed both the army and the civilian population. Unsurprisingly, the bakers had long been under anarcho-syndicalist influence. [Malet, Op. Cit., p. 124]

Clearly, whenever they could, the Makhnovists practised their stated goals of working-class self-management and supported the organisational structures to ensure the control of and participation in the social revolution by the toiling masses. Equally, when they liberated towns and cities they did not impose their own power upon the working-class population but rather urged it to organise itself by setting up soviets, unions and other forms of working-class power. They urged workers to organise self-management of industry. True to the anarchist vision of a free society, they advocated and practised freedom of assembly, speech and organisation. In the words of historian Christopher Reed:

*"Makhno's Insurgent Army . . . was the quintessence of a self-administered, people's revolutionary army. It arose from the peasants, it was composed of peasants, it handed power to the peasants. It encouraged the growth of communes, co-operatives and soviets but distrusted all permanent elites attempting to take hold within them. It would be foolish to think that Makhno was supported by every peasant or that he and his followers could not, on occasions, direct their cruelty towards dissidents within their own ranks, but, on the whole, the movement perhaps erred on the side of being too self-effacing, of handing too much authority to the population at key moments." [From **Tsar to Soviets**, p. 260]*

As such, Makhnovist practice matched its theory. This can be said of few social movements and it is to their credit that this is the case.

## 8 Weren't the Makhnovists just Kulaks?

According to Trotsky (and, of course, repeated by his followers), *"Makhno created a cavalry of peasants who supplied their own horses. These were not the downtrodden village poor whom the October revolution first awakened, but the strong and well-fed peasants who were afraid of losing what they had. The anarchist ideas of Makhno (ignoring of the state, non-recognition of the central power) corresponded to the spirit of this kulak cavalry as nothing else could."* He argued that the Makhnovist struggle was not the anarchist struggle against the state and capitalism, but rather *"a struggle of the infuriated petty property owner against the proletarian dictatorship."* The Makhno movement, he stressed, was just an example of the *"convulsions of the peasant petty bourgeoisie which desired, of course, to liberate itself from capital but at the same time did not consent to subordinate itself to the dictatorship of the proletariat."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 80, p. 89 and pp. 89-90]

Unfortunately for those who use this kind of argument against the Makhnovists, it fails to stand up to any kind of scrutiny. Ignoring the sophistry of equating the Bolshevik party's dictatorship with the "dictatorship of the proletariat," we can easily refute Trotsky's somewhat spurious argument concerning the background of the Makhnovists.

Firstly, however, we should clarify what is meant by the term *"kulak."* According to one set of Trotskyist editors, it was *"popularly used to refer to well-to-do peasants who owned land and hired poor peasants to work it."* ["glossary," Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 146] The term itself derives from the Russian for *"fist,"* with appropriate overtones of grasping and meanness. In other words, a rural small-scale capitalist (employer of wage labour and often the renter of land and loaner of money as well) rather than a well-off peasant as such. Trotsky, however, muddies the water considerably by talking about the *"peasant petty bourgeoisie"* as well. Given that a peasant is *"petty"* (i.e. petit) bourgeois (i.e. own and use their own means of production), Trotsky is blurring the lines between rural capitalist (kulak) and the middle peasantry, as occurred so often under Bolshevik rule.

Secondly, we could just point to the eyewitness accounts of the anarchists Arshinov and Voline. Both stress that the Makhno movement was a mass revolutionary movement of the peasant and working poor

in the Southern Ukraine. Arshinov states that after Denikin's troops had been broken in 1919, the Makhnovists *"literally swept through villages, towns and cities like an enormous broom"* and the *"returned pomeshchiks [landlords], the kulaks, the police, the priests"* were destroyed, so refuting the *"the myth spread by the Bolsheviks about the so-called kulak character of the Makhnovshchina."* Ironically, he states that *"wherever the Makhnovist movement developed, the kulaks sought the protection of the Soviet authorities, and found it there."* [Op. Cit., p. 145] Yossif the Emigrant, another anarchist active in the movement, told anarchist Alexander Berkman that while there was a *"kulak"* element within it, *"the great majority are not of that type."* [quoted by Berkman, **The Bolshevik Myth**, p. 187] According to Gallina Makhno (Makhno's wife), when entering a town or village it was *"always Makhno's practice to compel the rich peasants, the kulaki, to give up their surplus wealth, which was then divided among the poor, Makhno keeping a share for his army. Then he would call a meeting of the villagers, address them on the purposes of the povstantsi [partisan] movement, and distribute his literature."* [Emma Goldman, **My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 149]

However, this would be replying to Trotsky's assertions with testimony which was obviously pro-Makhnovist. As such, we need to do more than this, we need to refute Trotsky's assertions in depth, drawing on as many non-anarchist sources and facts as possible.

The key to refuting Trotsky's argument that the Makhnovists were just kulaks is to understand the nature of rural life before and during 1917. Michael Malet estimates that in 1917, the peasantry could be divided into three broad categories. About 40 percent could no longer make a living off their land or had none, another 40 per cent who could make ends meet, except in a bad year, and 20 per cent who were relatively well off, with a fraction at the very top who were very well off. [Op. Cit., p. 117] Assuming that *"kulak"* simply meant *"rich"* or *"well-off"* peasant, then Trotsky is arguing that the Makhnovist movement represented and was based on this top 20 per cent. However, if we take the term *"kulak"* to mean *"small rural capitalist"* (i.e. employer of wage labour) then this figure would be substantially smaller as few within this group would employ hired labour or rent land. In fact, the percentage of peasant households in Russia employing permanent wage-labour was 3.3% in 1917, falling to 1% in 1920. [Teodor Shanin, **The Awkward Class**, p. 171]

In 1917, the peasants all across the Russian Empire took back the land stolen by the landlords. This led to two developments. Firstly, there was a *"powerful levelling effect"* in rural life. [Shanin, Op. Cit., p. 159] Secondly, the peasants would only support those who supported their aspirations for land reform (which was why the Bolsheviks effectively stole the Socialist-Revolutionary land policy in 1917). The Ukraine was no different. In 1917 the class structure in the countryside changed when the Hulyai Pole peasants were amongst the first to seize the landlords' land. In August 1917 Makhno assembled all the landed gentry (*"pomeshchiks"*) of the region *"and made them give him all the documents relating to lands and buildings."* After making an exact inventory of all this property and presenting a report to the local and then district congress of soviets, he *"proceeded to equalise the rights of the pomeshchiks and kulaks with those of the poor peasant labourers in regard to the use of the land . . . the congress decided to let the pomeshchiks and kulaks have a share of the land, as well as tools and livestock, equal to that of the labourers."* Several other peasant congresses nearby followed this example and adopted the same measure. [Peter Arshinov, Op. Cit., pp. 53-4]

Most of this land, tools and livestock was distributed to poor peasants, the rest was used to set up voluntary communes where the peasants themselves (and not the state) self-managed the land. Thus the peasants' *"economic conditions in the region of the Makhno movement were greatly improved at the expense of the landlords, the church, monasteries, and the richest peasants."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 214] This redistribution was based on the principle that every peasant was entitled to as much land as their family could cultivate without the use of hired labour. The abolition of wage labour in the countryside was also the method the anarchists were to use in Spain to divide up the land some 20 years later.

We should also note that the Makhnovist policy of land reform based on the abolition of wage labour was, as we noted in [section 7](#), the position agreed at the second regional congress called in 1919. The Makhnovists specifically argued with regards to the kulaks:

*"We are sure that . . . the kulak elements of the village will be pushed to one side by the very course of events. The toiling peasantry will itself turn effortlessly on the kulaks, first by adopting the kulak's surplus land for general use, then naturally drawing the kulak elements into the social organisation."* [cited by Michael Malet, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 118-9]

As such, when Trotsky talks about the *"downtrodden village poor whom the October revolution first awakened,"* he is wrong. In the area around Hulyai Pole it was **not** the October revolution which *"first awakened"* them into action, it was the activities of Makhno and the anarchists during the summer and autumn of 1917 which had done that (or, more correctly, it was their activities which aided this process as the poor peasants and landless workers needed no encouragement to expropriate the landlords).

Needless to say, this land redistribution reinforced Makhno's popularity with the people and was essential for the army's later popularity and its ability to depend on the peasants for support. However, the landlords and richer kulaks did not appreciate it and, unsurprisingly, tried to crush the movement when they could. Once the Austro-Germans invaded, the local rich took the opportunity to roll back the social revolution and the local **pomeshchiks** and **kulaks** formed a *"special volunteer detachment"* to fight Makhno once he had returned from exile in July 1918. [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 59]

This system of land reform did not seek to divide the village. Indeed, the Makhnovist approach is sometimes called the *"united village"* theory. Rather than provoke unnecessary and damaging conflict behind the frontlines, land reform would be placed in the hands of the village community, which would ensure that even the kulaks would have a fair stake in the post-revolutionary society as everyone would have as much land as they could till without using hired labour. The Bolshevik policy, as we will see, aimed at artificially imposing "class conflict" upon the villages from without and was a disaster as it was totally alien to the actual socio-economic situation. Unsurprisingly, peasant communities **as a whole** rose up against the Bolsheviks all across Russia.

As such, the claim that the Makhnovists were simply *"kulaks"* is false as it fails to, firstly, acknowledge the actual pre-revolutionary composition of the peasantry and, secondly, to understand the social-

revolution that had happened in the region of Hulyai Pole in 1917 and, thirdly, totally ignores the actual Makhnovist position on land reform. As Michael Malet argues, the Bolsheviks *"totally misconstrued the nature of the Makhno movement. It was not a movement of kulaks, but of the broad mass of the peasants, especially the poor and middle peasants."* [Op. Cit., p. 122]

This was sometimes acknowledged by Bolsheviks themselves. Iakovlev acknowledged in 1920 that in 1919 Makhno *"was a real peasant idol, an expression of all peasant spontaneity against . . . Communists in the cities and simultaneously against city capitalists and landowners. In the Makhno movement it is difficult to distinguish where the poor peasant begins [and] the 'kulak' ends. It was a spontaneous peasant movement . . . In the village we had no foothold, there was not one element with which we could join that would be our ally in the struggle against the bandits [sic!]"* [quoted by Palij, Op. Cit., p. 157]

According to a Soviet author present at the Makhnovist regional congresses on January 23 and February 12: *"In 1919 when I asked the chairman of the two Congresses (a Jewish farmer) whether the 'kulaks' were allowed to participate in the Congress, he angrily responded: 'When will you finally stop talking about kulaks? Now we have no kulaks among us: everybody is tilling as much land as he wishes and as much as he can.'"* [quoted by Palij, Op. Cit., p. 293]

According to Christian Rakovskii, the Bolshevik ruler of Ukraine, *"three-fourths of the membership of the [partisan] bands were poor peasants."* He presented a highly original and inventive explanation of this fact by arguing that *"rich peasants stayed in the village and paid poor ones to fight. Poor peasants were the hired army of the kulaks."* [Vladimir N. Brovkin, **Behind the Front the Lines of the Civil War**, p. 112 and p. 328]

Even Trotsky (himself the son of a rich peasant!) let the cat out of the bag in 1919:

*"The liquidation of Makhno does not mean the end of the Makhnovschyna, which has its roots in the ignorant popular masses."* [quoted by Malet, Op. Cit., p. 122]

Ultimately, all sources (including Bolshevik ones) accept that in the autumn of 1919 (at the very least) Makhno's support was overwhelming and came from all sections of the population.

Even ignoring the fact there was a social revolution and the eye-witness Bolshevik accounts (including Trotsky's!) which contradict Trotsky's assertions, Trotsky can be faulted for other reasons.

The most important issue is simply that the Makhnovist movement could not have survived four years if (at best) 20 per cent of the population supported it. As Christopher Reed notes, when the Makhnovists were *"in retreat they would abandon their weapons and merge with the local population. The fact that they were able to succeed shows how closely they were linked with the ordinary peasants because such tactics made Makhno's men very vulnerable to informers. There were very few examples of betrayal."* [Op. Cit., p. 260] If Makhno's social base was as weak as claimed there would have been no

need for the Bolsheviks to enter into alliances with him, particularly in the autumn of 1920 when the Makhnovists held no significant liberated area. Even after the defeat of Wrangel and the subsequent Bolshevik betrayal and repression, Makhno's mass base allowed him to remain active for months. Indeed, it was only when the peasants themselves had become exhausted in 1921 due to worsening economic conditions and state repression, were the Makhnovists finally forced into exile.

In the attempt to "*eradicate his influence in the countryside*" the Bolsheviks "*by weight of numbers and consistent ruthlessness they achieved a partial success.*" This was achieved by state terrorism:

*"On the occupation of a village by the Red Army the **Cheka** would hunt out and hang all active Makhnovist supporters; an amenable Soviet would be set up; officials would be appointed or imported to organise the poor peasants . . . and three or four Red militia men left as armed support for the new village bosses."* [David Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 292]

Moreover, in these "*military operations the Bolsheviks shot all prisoners. The Makhnovists shot all captured officers unless the Red rank and file strongly interceded for them. The rank and file were usually sent home, though a number volunteered for service with the Insurgents. Red Army reports complain of poor morale . . . The Reds used a number of Lettish and Chinese troops to decrease the risk of fraternisation.*" [Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 293] If the Makhnovists were made up of kulaks, why would the Bolsheviks fear fraternisation? Equally, if the Makhnovists were "kulaks" then how could they have such an impact on Red Army troops (who were mostly poor peasants)? After all, Trotsky had been complaining that "Makhnovism" had been infecting nearby Red Army troops and in August 1919 was arguing that it was "*still a poison which has infected backward units in the Ukrainian army.*" In December 1919, he noted that "*disintegration takes place in unstable units of our army when they came into contact with Makhno's forces.*" It seems unlikely that a movement made up of "kulaks" could have such an impact. Moreover, as Trotsky noted, not all Makhnovists were anarchists, "*some of them wrongly regard themselves as Communists.*" Again, why would people who regarded themselves as Communists join a movement of "kulaks"? [**How the Revolution Armed**, vol. II, p. 367, p. 110 and p. 137]

In addition, it seems highly unlikely (to say the least!) that a movement which is alleged to be either made up of or supported by the kulaks could have had a land policy which emphasised and implemented an equal share for the poorest peasantry, not just of land but also of live and dead stock as well as opposing the hiring of labour. This fact is reinforced when we look at the peasant reaction to the Bolshevik (and, presumably, anti-kulak and pro-"downtrodden village poor") land policy. Simply put, their policies resulted in massive peasant unrest directed against the Bolsheviks.

The Bolshevik land decrees of the 5th and 11th of February, 1919, stated that large landlord holdings would become state farms and all stock was to be taken over by the Ministry of Agriculture, with only between one third and one half of the land being reserved for poor peasants. This was "*largely irrelevant, since the peasantry had expected, and in some cases already controlled, all of it. To them, the government was taking away their land, and not seizing it from the landlords, then keeping some of it*

*and handing the rest over to its rightful owners."* [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 134] Thus the land was to expropriated by the state, **not** by the peasants. The result of this policy soon became clear:

*"The Bolsheviks expropriation policy was countervailed by the peasants' resistance based upon their assumption that 'the land belongs to nobody . . . it can be used only by those who care about it, who cultivate it.' Thus the peasants maintained that all the property of the former landlords was now by right their own. This attitude was shared not only by the rich and middle peasants but also the poor and landless, for they all wished to be independent farmers. The poorer the areas, the more dissatisfied were the peasants with the Bolshevik decrees.*

*"Thus Communist agricultural policy and terrorism brought about a strong reaction against the new Bolshevik regime. By the middle of 1919, all peasants, rich and poor, distrusted the Bolsheviks."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 156]

The Bolshevik inspired Poor Peasant Committees were *"associated with this disastrous policy, were discredited, and their reintroduction would need the aid of troops."* [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 135] The Makhnovists, in contrast, did not impose themselves onto the villages, nor did they attempt to tell the peasants what to do and how to divide the land. Rather they advocated the formation of Free Soviets through which these decisions could be made. This, along with their support for land reform, helped win them mass support.

After evacuating the Ukraine in mid-1919 due to the success of Denikin's counter-revolution, the Ukrainian Communists took time to mull over what had happened. The Central Committee's November 1919 resolution on the Ukraine *"gave top priority to the middle peasant -- so often and so conveniently lumped in together with the kulak and dealt with accordingly -- the transfer of landlord land to the poor peasants with only minimum exceptions for state farms."* These points were the basis of the new Ukrainian land law of 5th of February, 1920. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 135] This new law reflected long standing Makhnovist theory **and** practice. Therefore, the changing nature of Bolshevik land policy in the Ukraine indicates that Trotsky's claims are false. The very fact that the Bolsheviks had to adjust their policies in line with Makhnovist theory indicates that the later appealed to the middle and poor peasants.

Equally, it seems strange that the *"kulaks"* who apparently dominated the movement should have let themselves be led by poor peasants and workers. Voline presents a list of some of the participants of the movement and the vast majority are either peasants or workers. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 688-91] As historian Michael Palij notes, *"[a]lmost to a man, they [the Makhnovist leadership] were of poor peasant origin, with little formal education."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 254] Exceptions to the general rule were usually workers. Most were Anarchists or Socialist-Revolutionaries. [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 254-62]

Of course, it can be argued that the leadership of a movement need not come from the class which it claims to lead. The leadership of the Bolsheviks, for example, had very few actual proletarians within it. However, it seems unlikely that a class would select as its leaders members of the population it



oppressed! Equally, it seems as unlikely that poor peasants and workers would let themselves lead a movement of kulaks, whose aims would be alien to theirs. After all, poor peasants would seek land reform while kulaks would view this as a threat to their social position. As can be seen from the Makhnovist land policy, they argued for (and implemented) radical land reform, placing the land into the hands of peasants who worked the land without hiring labour (see [section 7](#))

As regards Trotsky's argument that the Makhnovists had to be kulaks because they originally formed a cavalry unit, it is easy to refute. Makhno himself was the son of poor peasants, an agricultural labourer and a worker in a factory. He was able to ride a horse, so why could other poor peasants not do so? Ultimately, it simply shows that Trotsky knew very little of Ukrainian peasant life and society.

Given that the Bolshevik government was meant to be a "worker-peasant" power, it seems strange that Trotsky dismisses the concerns of the peasantry so. He should have remembered that peasant uprisings against the Bolshevik government occurred constantly under the Bolsheviks, forcing them (eventually) to, first, recognise the false nature of their peasant policies in 1919 and, second, to introduce the NEP in 1921. As such, it seems somewhat ironic for Trotsky to attack the Makhnovists for not following flawed Bolshevik ideology as regards the peasantry!

The Bolsheviks, as Marxists, saw the peasants as "petit bourgeoisie" and uninterested in the revolution except as a means to grab their own plot of land. Their idea of land collectivisation was limited to state ownership. The initial Bolshevik land strategy can be summed up as mobilising the poor peasantry against the rest on the one hand and mobilising the city worker against the peasants (through forced grain confiscation on the other). The lack of knowledge of peasant life was the basis of this policy, which was abandoned in 1919 when it was soon proven to be totally wrong. Rather than see wealth extremes rise, the 1917 revolution saw a general levelling.

As regards the peasantry, here as elsewhere the Bolsheviks claimed their strategy was the objectively necessary (only possible) one in the circumstances. And here again the Makhnovists demonstrate this to be false, as the Bolsheviks themselves acknowledged in practice by changing their agricultural policies and bringing them closer to the Makhnovist position.

Clearly, both factually and logically, Trotsky's arguments are false. Ultimately, like most Bolsheviks, Trotsky uses the term "*kulak*" as a meaningless term of abuse, with no relation to the actual class structure of peasant life. It simply means a peasant opposed to the Bolsheviks rather than an actual social strata. Essentially, he is using the standard Leninist technique of specifying a person's class (or ideas) based on whether they subscribe to (or simply follow without question) Leninist ideology (see [section H.2.12](#) for further discussion of this). This explains why the Makhnovists went from being heroic revolutionaries to kulak bandits (and back again!) depending on whether their activity coincided with the needs of Bolshevik power or not. Expediency is not a sound base to build a critique, particularly one based simply on assertions like Trotsky's.

## 9 Were the Makhnovists anti-Semitic and pogromists?

No, they were not. Anyone who claims that the Makhnovist movement was anti-Semitic or conducted pogroms against Jews simply shows ignorance or a desire to deceive. As we will show, the Makhnovists were both theoretically and practically opposed to anti-Semitism and pogroms.

Unsurprisingly, many Leninists slander the Makhnovists on this score. Trotsky, for example, asserted in 1937 that Makhno's followers expressed "*a militant anti-Semitism.*" [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 80] Needless to say, the Trotskyist editors of the book in question did not indicate that Trotsky was wrong in the accusation. In this way a slander goes unchecked and becomes "accepted" as being true. As the charge of "*militant anti-Semitism*" is a serious one, so it is essential that we (unlike Trotsky) provide evidence to refute it.

To do so we will present a chronological overview of the evidence against it. This will, to some degree, result in some duplication as well as lengthy quotations, however it is unavoidable. We are sorry to labour this point, but this allegation is sadly commonplace and it is essential to refute it fully.

Unsurprisingly, Arshinov's 1923 account of the movement takes on the allegations that the Makhnovists were anti-Semitic. He presents extensive evidence to show that the Makhnovists opposed anti-Semitism and pogroms. It is worth quoting him at length:

*"In the Russian press as well as abroad, the Makhnovshchina was often pictured as a very restricted guerrilla movement, foreign to ideas of brotherhood and international solidarity, and even tainted with anti-Semitism. Nothing could be more criminal than such slanders. In order to shed light on this question, we will cite here certain documented facts which relate to this subject.*

*"An important role was played in the Makhnovist army by revolutionaries of Jewish origin, many of whom had been sentenced to forced labour for participation in the 1905 revolution, or else had been obliged to emigrate to Western Europe or America. Among others, we can mention:*

*"**Kogan** -- vice-president of the central organ of the movement, the Regional Revolutionary Military Council of Hulyai Pole. Kogan was a worker who, for reasons of principle, had left his factory well before the revolution of 1917, and had gone to do agricultural work in a poor Jewish agricultural colony. Wounded at the battle of Peregonovka, near Uman, against the Denikinists, he was seized by them at the hospital at Uman where he was being treated, and, according to witnesses, the Denikinists killed him with sabres.*

*"**L. Zin'kovsky (Zadov)** -- head of the army's counter espionage section, and later commander of a special cavalry regiment. A worker who before the 1917 revolution was condemned to ten years of forced labour for political activities. One of the most active*

*militants of the revolutionary insurrection.*

*"Elena Keller -- secretary of the army's cultural and educational section. A worker who took part in the syndicalist movement in America. One of the organisers of the 'Nabat' Confederation.*

*"Iosif Emigrant (Gotman) -- Member of the army's cultural and educational section. A worker who took an active part in the Ukrainian anarchist movement. One of the organisers of the 'Nabat' Confederation, and later a member of its secretariat.*

*"Ya. Alyi (Sukhovol'sky) -- worker, and member of the army's cultural and educational section. In the Tsarist period he was condemned to forced labor for political activity. One of the organisers of the 'Nabat' Confederation and a member of its secretariat.*

*"We could add many more names to the long list of Jewish revolutionaries who took part in different areas of the Makhnovist movement, but we will not do this, because it would endanger their security.*

*"At the heart of the revolutionary insurrection, the Jewish working population was among brothers. The Jewish agricultural colonies scattered throughout the districts of Mariupol, Berdyansk, Aleksandrovsk and elsewhere, actively participated in the regional assemblies of peasants, workers and insurgents; they sent delegates there, and also to the regional Revolutionary Military Council.*

*"Following certain anti-Semitic incidents which occurred in the region in February, 1919, Makhno proposed to all the Jewish colonies that they organise their self-defence and he furnished the necessary guns and ammunition to all these colonies. At the same time Makhno organised a series of meetings in the region where he appealed to the masses to struggle against anti-Semitism.*

*"The Jewish working population, in turn, expressed profound solidarity and revolutionary brotherhood toward the revolutionary insurrection. In answer to the call made by the Revolutionary Military Council to furnish voluntary combatants to the Makhnovist insurgent army, the Jewish colonies sent from their midst a large number of volunteers.*

*"In the army of the Makhnovist insurgents there was an exclusively Jewish artillery battery which was covered by an infantry detachment, also made up of Jews. This battery, commanded by the Jewish insurgent Shneider, heroically defended Hulyai Pole from Denikin's troops in June, 1919, and the entire battery perished there, down to the last man and the last shell.*

*"In the extremely rapid succession of events after the uprising of 1918-19, there were*

*obviously individuals who were hostile to Jews, but these individuals were not the products of the insurrection; they were products of Russian life. These individuals did not have any importance in the movement as a whole. If people of this type took part in acts directed against Jews, they were quickly and severely punished by the revolutionary insurgents.*

*"We described earlier the speed and determination with which the Makhnovists executed Hryhoriyiv and his staff, and we mentioned that one of the main reasons for this execution was their participation in pogroms of Jews.*

*"We can mention other events of this nature with which we are familiar.*

*"On May 12, 1919, several Jewish families - 20 people in all - were killed in the Jewish agricultural colony of Gor'kaya, near Aleksandrovsk. The Makhnovist staff immediately set up a special commission to investigate this event. This commission discovered that the murders had been committed by seven peasants of the neighbouring village of Uspenovka. These peasants were not part of the insurrectionary army. However, the Makhnovists felt it was impossible to leave this crime unpunished, and they shot the murderers. It was later established that this event and other attempts of this nature had been carried out at the instigation of Denikin's agents, who had managed to infiltrate the region and had sought by these means to prepare an atmosphere favourable for the entry of Denikin's troops into the Ukraine.*

*"On May 4th or 5th, 1919, Makhno and a few commanders hurriedly left the front and went to Hulyai Pole, where they were awaited by the Extraordinary Plenipotentiary of the Republic, L. Kamenev, who had arrived from Khar'kov with other representatives of the Soviet government. At the Verkhni Tokmak station, Makhno saw a poster with the words: 'Death to Jews, Save the Revolution, Long Live Batko Makhno.'*

*"Who put up that poster?' Makhno asked.*

*"He learned that the poster had been put up by an insurgent whom Makhno knew personally, a soldier who had taken part in the battle against Denikin's troops, a person who was in general decent. He presented himself immediately and was shot on the spot.*

*"Makhno continued the journey to Hulyai Pole. During the rest of the day and during his negotiations with the Plenipotentiary of the Republic, he could not free himself from the influence of this event. He realised that the insurgent had been cruelly dealt with, but he also knew that in conditions of war and in view of Denikin's advance, such posters could represent an enormous danger for the Jewish population and for the entire revolution if one did not oppose them quickly and resolutely.*

*"When the insurrectionary army retreated toward Uman in the summer of 1919, there were several cases when insurgents plundered Jewish homes. When the insurrectionary army examined these cases, it was learned that one group of four or five men was involved in all these incidents -- men who had earlier belonged to Hryhoriyiv's detachments and who had been incorporated into the Makhnovist army after Hryhoriyiv was shot. This group was disarmed and discharged immediately. Following this, all the combatants who had served under Hryhoriyiv were discharged from the Makhnovist army as an unreliable element whose re-education was not possible in view of the unfavorable conditions and the lack of time. Thus we see how the Makhnovists viewed anti-Semitism. Outbursts of anti-Semitism in various parts of the Ukraine had no relation to the Makhnovshchina.*

*"Wherever the Jewish population was in contact with the Makhnovists, it found in them its best protectors against anti-Semitic incidents. The Jewish population of Hulyai Pole, Aleksandrovsk, Berdyansk, Mariupol, as well as all the Jewish agricultural colonies scattered throughout the Donets region, can themselves corroborate the fact that they always found the Makhnovists to be true revolutionary friends, and that due to the severe and decisive measures of the Makhno visits, the anti-Semitic leanings of the counter-revolutionary forces in this region were promptly squashed.*

*"Anti-Semitism exists in Russia as well as in many other countries. In Russia, and to some extent in the Ukraine, it is not a result of the revolutionary epoch or of the insurrectionary movement, but is on the contrary a vestige of the past. The Makhnovists always fought it resolutely in words as well as deeds. During the entire period of the movement, they issued numerous publications calling on the masses to struggle against this evil. It can firmly be stated that in the struggle against anti-Semitism in the Ukraine and beyond its borders, their accomplishment was enormous." [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 211-215]*

Arshinov then goes on to quote an appeal published by Makhnovists together with anarchists referring to an anti-Semitic incident which took place in the spring of 1919. It is called **WORKERS, PEASANTS AND INSURGENTS FOR THE OPPRESSED, AGAINST THE OPPRESSORS -- ALWAYS!:**

*"During the painful days of reaction, when the situation of the Ukrainian peasants was especially difficult and seemed hopeless, you were the first to rise as fearless and unconquerable fighters for the great cause of the liberation of the working masses. . . This was the most beautiful and joyful moment in the history of our revolution. You marched against the enemy with weapons in your hands as conscious revolutionaries, guided by the great idea of freedom and equality. . . But harmful and criminal elements succeeded in insinuating themselves into your ranks. And the revolutionary songs, songs of brotherhood and of the approaching liberation of the workers, began to be disrupted by the harrowing cries of poor Jews who were being tormented to death. . . On the clear and splendid foundation of the revolution appeared indelible dark blots caused by the parched blood of poor Jewish martyrs who now, as before, continue to be innocent victims of the criminal reaction, of the class struggle . . . Shameful acts are being carried out. Anti-Semitic*

*pogroms are taking place.*

*"Peasants, workers and insurgents! You know that the workers of all nationalities -- Russians, Jews, Poles, Germans, Armenians, etc. -- are equally imprisoned in the abyss of poverty. You know that thousands of Jewish girls, daughters of the people, are sold and dishonoured by capital, the same as women of other nationalities. You know how many honest and valiant revolutionary Jewish fighters have given their lives for freedom in Russia during our whole liberation movement. . . The revolution and the honour of workers obliges all of us to declare as loudly as possible that we make war on the same enemies: on capital and authority, which oppress all workers equally, whether they be Russian, Polish, Jewish, etc. We must proclaim everywhere that our enemies are exploiters and oppressors of various nationalities: the Russian manufacturer, the German iron magnate, the Jewish banker, the Polish aristocrat . . . The bourgeoisie of all countries and all nationalities is united in a bitter struggle against the revolution, against the labouring masses of the whole world and of all nationalities.*

*"Peasants, workers and insurgents! At this moment when the international enemy -- the bourgeoisie of all countries -- hurries to the Russian revolution to create nationalist hatred among the mass of workers in order to distort the revolution and to shake the very foundation of our class struggle - the solidarity and unity of all workers -- you must move against conscious and unconscious counter-revolutionaries who endanger the emancipation of the working people from capital and authority. Your revolutionary duty is to stifle all nationalist persecution by dealing ruthlessly with all instigators of anti-Semitic pogroms.*

*"The path toward the emancipation of the workers can be reached by the union of all the workers of the world."* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, 215-7]

Arshinov also quotes an order issued by Makhno to *"all revolutionary insurgents without exception"* which states, in part, that the *"goal of our revolutionary army, and of every insurgent participating in it, is an honourable struggle for the full liberation of the Ukrainian workers from all oppression."* This was *"why every insurgent should constantly keep in mind that there is no place among us for those who, under the cover of the revolutionary insurrection, seek to satisfy their desires for personal profit, violence and plunder at the expense of the peaceful Jewish population."* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 217-8]

Unsurprisingly, as an anarchist, Makhno presents a class analysis of the problem of racism, arguing as follows:

*"Every revolutionary insurgent should remember that his personal enemies as well as the enemies of all the people are the rich bourgeoisie, regardless of whether they be Russian, or Jewish, or Ukrainian. The enemies of the working people are also those who protect*

*the unjust bourgeois regime, i.e., the Soviet Commissars, the members of repressive expeditionary corps, the Extraordinary Commissions which go through the cities and villages torturing the working people who refuse to submit to their arbitrary dictatorship. Every insurgent should arrest and send to the army staff all representatives of such expeditionary corps, Extraordinary Commissions and other institutions which oppress and subjugate the people; if they resist, they should be shot on the spot. As for any violence done to peaceful workers of whatever nationality - such acts are unworthy of any revolutionary insurgent, and the perpetrator of such acts will be punished by death."* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 218]

It should also be noted that the chairmen of three Makhnovist regional congresses were Jewish. The first and second congresses had a Jewish chairman [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 293], while Voline was the chair for the fourth one held at Aleksandrovsk. Similarly, one of the heads of the army's counter-espionage section was Jewish. [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 212] Little wonder both Arshinov and Voline stress that an important role was played by Jews within the movement.

The Jewish American anarchists Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman were also in Russia and the Ukraine during the revolution. Between 1920 and 1921, they were in contact with anarchists involved with the Makhnovists and were concerned to verify what they had heard about the movement from Bolshevik and other sources. Berkman recounts meeting the Jewish anarchist Yossif the Emigrant (shot by the Bolsheviks in late 1920). Yossif stated that *"Nestor is merciless toward those guilty of Jew-baiting. Most of you have read his numerous proclamations against pogroms, and you know how severely he punishes such things."* He stressed that any stories of atrocities and pogroms committed by the Makhnovists were *"lies wilfully spread by the Bolsheviks" who "hate Nestor worse than they do Wrangel."* For Yossif, *"Makhno represents the real spirit of October."* [quoted by Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 187-9] He also notes that Gallina Makhno, Nestor's wife, would *"slightly raise her voice in indignation when reports of Jew-baiting by povstantsi [partisans] were mentioned. These stories were deliberately spread by the Bolsheviks, she averred. No-one could be more severe in punishing such excesses than Nestor. Some of his best comrades are Jews; there are a number of them in the Revolutionary Soviet and in other branches of the army. Few men are so loved and respected by the povstantsi as Yossif the Emigrant, who is a Jew, and Makhno's best friend."* [Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 238-9] Both Goldman and Berkman became friends with Makhno during his exile in Paris.

After his exile, Makhno himself spent time refuting allegations of anti-Semitism. Two articles on this subject are contained in **The Struggle Against the State and other Essays**, a collection of Makhno's exile writings. In the article *"The Makhnovshchina and Anti-Semitism"* he recounts various examples of the *"uncompromising line on the anti-Semitism of pogromists"* which the Makhnovists took *"throughout its entire existence."* This was *"because it was a genuinely revolutionary toilers' movement in the Ukraine."* He stressed that *"[a]t no time did the movement make it its business to carry out pogroms against Jews nor did it ever encourage any."* [**The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays**, p. 38 and p. 34] He wrote another article (called *"To the Jews of All Countries"*):

*"In my first 'Appeal to Jews, published in the French libertarian newspaper, Le*

*Libertaire*, I asked Jews in general, which is to say the bourgeois and the socialist ones as well as the 'anarchist' ones like Yanovsky, who have all spoken of me as a pogromist against Jews and labelled as anti-Semitic the liberation movement of the Ukrainian peasants and workers of which I was the leader, to detail to me the specific facts instead of blathering vacuously away: just where and just when did I or the aforementioned movement perpetrate such acts? . . . Thus far, no such evidence advanced by Jews has come to my attention. The only thing that has appeared thus far in the press generally, certain Jewish anarchist organs included, regarding myself and the insurgent movement I led, has been the product of the most shameless lies and of the vulgarity of certain political mavericks and their hirelings." [Op. Cit., p. 28]

It should be noted that Yanovsky, editor of the Yiddish language anarchist paper **Freie Arbeiter Stimme** later admitted that Makhno was right. Yanovsky originally believed the charges of anti-Semitism made against Makhno, going so far as ignoring Makhno's appeal to him out of hand. However, by the time of Makhno's death in 1934, Yanovsky had learned the truth:

*"So strongly biased was I against him [Makhno] at that time I did not think it necessary to find out whether my serious accusation was founded on any real facts during the period of his great fight for real freedom in Russia. Now I know that my accusations of anti-Semitism against Makhno were built entirely on the lies of the Bolsheviks and to the rest of their crimes must be added this great crime of killing his greatness and the purity of this fighter for freedom."*

Due to this, he could not forgive himself for "*so misjudg[ing] a man merely on the basis of calumny by his bitter enemies who more than once shamefully betrayed him, and against whom he fought so heroically.*" He also notes that it had "*become known to me that a great many Jewish comrades were heart and soul with Makhno and the whole Makhno movement. Amongst them was one whom I knew well personally, Joseph Zutman of Detroit, and I know that he would not have had anything to do with persons, or a movement, which possessed the slightest leaning towards anti-Semitism.*" ["appendix," **My Visit to the Kremlin**, pp. 36-7]

However, by far the best source to refute claims of anti-Semitism the work of the Jewish anarchist Voline. He summarises the extensive evidence against such claims:

*"We could cover dozens of pages with extensive and irrefutable proofs of the falseness of these assertions. We could mention articles and proclamations by Makhno and the Council of Revolutionary Insurgents denouncing anti-Semitism. We could tell of spontaneous acts by Makhno himself and other insurgents against the slightest manifestation of the anti-Semitic spirit on the part of a few isolated and misguided unfortunates in the army and the population. . . One of the reasons for the execution of Grigoriev by the Makhnovists was his anti-Semitism and the immense pogrom he organised at Elizabethgrad . . ."*



*"We could cite a whole series of similar facts, but we do not find it necessary . . . and will content ourselves with mentioning briefly the following essential facts:*

*"1. A fairly important part in the Makhnovist movement was played by revolutionists of Jewish origin.*

*"2. Several members of the Education and Propaganda Commission were Jewish.*

*"3. Besides many Jewish combatants in various units of the army, there was a battery composed entirely of Jewish artillery men and a Jewish infantry unit.*

*"4. Jewish colonies in the Ukraine furnished many volunteers to the Insurrectionary Army.*

*"5. In general the Jewish population, which was very numerous in the Ukraine, took an active part in all the activities of the movement. The Jewish agricultural colonies which were scattered throughout the districts of Mariupol, Berdiansk, Alexandrovsk, etc., participated in the regional assemblies of workers, peasants and partisans; they sent their delegates to the regional Revolutionary Military Council.*

*"6. Rich and reactionary Jews certainly had to suffer from the Makhnovist army, not as Jews, but just in the same way as non-Jewish counter-revolutionaries." [The Unknown Revolution, pp. 967-8]*

However, it could be claimed that these accounts are from anarchists and so are biased. Ignoring the question of why so many Jewish anarchists should defend Makhno if he was, in fact, a pogromist or anti-Semite, we can turn to non-anarchist sources for confirmation of the fact that Makhno and the Makhnovist movement were not anti-Semites.

First, we turn to Voline, who quotes the eminent Jewish writer and historian M. Tcherikover about the question of the Makhnovists and anti-Semitism. Tcherikover had, for a number of years, had specialised in research on the persecutions of the Jews in Russia. The Jewish historian states *"with certainty that, on the whole, the behaviour of Makhno's army cannot be compared with that of the other armies which were operating in Russian during the events 1917-21. Two facts I can certify absolutely explicitly.*

*"1. It is undeniable that, of all these armies, including the Red Army, the Makhnovists behaved best with regard the civil population in general and the Jewish population in particular. I have numerous testimonies to this. The proportion of **justified** complaints against the Makhnovist army, in comparison with the others, is negligible.*

*"2. Do not speak of pogroms alleged to have been organised by Makhno himself. That is a slander or an error. Nothing of the sort occurred. As for the Makhnovist Army, I have had hints and precise*

*denunciations on this subject. But, up to the present, every time I have tried to check the facts, I have been obliged to declare that on the day in question no Makhnovist unit could have been at the place indicated, the whole army being far away from there. Upon examining the evidence closely, I established this fact, every time, with absolute certainty, at the place and on the date of the pogrom, no **Makhnovist** unit was operating or even located in the vicinity. **Not once** have I been able to prove the existence of a Makhnovist unit at the place a pogrom against the Jews took place. Consequently, the pogroms in question could not have been the work of the Makhnovists."* [quoted by Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 699]

This conclusion is confirmed by later historians. Paul Avrich notes that "*[c]harges of Jew-baiting and of anti-Jewish pogroms have come from every quarter, left, right, and centre. Without exception, however, they are based on hearsay, rumour, or intentional slander, and remain undocumented and unproved.*" He adds that the "*Soviet propaganda machine was at particular pains to malign Makhno as a bandit and pogromist.*" Wishing to verify the conclusions of Tcherikover proved by Voline, Avrich examined several hundred photographs in the Tcherikover Collection, housed in the YIVO Library in New York and depicting anti-Jewish atrocities in the Ukraine during the Civil War. He found that "*only one [was] labelled as being the work of the Makhnovists, though even here neither Makhno himself nor any of his recognisable subordinates are to be seen, nor is there any indication that Makhno had authorised the raid or, indeed, that the band involved was in fact affiliated with his Insurgent Army.*" Avrich then states that "*there is evidence that Makhno did all in his power to counteract anti-Semitic tendencies among his followers*" and that "*a considerable number of Jews took part in the Makhnovist movement.*" He also points out that the Jewish anarchists Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, Sholem Schwartzbard, Voline, Senya Fleshin, and Mollie Steimer did not criticise Makhno as an anti-Semite, they also "*defended him against the campaign of slander that persisted from all sides.*" [**Anarchist Portraits**, pp. 122-3] It should be noted that Schwartzbard assassinated the Nationalist leader Petliura in 1926 because he considered him responsible for pogroms conducted by Nationalist troops during the civil war. He shot Petliura the day after he, Makhno and Berkman had seen him at a Russian restaurant in Paris. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 189]

Michael Malet, in his account of the Makhnovists, states that "*there is overwhelming evidence that Makhno himself was not anti-Semitic.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 168] He indicates that in the period January to September 1919, the Central Committee of Zionist Organisations in Russia listed the Nationalists as creating 15,000 victims of pogroms, then the Denikinists with 9,500 followed by Hryhoriyiv, Sokolovsky, Struk, Yatsenko and Soviet troops (500 victims). Makhno is not mentioned. Of the pogroms listed, almost all took place on the western Ukraine, where the local otamany (warlords) and the Nationalists were strong. Very few took place where Makhno's influence predominated, the nearest being in Katerinoslav town and Kherson province; none in the provinces of Katerinoslav or Tavria. It should also be noted that the period of January to June of that year was one of stability within the Makhnovist region, so allowing them the space to apply their ideas. Malet summarises:

*"Even granted the lower level of Jewish involvement in left-bank trade, the almost total lack of anti-Semitic manifestations would show that Makhno's appeals, at a time when anti-Semitism was fast becoming fashionable, did not go unheeded by the population.*

*There were a number of Jewish colonies in the south-east Ukraine.*" [Op. Cit., p. 169]

Unsurprisingly, Malet notes that apart from certain personal considerations (such as his friendship with a number of Jews, including Voline and Yossif the Emigrant), *"the basis of Makhno's hostility to anti-Semitism was his anarchism. Anarchism has always been an international creed, explicitly condemning all forms of racial hatred as incompatible with the freedom of individuals and the society of equals."* And like other serious historians, he points to *"the continual participation in the movement of both intellectual Jews from outside, and Jews from the local colonies"* as *"further proof . . . of the low level of anti-Semitism within the Makhnovshchina."* [Op. Cit., p. 171 and pp. 171-2]

Anarchist Serge Cipko summarises the literature by stating that the *"scholarly literature that discusses Makhno's relationships with the Jewish population is of the same opinion [that the Makhnovists were not anti-Semitic] and concur that unlike the Whites, Bolsheviks and other competing groups in Ukraine during the Revolution, the Makhnovists did not engage in pogroms."* ["Nestor Makhno: A Mini-Historiography of the Anarchist Revolution in Ukraine, 1917-1921," pp. 57-75, **The Raven**, no. 13, p. 62]

Historian Christopher Reed concurs, noting that *"Makhno actively opposed anti-Semitism . . . Not surprisingly, many Jews held prominent positions in the Insurgent movement and Jewish farmers and villagers staunchly supported Makhno in the face of the unrestrained anti-Semitism of Ukrainian nationalists like Grigoriev and of the Great Russian chauvinists like the Whites."* [Op. Cit., pp. 263-4] Arthur E. Adams states that *"Makhno protected Jews and in fact had many serving on his own staff."* [Bolsheviks in the Ukraine, p. 402]

We apologise again for labouring this point, but the lie that Makhno and the Makhnovists were anti-Semitic is relatively commonplace and needs to be refuted. As noted, Trotskyists repeat Trotsky's false assertions without correction. Other repeat the lie from other sources. It was essential, therefore, to spend time making the facts available and to nail the lie of Makhnovist anti-Semitism once and for all!

## 10 Did the Makhnovists hate the city and city workers?

For some reason the Makhnovists have been portrayed as being against the city and even history as such. This assertion is false, although sometimes made. For example, historian Bruce Lincoln states that Makhno *"had studied the anarchist writings of Bakunin, whose condemnation of cities and large-scale industries fit so well with the anti-urban, anti-industrial feelings of the Ukrainian peasants, and his program was precisely the sort that struck responsive chords in peasant hearts."* [Red Victory, p. 325] Lincoln fails to present any evidence for this claim. This is unsurprising as it is doubtful that Makhno read such condemnations in Bakunin as they do not, in fact, exist. Similarly, the Makhnovist *"program"* (like anarchism in general) was not *"anti-urban"* or *"anti-industrial."*

However, Lincoln's inventions are mild compared to Trotsky's. According to Trotsky, *"the followers of Makhno"* were marked by *"hatred for the city and the city worker."* He later gives some more concrete

examples of this "*hostility to the city*" which, as with the general peasant revolt, also "*nourished the movement of Makhno, who seized and looted trains marked for the factories, the plants, and the Red Army; tore up railway tracks, shot Communists, etc.*" [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 80 and p. 89]

Unsurprisingly, Trotsky simply shows his ignorance of the Makhno movement by these statements. To refute Trotsky's claim we can simply point to how the Makhnovists acted once they occupied a city. As we discuss in [section 7](#), the first thing the Makhnovists did was to call a conference of workers and urge them to organise their own affairs directly, using their own class organs of self-management (soviets, unions, etc.). Hardly the activity of a group of people who allegedly "*hated*" city workers!

We can also point to the fact that the Makhnovists arranged direct exchanges of goods between the towns and country. In early 1918, for example, corn was shipped directly to a Moscow factory in return for textiles (without state interference). In 1919, 1500 tons of grain (and a small amount of coal) was sent by train to Petrograd and Moscow where the commander of the train was to exchange it again for textiles. The initiative in both cases came from the Hulyai Pole peasants. Again, hardly the work of city-hating peasants.

Peter Arshinov indicates the underlying theory behind the Makhnovists as regards the relations between city and country:

*"The Makhnovshchina . . . understands that the victory and consolidation of the revolution . . . cannot be realised without a close alliance between the working classes of the cities and those of the countryside. The peasants understand that without urban workers and powerful industrial enterprises they will be deprived of most of the benefits which the social revolution makes possible. Furthermore, they consider the urban workers to be their brothers, members of the same family of workers.*

*"There can be no doubt that, at the moment of the victory of the social revolution, the peasants will give their entire support to the workers. This will be voluntary and truly revolutionary support given directly to the urban proletariat. In the present-day situation [under the Bolsheviks], the bread taken by force from the peasants nourishes mainly the enormous governmental machine. The peasants see and understand perfectly that this expensive bureaucratic machine is not in any way needed by them or by the workers, and that in relation to the workers it plays the same role as that of a prison administration toward the inmates. This is why the peasants do not have the slightest desire to give their bread voluntarily to the State. This is why they are so hostile in their relations with the contemporary tax collectors -- the commissars and the various supply organs of the State.*

*"But the peasants always try to enter into **direct** relations with the urban workers. The question was raised more than once at peasant congresses, and the peasants always resolved it in a revolutionary and positive manner."* [Op. Cit., p. 258]

Simply put, Trotsky misinterprets hostility to the repressive policies of the Bolshevik dictatorship with hostility to the city.

Moreover, ignoring the **actual** relationships of the Makhnovists with the city workers, we can fault Trotsky's arguments without recourse to such minor things as facts. This is because every one of his "examples" of "*hatred for the city and the city worker*" can be explained by more common sense arguments.

As regards the destruction of trains and railway tracks, a far simpler and more plausible explanation can be found than Trotsky's "*hostility to the city.*" This is the fact that a civil war was taking place. Both the Reds and Whites used armoured trains to move troops and as bases of operations. To destroy the means by which your enemy attacks you is common sense! Equally, in the chaotic times of the war, resources were often in low supply and in order to survive the Makhnovists had to "*loot*" trains (needless to say, Trotsky does not explain how the Makhnovists knew the trains were "*marked for the factories.*"). It should be noted that the Bolsheviks "*looted*" the countryside, can we surmise that the Bolsheviks simply expressed "*hostility to the village*"?

As regards the shooting of Communists, a far simpler and more plausible explanation also exists. Rather than show "*hostility to the city,*" it shows "*hostility*" to the Communist Party, its policies and its authoritarian ideas. Given that the Bolsheviks had betrayed the Makhnovists on **three** occasions (see [section 13](#)) and attacked them, "*hostility*" to Communists seems a sensible position to take! Equally, the first Bolshevik attack on the Makhnovists occurred in mid-1919, when the Bolsheviks began justifying their party dictatorship as essential for the success of the revolution. The other two occurred in 1920, when the Bolsheviks were announcing to the whole world at the Communist International (to quote Zinoviev) that "*the dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party.*" [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 1, p. 152] Given this, perhaps the fact that the Makhnovists shot Communists can be explained in terms of defence against Bolshevik betrayal and opposition to the dictatorship of the Communist Party rather than "*hostility to the city.*" Needless to say, the Communists shot Makhnovists and anarchists. What does that suggest a "*hostility*" to by the Bolsheviks? Working-class autonomy and freedom?

Clearly, Trotsky was clutching at straws in his smearing of the Makhnovist movement as haters of the city worker. The "*hostility*" Trotsky speaks of can be far more easily explained in terms of the necessities imposed upon the Makhnovists by the civil war and the betrayals of the Bolsheviks. As such, it would be fairer to state that the Makhnovists showed "*hostility*" or "*hatred*" to the city or city workers only if you equate both with the Bolshevik party dictatorship. In other words, the Makhnovists showed "*hostility*" to the new ruling class of the Communist Party hierarchy.

All this does not mean that there were not misunderstandings between the Makhno movement, a predominantly rural movement, and the workers in the cities. Far from it. Equally, it can be said that the Makhnovists did not understand the workings of an urban economy and society as well as they understood their own. However, they made no attempt to **impose** their world-view on the city workers

(unlike the Bolsheviks, who did so on both urban and rural workers). However, ignorance of the city and its resulting misunderstandings do not constitute *"hostility"* or *"hatred."*

Moreover, where these misunderstandings developed show that the claims that the Makhnovists hated the city workers are simply false. Simply put, the misunderstanding occurred when the Makhnovists had liberated cities from the Whites. As we discussed in [section 7](#), the first thing the Makhnovists did was to call a conference of workers' delegates to discuss the current situation and to urge them to form soviets, unions and co-operatives in order to manage their own affairs. This hardly shows *"hatred"* of the city worker. In contrast, the first thing the Bolsheviks did in taking a city was to form a *"revolutionary committee"* to govern the town and implement Bolshevik policy.

This, needless to say, shows a distinct *"hostility"* to the city workers on the part of the Bolsheviks. Equally, the Bolshevik advocacy of party dictatorship to overcome the *"wavering"* of the working class. In the words of Trotsky himself (in 1921):

*"The Workers' Opposition has come out with dangerous slogans, making a fetish of democratic principles! They place the workers' right to elect representatives above the Party, as if the party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy. It is necessary to create amongst us the awareness of the revolutionary birthright of the party, which is obliged to maintain its dictatorship, regardless of temporary wavering even in the working classes. This awareness is for us the indispensable element. The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy."* [quoted by Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 209]

Opposing workers' democracy because working people could make decisions that the party thought were wrong shows a deep *"hostility"* to the **real** city workers and their liberty and equality. Equally, Bolshevik repression of workers' strikes, freedom of speech, assembly, organisation and self-determination shows far more *"hostility"* to the city worker than a few Makhnovist misunderstandings!

All in all, any claim that the Makhnovists *"hated"* city workers is simply false. While some Makhnovists may not have liked the city nor really understood the complexities of an urban economy, they did recognise the importance of encouraging working-class autonomy and self-organisation within them and building links between the rural and urban toilers. While the lack of a large-scale anarcho-syndicalist movement hindered any positive construction, the Makhnovists at least tried to promote urban self-management. Given Bolshevik authoritarianism and its various rationalisations, it would be fairer to say that it was the Bolsheviks who expressed *"hostility"* to the city workers by imposing their dictatorship upon them rather than supporting working-class self-management as the Makhnovists did!

## 11 Were the Makhnovists nationalists?

Some books on the Makhnovist movement try to present the Makhnovists as being Ukrainian

nationalists. A few discuss the matter in order, perhaps, to increase the respectability of the Makhnovist movement by associating it with a more "serious" and "respectable" political theory than anarchism, namely "Nationalism." Those who seriously investigate the issue come to the same conclusion, namely that neither Makhno nor the Makhnovist movement was nationalist (see, for example, Frank Sysyn's essay **Nestor Makhno and the Ukrainian Revolution** which discusses this issue).

Therefore, any claims that the Makhnovists were nationalists are incorrect. The Makhnovist movement was first and foremost an internationalist movement of working people. This is to be expected as anarchists have long argued that nationalism is a cross-class movement which aims to maintain the existing class system but without foreign domination (see [section D.6](#) for details). As such, the Makhnovists were well aware that nationalism could not solve the social question and would simply replace a Russian ruling class and state with a Ukrainian one.

This meant that the aims of the Makhnovists went further than simply national liberation or self-determination. Anarchists, rather, aim for working-class self-liberation and self-determination, both as individuals and as groups, as well as politically, economically and socially. To quote Makhno's wire to Lenin in December 1918, the Makhnovist *"aims are known and clear to all. They are fighting against the authority of all political governments and for liberty and independence of the working people."* [quoted by Palič, **Op. Cit.**, p. 80]

From this class and anti-hierarchical perspective, it is not unsurprising that the Makhnovists were not nationalists. They did not seek Ukrainian independence but rather working-class autonomy. This, of necessity, meant they opposed all those who aimed to govern and/or exploit the working class. Hence Arshinov:

*"Composed of the poorest peasants, who were united by the fact that they all worked with their own hands, the Makhnovist movement was founded on the deep feeling of fraternity which characterises only the most oppressed. During its entire history it did not for an instant appeal to national sentiments. The whole struggle of the Makhnovists against the Bolsheviks was conducted solely in the name of the rights and interests of the workers. Denikin's troops, the Austro-Germans, Petliura, the French troops in Berdyansk, Wrangel -- were all treated by the Makhnovists as enemies of the workers. Each one of these invasions represented for them essentially a threat to the workers, and the Makhnovists had no interest in the national flag under which they marched."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 210]

He stressed that *"national prejudices had no place in the Makhnovshchina. There was also no place in the movement for religious prejudices . . . Among modern social movements, the Makhnovshchina was one of the few in which an individual had absolutely no interest in his own or his neighbour's religion or nationality, in which he respected only the labour and the freedom of the worker."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 211]

The Makhnovists made their position on nationalism clear in the 'Declaration' published by the Revolutionary Military Council of the army in October, 1919:

*"When speaking of Ukrainian independence, we do not mean national independence in Petliura's sense but the social independence of workers and peasants. We declare that Ukrainian, and all other, working people have the right to self-determination not as an 'independent nation' but as 'independent workers'" [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 210]*

In other words, the Makhnovists *"declared, that in their option **Petlurovtchina** [the Petliura movement, Petliura being the leader of the Nationalists] was a bourgeois nationalist movement whose road was entirely different from that of the revolutionary peasants, that the Ukraine should be organised on a basis of free labour and the independence of the peasants and the workers . . . and that nothing but struggle was possible between the **Makhnovitchina** , the movement of the workers, and the **Petlurovtchina** , the movement of the bourgeoisie."* [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 572]

This does not mean that anarchists are indifferent to cultural and national domination and oppression. Far from it! As we discussed in sections [D.6](#) and [D.7](#), anarchists are against foreign domination and cultural imperialism, believing that every community or national group has the right to be itself and develop as it sees fit. This means that anarchists seek to transform national liberation struggles into **human** liberation struggles, turning any struggle against foreign oppression and domination into a struggle against **all** forms of oppression and domination.

This means that the Makhnovists, like anarchists in general, seek to encourage local culture and language while opposed nationalism. As Frank Sysyn argues, it *"would be a mistake . . . to label the Makhnivtzi as 'anti-Ukrainian.' Although they opposed the political goals of most 'svidomi ukraintsi' (nationally conscious Ukrainians), they accepted the existence of a Ukrainian nation and used the terms 'Ukraine' and 'Ukrainian.'"* [**Nestor Makhno and the Ukrainian Revolution**, p. 288] It should be noted that opponents of Ukrainian independence generally called it the *"south of Russia"* or *"Little Russia."*

Thus an opposition to nationalism did not imply a rejection or blindness to foreign domination and free cultural expression. On the question of the language to be taught in schools, the Cultural-Educational Section of the Makhnovist Insurgent Army wrote the following in October, 1919:

*"The cultural-educational section of the Makhnovist army constantly receives questions from school teachers asking about the language in which instruction should be given in the schools, now that Denikin's troops have been expelled.*

*"The revolutionary insurgents, holding to the principles of true socialism, cannot in any field or by any measure do violence to the natural desires and needs of the Ukrainian people. This is why the question of the language to be taught in the schools cannot be solved by our army, but can only be decided by the people themselves, by parents, teachers and students*



*"It goes without saying that all the orders of Denikin's so-called 'Special Bureau' as well as General Mai-Maevsky's order No. 22, which forbids the use of the mother tongue in the schools, are null and void, having been forcibly imposed on the schools.*

*"In the interest of the greatest intellectual development of the people, the language of instruction should be that toward which the local population naturally tends, and this is why the population, the students, the teachers and the parents, and not authorities or the army, should freely and independently resolve this question."* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 210-1]

They also printed a Ukrainian version of their paper ("*The Road to Freedom*").

Clearly their opposition to Ukrainian nationalism did not mean that the Makhnovists were indifferent to imperialism and foreign political or cultural domination. This explains why Makhno criticised his enemies for anti-Ukrainian actions and language. Michael Malet summarises, for the Makhnovists *"Ukrainian culture was welcome, but political nationalism was highly suspect."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 143]

Given anarchist support for federal organisation from below upwards, working-class self-determination and autonomy, plus a healthy respect for local culture, it is easy to see why some historians have fostered a nationalist perspective onto the Makhnovists where none existed. This means that when they agitated with the slogan *"All to whom freedom and independence are dear should stay in the Ukraine and fight the Denikinists,"* it should be noted that *"[n]owhere . . . nationalism openly advocated, and the line of argument put forward can more easily be interpreted as libertarian and, above all, anti-White."* [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 146]

In 1928, Makhno wrote a rebuttal to a Soviet historian's claim that Makhno became a Ukrainian Nationalist during the 1920-21 period. He *"totally dismissed the charges"* and argued that the historian *"distorted anarchism's espousal of local autonomy so as to create trumped-up charges of nationalism."* As Sysyn argues, while Makhno *"never became a nationalist, he did to a degree become a Ukrainian anarchist."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 292 and p. 303]

Thus while neither Makhno nor the movement were nationalists, they were not blind to national and cultural oppression. They considered nationalism as too narrow a goal to satisfy the **social** aspirations of the working classes. As Makhno argued in exile, the Ukrainian toilers had *"asserted their rights to use their own language and their entitlement to their own culture, which had been regarded before the revolution as anathema. They also asserted their right to conform in their lives to their own way of life and specific customs."* However, *"[i]n the aim of building an independent Ukrainian State, certain statist gentlemen would dearly love to arrogate to themselves all natural manifestations of Ukrainian reality."* Yet the *"healthy instincts of the Ukrainian toilers and their baleful life under the Bolshevik yoke has not made them oblivious of the State danger in general"* and so they *"shun the chauvinist trend and do not mix it up with their social aspirations, rather seeking their own road to emancipation."* [**The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays**, pp. 24-5]

In summary, the Makhnovists were opposed to nationalism but supported culture diversity and self-determination within a free federation of toilers communes and councils. They did not limit their aims to national liberation, but rather sought the self-liberation of the working classes from every oppression -- foreign or domestic, economic or political, cultural or social.

## 12 Did the Makhnovists support the Whites?

No, they did not. However, black propaganda by the Bolsheviks stated they did. Victor Serge wrote about the *"strenuous calumnies put out by the Communist Party"* against him *"which went so far as to accuse him of signing pacts with the Whites at the very moment when he was engaged in a life-and-death struggle against them."* [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 122]

According to Arshinov, *"Soviet newspapers spread the false news of an alliance between Makhno and Wrangel"* and in the summer of 1920, a representative of the Kharkov government *"declared at the Plenary Session of the Ekaterinoslav Soviet, that Soviet authorities had written proof of the alliance between Makhno and Wrangel. This was obviously an intentional lie."* Wrangel, perhaps believing these lies had some basis, sent a messenger to Makhno in July, 1920. *"Wrangel's messenger was immediately executed"* and the *"entire incident was reported in the Makhnovist press. All this was perfectly clear to the Bolsheviks. They nevertheless continued to trumpet the alliance between Makhno and Wrangel. It was only after a military-political agreement had been concluded between the Makhnovists and the Soviet power that the Soviet Commissariat of War announced that there had never been an alliance between Makhno and Wrangel, that earlier Soviet assertions to this effect were an error."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 173-5]

Needless to say, while the Bolsheviks spread the rumour to discredit Makhno, the Whites spread it to win the confidence of the peasants. Thus when Trotsky stated that Wrangel had *"united with the Ukrainian partisan Makhno,"* he was aiding the efforts of Wrangel to learn from previous White mistakes and build some kind of popular base. [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 220] By October, Trotsky had retracted this statement:

*"Wrangel really tried to come into direct contact with Makhno's men and dispatched to Makhno's headquarters two representatives for negotiations . . . [However] Makhno's men not only did not enter into negotiations with the representatives of Wrangel, but publicly hanged them as soon as they arrived at the headquarters."* [quoted by Palij, **Ibid.**]

Trotsky, of course, still tried to blacken the Makhnovists. In the same article he argued that *"[u]ndoubtedly Makhno actually co-operated with Wrangel, and also with the Polish *szlachta*, as he fought with them against the Red Army. However, there was no formal alliance between them. All the documents mentioning a formal alliance were fabricated by Wrangel . . . All this fabrication was made to deceive the protectors of Makhno, the French, and other imperialists."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 225]

It is hard to know where to start in this amazing piece of political story-telling. As we discuss in more detail in [section 13](#), the Makhnovists were fighting the Red Army from January to September 1920 because the Bolsheviks had engineered their outlawing! As historian David Footman points out, the attempt by the Bolsheviks to transfer Makhno to Polish front was done for political reasons:

*"it is admitted on the Soviet side that this order was primarily 'dictated by the necessity' of liquidating **Makhnovshchina** as an independent movement. Only when he was far removed from his home country would it be possible to counteract his influence" [Op. Cit., p. 291]*

Indeed, it could be argued that by attacking Makhno in January helped the Whites to regroup under Wrangel and return later in the year. Equally, it seems like a bad joke for Trotsky to blame the victim of Bolshevik intrigues for defending themselves. And the idea that Makhno had "*protectors*" in any imperialist nation is a joke, which deserves only laughter as a response!

It should be noted that it is "*agreed that the initiative for joint action against Wrangel came from the Makhnovites.*" This was ignored by the Bolsheviks until after "*Wrangel started his big offensive*" in September 1920 [Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 294 and p. 295]

So while the Bolsheviks claimed that the Makhnovists had made a pact with General Wrangel, the facts are that Makhnovists fought the Whites with all their energy. Indeed, they considered the Whites so great a threat to the revolution they even agreed to pursue a pact with the Bolsheviks, who had betrayed them twice already and had subjected both them and the peasantry to repression. As such, it could be argued that the Bolsheviks were the only counter-revolutionaries the Makhnovists can be accurately accused of collaborating with.

Every historian who has studied the movement has refuted claims that the Makhnovist movement made any alliance with the counter-revolutionary White forces. For example, Michael Palij notes that Denikin "*was the main enemy that Makhno fought, stubbornly and uncompromising, from the end of 1918 to the end of 1919. Its social and anti-Ukrainian policies greatly antagonised all segments of Ukrainian society. The result of this was an increased resistance to the Volunteer Army and its regime and a substantial strengthening of the Makhno movement.*" He also notes that after several months of "*hard fighting*" Denikin's troops "*came to regard Makhno's army as their most formidable enemy.*" Makhno's conflict with Wrangel was equally as fierce and "*[a]lthough Makhno had fought both the Bolsheviks and Wrangel, his contribution to the final defeat of the latter was essential, as is proved by the efforts of both sides to have him as an ally.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 177, p. 202 and p. 228] According to Footman, Makhno "*remained to the end the implacable enemy of the Whites.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 295] Malet just states the obvious: "*The Makhnovists were totally opposed to the Whites.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 140]

We will leave the last word to the considered judgement of the White General Denikin who, in exile, stated that the Makhno movement was "*the most antagonistic to the idea of the White movement.*" [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 140]

In summary, the Makhnovists fought the White counter-revolution with all their might, playing a key role in the struggle and defeat of both Denikin and Wrangel. Anyone who claims that they worked with the Whites is either ignorant or a liar.

## 13 What was the relationship of the Bolsheviks to the movement?

The Makhnovists worked with the Bolsheviks in three periods. The first (and longest) was against Denikin after the Red Army had entered the Ukraine after the withdrawal of the Austro-Germans. The second was an informal agreement for a short period after Denikin had been defeated. The third was a formal political and military agreement between October and November 1920 in the struggle against Wrangel. Each period of co-operation ended with Bolshevik betrayal and conflict between the two forces.

As such, the relationship of the Bolsheviks to the Makhnovists was one of, at best, hostile co-operation against a common enemy. Usually, it was one of conflict. This was due, fundamentally, to two different concepts of social revolution. While the Makhnovists, as anarchists, believed in working-class self-management and autonomy, the Bolsheviks believed that only a centralised state structure (headed by themselves) could ensure the success of the revolution. By equating working-class power with Bolshevik party government (and from 1919 onwards, with the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party), they could not help viewing the Makhnovist movement as a threat to their power (see [section 14](#) for a discussion of the political differences and the evolving nature of the Bolshevik's conception of party rule).

Such a perspective ensured that they could only co-operate during periods when the White threat seemed most dangerous. As soon as the threat was defeated or they felt strong enough, the Bolsheviks turned on their former allies instantly. This section discusses each of the Bolshevik betrayals and the subsequent conflicts. As such, it is naturally broken up into three parts, reflecting each of the betrayals and their aftermath.

Michael Malet sums up the usual Bolshevik-Makhnovist relationship by arguing that it *"will be apparent that the aim of the Soviet government from the spring of 1919 onwards was to destroy the Makhnovists as an independent force, preferably killing Makhno himself in the process . . . Given the disastrous nature of Bolshevik land policy . . . this was not only unsurprisingly, it was inevitable."* He also adds that the *"fact that Makhno had a socio-political philosophy to back up his arguments only made the Bolsheviks more determined to break his hold over the south-east Ukraine, as soon as they realised that Nestor would not surrender that hold voluntarily."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 128 and p. 129]

The first betrayal occurred in June 1919. The Makhnovists had been integrated with the Red Army in late January 1919, retaining their internal organisation (including the election of commanders) and their black flags. With the Red Army they fought against Denikin's Volunteer Army. Before the arrival of

Red forces in their region and the subsequent pact, the Makhnovists had organised a successful regional insurgent, peasant and worker congress which had agreed to call a second for February 12th. This second congress set up a Revolutionary Military Soviet to implement the decisions of this and following congresses. This congress (see [section 7](#)) passed an anti-Bolshevik resolution, which urged *"the peasants and workers to watch vigilantly the actions of the Bolshevik regime that cause a real danger to the worker-peasant revolution."* Such actions included the monopolisation of the revolution, centralising power and overriding local soviets, repressing anarchists and Left Socialist Revolutionaries and *"stifling any manifestation of revolutionary expression."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 154]

This change from the recent welcome was simply the behaviour of the Bolsheviks since their arrival. The (unelected) Ukrainian Bolshevik government had tried to apply the same tactics as its Russian equivalent, particularly as regards the peasants. In addition, the Bolshevik land policy (as indicated in [section 8](#)) was a complete disaster, alien to the ideas and needs of the peasants and, combined with grain requisitioning, alienating them.

The third congress was held on the 10th of April. By this time, Communist agricultural policy and terrorism had alienated all the peasantry, who *"rich and poor alike"* were *"united in their opposition"* to the Bolsheviks. [Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 269] Indeed, the *"poorer the areas, the more dissatisfied were the peasants with the Bolshevik decrees."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 156] As we indicated in [section 7](#), the third congress was informed that it was *"counter-revolutionary"* and banned by the Bolshevik commander Dybenko, provoking a famous reply which stressed the right of a revolutionary people to apply the gains of that revolution when they see fit. It is worth re-quoting the relevant section:

*"Can there exist laws made by a few people who call themselves revolutionaries which permit them to outlaw a whole people who are more revolutionary than they are themselves? . . .*

*"Is it permissible, is it admissible, that they should come to the country to establish laws of violence, to subjugate a people who have just overthrown all lawmakers and all laws?"*

*"Does there exist a law according to which a revolutionary has the right to apply the most severe penalties to a revolutionary mass, of which he calls himself the defender, simply because this mass has taken the good things which the revolution promised them, freedom and equality, without his permission?"*

*"Should the mass of revolutionary people perhaps be silent when such a revolutionary takes away the freedom which they have just conquered?"*

*"Do the laws of the revolution order the shooting of a delegate because he believes he ought to carry out the mandate given him by the revolutionary mass which elected him?"*

*"Whose interests should the revolutionary defend; those of the Party or those of the people"*

*who set the revolution in motion with their blood?"* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 103]

After the 3rd congress, the Bolsheviks started to turn against Makhno:

*"It was now that favourable mention of Makhno ceased to appear in the Soviet Press; an increasingly critical note became apparent. Supplies failed to get through to Makhnovite units and areas."* [Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 271]

Lenin himself advised local Bolshevik leaders on Makhno, stating in early May that *"temporarily, while Rostov is not yet captured, it is necessary to be diplomatic."* [quoted by Arthur E. Adams, **Bolsheviks in the Ukraine**, pp. 352-3] Thus, as long as the Bolsheviks needed cannon fodder, Makhno was to be tolerated. Things changed when Trotsky arrived. On May 17th he promised a *"radical and merciless liquidation of partisanshchina [the partisan movement], independence, hooliganism, and leftism."* [quoted by Adams, **Op. Cit.**, p. 360] According to one historian, Trotsky *"favoured a thoroughgoing annihilation of the partisan's ideological leaders as well as men like Hryhoriyov who wielded political power."* [Adams, **Op. Cit.**, p. 360] Unsurprisingly, given Trotsky's stated mission, Bolshevik hostility towards the Makhnovists became more than mere words. It took the form of both direct and indirect aggression. *"In the latter part of May,"* states Footman, *"the Cheka sent over two agents to assassinate Makhno."* Around the same time, the Red *"hold-back of supplies for the Insurgents developed into a blockade of the area. Makhnovite units at the front ran short of ammunition."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 271 and p. 272] This, obviously, had a negative impact the Makhnovists' ability to fight the Whites.

Due to the gravity of the military and political situations both at and behind the front, the Makhnovist Revolutionary Military Soviet decided to call an extraordinary congress of peasants, workers, insurgents and Red soldiers. This congress was to determine the immediate tasks and the practical measures to be taken by the workers to remedy the mortal danger represented by the Whites. On May 31st, a call was sent out which stated, in part, *"that only the working masses themselves can find a solution [to the current problem], and not individuals or parties."* The congress would be based as follows: *"elections of delegates of peasants and workers will take place at general assemblies of villages, towns, factories and workshops."* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 121]

The Bolshevik reply came quickly, with Trotsky issuing his infamous Order no. 1824 on June 4th:

*"This Congress is directed squarely against the Soviet Power in the Ukraine and against the organisation of the southern front, where Makhno's brigade is stationed. This congress can have no other result then to excite some new disgraceful revolt like that of Grigor'ev, and to open the front to the Whites, before whom Makhno's brigade can only retreat incessantly on account of the incompetence, criminal designs and treason of its commanders."*

*"1. By the present order this congress is forbidden, and will in no circumstances be*

*allowed to take place.*

*"2. All the peasant and working class population shall be warned. orally and in writing, that participation in the said congress will be considered an act of high treason against the Soviet Republic and the Soviet front.*

*"3. All delegates to the said Congress shall be arrested immediately and brought before the Revolutionary Military Tribunal of the 14th, formerly 2nd, Army of the Ukraine.*

*"4. The persons spreading the call of Makhno and the Hulyai Pole Executive Committee to the Congress shall likewise be arrested.*

*"5. The present order shall have the force of law as soon as it is telegraphed. It should be widely distributed, displayed in all public places, and sent to the representatives of the executive committees of towns and villages, as well as to all the representatives of Soviet authority, and to commanders and commissars of military units." [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 122-3]*

Arshinov argues that this *"document is truly classic"* and *"[w]hoever studies the Russian revolution should learn it by heart."* He compares Trotsky's order to the reply the Makhnovists had sent to the Bolsheviks' attempt to ban the third congress. Clearly, Order No. 1824 shows that laws did exist *"made by a few people who call themselves revolutionaries which permit them to outlaw a whole people who are more revolutionary than they are themselves"*! Equally, the order shows that *"a revolutionary has the right to apply the most severe penalties to a revolutionary mass . . . simply because this mass has taken the good things which the revolution has promised them, freedom and equality, without his permission"*! Little wonder Arshinov states that this order meant that the *"entire peasant and labouring population are declared guilty of high treason if they dare to participate in their own free congress."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 123]

According to Voline, in Alexandrovsk *"all workers meetings planned for the purpose of discussing the call of the Council and the agenda of the Congress were forbidden under pain of death. Those which were organised in ignorance of the order were dispersed by armed force. In other cities and towns, the Bolsheviks acted in the same way. As for the peasants in the villages, they were treated with still less ceremony; in many places militants and even peasants 'suspected of acting in favour of the insurgents and the Congress' were seized and executed after a semblance of a trial. Many peasants carrying the call were arrested, 'tried' and shot, before they could even find out about Order No. 1824."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 599-600]

As Arshinov summarises:

*"This entire document represents such a crying usurpation of the rights of the workers that it is pointless to comment further on it." [Op. Cit., p. 124]*

Trotsky continued his usurpation of the rights of the workers in a later order on the congress. In this, Trotsky called this openly announced workers, peasant and insurgent congress a "*conspiracy against Soviet power*" and a "*congress of Anarchist-kulaks delegates for struggle against the Red Army and the Soviet power*" (which explains why the congress organisers had asked that hotbed of kulakism, the Red Army troops, to send delegates!). Trotsky indicated the fate of those workers and peasants who dared participate in their own revolution: "*There can be only one penalty for these individuals: shooting.*" [**How the Revolution Armed**, vol. II, p. 293]

Trotsky also ordered the arrest of Makhno, who escaped but who ordered his troops to remain under Bolshevik command to ensure that the front against Denikin was maintained. However, five members of his staff were shot for having distributed literature concerning the banned fourth congress. This order was the first step in the Bolshevik attempt to "*liquidate the Makhnovist movement.*" This campaign saw Bolshevik regiments invade the insurgent area, shooting militants on the spot and destroying the free communes and other Makhnovist organisations. [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 121] It should be noted that during the Spanish Revolution, the Stalinists acted in the same way, attacking rural collectives while the anarchist troops fought against Franco at the front.

Thus the participating event for the break between the Makhnovists and Bolsheviks was Trotsky's banning of the fourth regional congress. However, this was preceded by an intense press campaign against the Makhnovists as well as holding back of essential supplies from the frontline troops. Clearly the Bolsheviks considered that the soviet system was threatened if soviet conferences were called and that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" was undermined if the proletariat took part in the revolutionary process!

With the Makhnovist front weakened, they could not hold against Denikin's attacks, particularly when Red Army troops retreated on their flank. Thus, the front which the Makhnovists themselves had formed and held for more than six months was finally broken. [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 124] The Red Army was split into three and the Whites entered the Ukraine, which the Bolsheviks promptly abandoned to its fate. The Makhnovists, drawing stray Red Army and other forces to it, continued to fight the Whites, ultimately inflicting a decisive defeat on them at Peregonovka, subsequently destroying their supply lines and ensuring Denikin's defeat (see [section 4](#)).

The Red Army re-entered the Ukraine at the end of 1919. Bolshevik plans with regard to the Makhnovists had already been decided in a secret order written by Trotsky on December 11th. Red Army troops had to "*be protected against infection by guerrilla-ism and Makhnovism*" by various means, including "*extensive agitation*" which used "*examples from the past to show the treacherous role played by the Makhnovites.*" A "*considerable number of agents*" would be sent "*ahead*" of the main forces to "*join the guerrilla detachments*" and would agitate against "*guerrilla-ism.*" Once partisan forces meet with Red Army troops, the former "*ceases to be a military unit after it has appeared on our side of the line . . . From that moment it becomes merely material for processing, and for that purpose is to be sent to our rear.*" To "*secure complete subordination of the detachments,*" the Red forces "*must make use of the agents previously set to these detachments.*" The aim, simply put, was to ensure that the



partisans became *"fully subordinate to our command."* If the partisans who had been fighting for revolution and against the Whites opposed becoming *"material for processing"* (i.e. cannon fodder), *"refuses to submit to orders, displays unruliness and self-will,"* then it *"must be subjected to ruthless punishment."* Recognising the organic links the partisans had with the peasants, Trotsky argues that *"in the Ukraine, guerrilla detachments appear and disappear with ease, dissolving themselves into the mass of the armed peasant population"* and so *"a fundamental condition for the success against guerrilla-ism is unconditional disarmament of the rural population, without exception."* [Trotsky, **How the Revolution Armed**, vol. II, pp. 440-2] As events would show, the Bolsheviks implemented Trotsky's order to the letter.

On December 24th, Makhno's troops met with the Bolshevik 14th army and its commander *"admitted Makhno's service in defeating Denikin."* However, while *"the Bolsheviks fraternised with the Makhno troops . . . they distrusted Makhno, fearing the popularity he had gained as a result of his successful fighting against Denikin."* The Bolsheviks had *"no intention of tolerating Makhno's independent policy, but hoped first to destroy his army by removing it from its own base. With this in mind, on January 8th, 1920, the Revolutionary Military Council of the Fourteenth Army ordered Makhno to move to the Polish Front . . . The author of the order realised that there was no real war between the Poles and the Bolsheviks at the time and he also knew that Makhno would not abandon his region. . . . Uborevich [the author] explained that 'an appropriate reaction by Makhno to this order would give us the chance to have accurate grounds for our next steps' . . . [He] concluded: 'The order is a certain political manoeuvre and, at the very least, we expect positive results from Makhno's realisation of this.'"* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 209 and p. 210] As can be seen, these actions fit perfectly with Trotsky's secret order and with Bolshevik desire for a monopoly of power for itself (see [next section](#)).

As expected, the Makhnovists refused to leave their territory. They realised the political motivations behind the order. As Arshinov notes, *"[s]ending the insurrectionary army to the Polish front meant removing from the Ukraine the main nerve centre of the revolutionary insurrection. This was precisely what the Bolsheviks wanted: they would then be absolute masters of the rebellious region, and the Makhnovists were perfectly aware of this."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 163] As well as political objections, the Makhnovists listed practical reasons for not going. Firstly, *"the Insurrectionary Army was subordinate neither to the 14th Corps nor to any other unit of the Red Army. The Red commander had no authority to give orders to the Insurrectionary Army."* Secondly, *"it was materially impossible to carry it out, since half the men, as well as nearly all the commanders and staff, and Makhno himself, were sick [with typhus]."* Thirdly, *"the fighting qualities and revolutionary usefulness of the Insurrectionary Army were certainly much greater on their own ground."* [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 650-1]

The Bolsheviks refused to discuss the issue and on the 14th of January, they declared the Makhnovists outlawed. They then *"made a great effort to destroy"* Makhno. [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 210] In summary, the Bolsheviks **started** the conflict in order to eliminate opposition to their power. This led to nine months of bitter fighting between the Red Army and the Makhnovists. To prevent fraternisation, the Bolsheviks did not use local troops and instead imported Latvian, Estonian and Chinese troops. They also used other *"new tactics,"* and *"attacked not only Makhno's partisans, but also the villages and towns in which the population was sympathetic toward Makhno. They shot ordinary soldiers as well as their commanders,*

*destroying their houses, confiscating their properties and persecuting their families. Moreover the Bolsheviks conducted mass arrests of innocent peasants who were suspected of collaborating in some way with the partisans. It is impossible to determine the casualties involved." They also set up "Committees of the Poor" as part of the Bolshevik administrative apparatus, which acted as "informers helping the Bolshevik secret police in its persecution of the partisans, their families and supporters, even to the extent of hunting down and executing wounded partisans." [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 212-3]*

This conflict undoubtedly gave time for the Whites to reorganise themselves and encouraged the Poles to invade the Ukraine, so prolonging the Civil War. The Makhnovists were threatened by both the Bolsheviks **and** Wrangel. By mid-1920, Wrangel appeared to be gaining the upper hand and the Makhnovists *"could not remain indifferent to Wrangel's advance . . . Everything done to destroy him would in the last analysis benefit the revolution."* This led the Makhnovists to consider allying with the Bolsheviks as *"the difference between the Communists and Wrangel was that the Communists had the support of the masses with faith in the revolution. It is true that these masses were cynically misled by the Communists, who exploited the revolutionary enthusiasm of the workers in the interests of Bolshevik power."* With this in mind, the Makhnovists agreed at a mass assembly to make an alliance with the Bolsheviks against Wrangel as this would eliminate the White threat and end the civil war. [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 176]

The Bolsheviks ignored the Makhnovist offer using mid-September, when *"Wrangel's success caused the Bolsheviks leaders to reconsider."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 223] Sometime between the 10th and 15th of October the final agreement was signed:

*"Part I -- Political Agreement.*

*"1. Immediate release of all Makhnovists and anarchists imprisoned or in exile in the territories of the Soviet Republic; cessation of all persecutions of Makhnovists or anarchists, except those who carry on armed conflict against the Soviet Government.*

*"2. Complete freedom in all forms of public expression and propaganda for all Makhnovists and anarchists, for their principles and ideas, in speech and the press, with the exception of anything that might call for the violent overthrow of the Soviet Government, and on condition that the requirements of military censorship be respected. For all kinds of publications, the Makhnovists and anarchists, as revolutionary organisations recognised by the Soviet Government may make use of the technical apparatus of the Soviet State, while naturally submitting to the technical rules for publication.*

*"3. Free participation in elections to the Soviets; and the right of Makhnovists and anarchists to be elected thereto. Free participation in the organisation of the forthcoming Fifth Pan-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets . . .*

*"Part II -- Military Agreement.*

*"1. The Ukrainian Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army (Makhnovist) will join the armed forces of the Republic as a partisan army, subordinate, in regard to operations, to the supreme command of the Red Army; it will retain its established internal structure, and does not have to adopt the bases and principles of the regular Red Army.*

*"2. When crossing Soviet territory at the front, or going between fronts, the Insurrectionary Army will not accept into its ranks neither any detachments of, nor deserters from, the Red Army . . .*

*"3. For the purpose of destroying the common enemy -- the White Army -- the Ukrainian Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army (Makhnovists) will inform the working masses that collaborate with it the agreement that has been concluded; it will call upon the people to cease all military actions hostile to the Soviet power; and for its part, the Soviet power will immediately publish the clauses of the agreement.*

*"4. The families of combatants of the Makhnovist Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army living in the territory of the Soviet Republic shall enjoy the same rights as those of soldiers of the Red Army . . ." [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 178]*

This agreement was agreed by both sides, although the Bolsheviks immediately broke it by publishing the military agreement first, followed by the political agreement a week later, so obscuring the real meaning of the pact. As it stands, the political clause simply gave anarchists and Makhnovists the rights they should have already had, according to the constitution of the Soviet state. This shows how far the Bolsheviks had applied that constitution.

The agreement is highly significant as in itself it disproves many of the Bolsheviks slanders about the Makhnovists and it proves the suppression of the anarchist press to have been on political grounds.

However, the Makhnovists desired to add a fourth clause to the Political Agreement:

*"Since one of the essential principles of the Makhnovist movement is the struggle for the self-management of the workers, the Insurrectionary Army (Makhnovist) believes it should insist on the following fourth point of the political agreement: in the region where the Makhnovist Army is operating, the population of workers and peasants will create its own institutions of economic and political self-management; these institutions will be autonomous and joined in federation, by means of agreement, with the government organs of the Soviet Republic," [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 179-80]*

Unsurprisingly, the Bolsheviks refused to ratify this clause. As one Bolshevik historian pointed out, the *"fourth point was fundamental to both sides, it meant the system of free Soviets, which was in total*

*opposition to the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 108] As we discuss in the [next section](#), the Bolsheviks had equated the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*" with the dictatorship of their party and so working-class self-management could not be allowed. It should be noted that this fourth clause was the cause of Lenin and Trotsky's toying with the idea of allowing the Makhnovists south-eastern Ukraine as an anarchist experiment (as mentioned by both Victor Serge and Trotsky in later years).

Once Wrangel had been defeated by Makhnovist and Red Army units, the Bolsheviks turned on the movement. Makhno had "*assumed that the coming conflict with the Bolsheviks could be limited to the realm of ideas, feeling that the strong revolutionary ideas and feelings of the peasants, together with their distrust of the foreign invaders, were the best guarantees for the movement's territory. Moreover, Makhno believed that the Bolsheviks would not attack his movement immediately. A respite of some three months would have allowed him to consolidate his power [sic!] and to win over much of the Bolshevik rank and file.*" [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 231] From the wording of the second clause of the military agreement (namely, to refuse Red Army deserters or units), it is clear that the Bolsheviks were aware of the appeal of Makhnovist politics on the Red Army soldiers. As soon as Wrangel was defeated, the Red Army attacked. Makhnovist commanders were invited to meetings, arrested and then shot. The Red Army surrounded Makhnovist units and attacked them. At the same time, anarchists were arrested all across the Ukraine. Hulyai Pole itself was attacked (Makhno, despite overwhelming odds, broke out). [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 71-2]

In the words of Makhno:

*"In this difficult and responsible revolutionary position the Makhno movement made one great mistake: alliance with the Bolsheviks against a common enemy, Wrangel and the Entente. In the period of this alliance that was morally right and of practical value for the revolution, the Makhno movement mistook Bolshevik revolutionism and failed to secure itself in advance against betrayal. The Bolsheviks and their experts treacherously circumvented it."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 234]

While the Bolsheviks continuously proclaimed the final defeat of the Makhnovists, they held out for nearly a year before being forced to leave the Ukraine in August 1921. Indeed, by the end of 1920 his troops number ten to fifteen thousand men and the "*growing strength of the Makhno army and its successes caused serious concern in the Bolshevik regime.*" More Red troops were deployed, "*stationing whole regiments, primarily cavalry, in the occupied villages to terrorise the peasants and prevent them from supporting Makhno. . . Cheka punitive units were constantly trailing the partisans, executing Makhno's sympathisers and the partisans' families.*" [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 237 and p. 238] Combined with this state terrorism, economic conditions in the villages got worse. The countryside was exhausted and 1921 was a famine year. With his rural base itself barely surviving, the Makhnovists could not survive long.

It should be noted that during the periods after the Bolsheviks had turned on the Makhnovists, the latter

appealed to rank-and-file Red Army troops not to attack them. As one of their leaflets put it: "*Down with fratricidal war among the working people!*" They urged the Red Army troops (with some success) to rebel against the commissars and appointed officers and join with the Makhnovists, who would "*greet [them] as our own brothers and together we will create a free and just life for workers and peasants and will struggle against all tyrants and oppressors of the working people.*" [contained in Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 276 and p. 283]

Even after the defeat of the Makhnovists, the Bolsheviks did not stop their campaign of lies. For example, Trotsky reported to the Ninth Congress of Soviets on December 26th, 1921, that the Makhnovists were "*in Romania,*" where Makhno had "*received a friendly welcome*" and was "*liv[ing] comfortably in Bucharest.*" The Makhnovists had picked Romania because it was, like Poland, "*a country where they . . . felt secure*" due to the way they treated "*Russian counter-revolutionary bands.*" [**How the Revolution Armed**, vol. IV, p. 404] In reality, the "*Romanian authorities put Makhno, his wife, and his followers in an internment camp.*" The Bolsheviks were not unaware of this, as they "*sent a series of sharp diplomatic notes demanding Makhno's extradition.*" They expelled Makhno and his wife to Poland on April 11, 1922. The Poles also interned them and, again, the Bolsheviks demanded Makhno's extradition "*on the ground that he was a criminal and not entitled to political asylum.*" [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 242] Trotsky's lies come as no surprise, given his and his party's track record on slandering anarchists.

As can be seen, the relationship of the Makhnovists to the Bolsheviks was one of constant betrayal of the former by the latter. Moreover, the Bolsheviks took every opportunity to slander the Makhnovists, with Trotsky going so far as to report Makhno was living well while he was rotting in a capitalist prison. This is to be expected, as the aims of the two groups were at such odds. As we discuss in the [next section](#), while the Makhnovists did whatever they could to encourage working-class self-management and freedom, the Bolsheviks had evolved from advocating the government of their party as the expression of "the dictatorship of the proletariat" to stating that only the dictatorship of their party could ensure the success of a social revolution and so **was** "the dictatorship of the proletariat." As the Makhnovist movement shows, if need be, the party would happily exercise its dictatorship **over** the proletariat (and peasantry) if that was needed to retain its power.

## 14 How did the Makhnovists and Bolsheviks differ?

Like chalk and cheese.

Whereas the Bolsheviks talked about soviet democracy while exercising a party dictatorship, the Makhnovists not only talked about "*free soviets,*" they also encouraged them with all their ability. Similarly, while Lenin stated that free speech was "*a bourgeois notion*" and that there could be "*no free speech in a revolutionary period,*" the Makhnovists proclaimed free speech for working people. [Lenin quoted by Goldman, **My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 33] While the Bolsheviks ended up arguing for the necessity of party dictatorship during a revolution, the Makhnovists introduced free soviets and organised peasant, worker and insurgent congresses to conduct the revolution.

We have discussed the Makhnovist ideas in both theory and practice in sections [5](#), [6](#) and [7](#). In spite of the chaos and difficulties imposed upon the movement by having to fight the counter-revolution, the Makhnovists applied their ideals constantly. The Makhnovists were a mass movement and its constructive efforts showed that there was an alternative route the Russian revolution could have followed other than the authoritarian dictatorship that Leninists, then and now, claimed was inevitable if the revolution was to be saved.

To see why, we must compare Bolshevik ideology and practice to that of the Makhnovists in three key areas. Firstly, on how a revolution should be defended. Secondly, on the role of the soviets and party in the revolution. Thirdly, on the question of working-class freedom.

Early in 1918, after the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty the Bolsheviks re-introduced Tsarist officers into the army alongside bourgeois military discipline. As Maurice Brinton correctly summarises:

*"Trotsky, appointed Commissar of Military Affairs after Brest-Litovsk, had rapidly been reorganising the Red Army. The death penalty for disobedience under fire had been restored. So, more gradually, had saluting, special forms of address, separate living quarters and other privileges for officers. Democratic forms of organisation, including the election of officers, had been quickly dispensed with."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 37]

Officers were appointed rather than elected. They argued this had to be done to win the war. The *"principle of election,"* stated Trotsky, *"is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient and has been, in practice, abolished by decree."* Thus the election of officers and the creation of soldiers' committees was abolished from the top, replaced by appointed officers. Trotsky's rationale for this was simply that *"political power is in the hands of the same working class from whose ranks the Army is recruited."* In other words, the Bolshevik Party held power as power was actually held by it, **not** the working class. Trotsky tried to answer the obvious objection:

*"Once we have established the Soviet regime, that is a system under which the government is headed by persons who have been directly elected by the Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies, there can be no antagonism between the government and the mass of the workers, just as there is no antagonism between the administration of the union and the general assembly of its members, and, therefore, there cannot be any grounds for fearing the **appointment** of members of the commanding staff by the organs of the Soviet Power."* [**Work, Discipline, Order**]

He repeated this argument in his 1919 diatribe against the Makhnovists:

*"The Makhnovites shout raucously: 'Down with appointed commanders!' This they do only so as to delude the ignorant element among their own soldiers. One can speak of*

*'appointed' persons only under the bourgeois order, when Tsarist officials or bourgeois ministers appointed at their own discretion commanders who kept the soldier masses subject to the bourgeois classes. Today there is no authority in Russia but that which is elected by the whole working class and working peasantry. It follows that commanders appointed by the central Soviet Government are installed in their positions by the will of the working millions. But the Makhnovite commanders reflect the interests of a minute group of Anarchists who rely on the kulaks and the ignorant.*" [The Makhno Movement]

Of course, most workers are well aware that the administration of a trade union usually works against them during periods of struggle. Indeed, so are most Trotskyists as they often denounce the betrayals by that administration. Thus Trotsky's own analogy indicates the fallacy of his argument. Equally, it was not *"the will of the working millions"* which appointed anyone, it was a handful of leaders of the Bolshevik party (which had manipulated the soviets to remain in power). Needless to say, this was a vast change from Lenin's comments in **State and Revolution** opposing appointment and calling for election of **all** officials!

Moreover, the explanation that *"the ignorant"* were to blame for Makhnovist opposition to appointed officers had a long legacy with Trotsky. In April 1918, when justifying Bolshevik introduction of appointed officers, he had argued that the *"Soviet government is the same as the committee of a trade union. It is elected by the workers and peasants and you can at the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, at any moment you like, dismiss that government and appoint another. But once you have appointed it, you must give it the right to choose the technical specialists."* He stressed that this applied *"in military affairs, in particular."* Using the trade union analogy, he argued that the workers had *"entrusted us [the Bolshevik leaders] with the direction of the union"* and this meant that the Bolshevik leaders, not the workers, should decide things as *"we are better able to judge in the matter"* than them! The workers role was stated clearly: *"if our way of conducting the business is bad, then throw us out and elect another committee!"* [Leon Trotsky Speaks, p. 113] In other words, like any bureaucrat, for Trotsky working-class participation in the affairs of the revolution was seen as irrelevant: the masses had voted and their role was now that of obeying those who *"are better able to judge."*

Using an argument the Tsar could have been proud of, Trotsky defended the elimination of soldier democracy:

*"How could soldiers who have just entered the army choose the chiefs! Have they any vote to go by? They have none. And therefore elections are impossible."* [Ibid.]

Equally, how could workers and peasants who have just entered political or economic struggle in 1917 choose the chiefs? Had they any vote to go by? They had none. And therefore political and workplace elections are impossible. Unsurprisingly, Trotsky soon ended up applying this logic to politics as well, defending (like all the leaders of Bolshevism) the dictatorship of the party **over** working class. How could the *"ignorant"* workers be expected to elect the best *"chiefs"* never mind manage their own affairs!

Ironically, in 1936 the Stalinist Communist Party in Spain was to make very similar arguments about the need for a regular army and army discipline to win the war. As Aileen O'Carroll in her essay "*Freedom and Revolution*" argues:

*"The conventional army structure evolved when feudal kings or capitalist governments required the working class to fight its wars for them. These had to be authoritarian institutions, because although propaganda and jingoism can play a part initially in encouraging enlistment, the horrors of war soon expose the futility of nationalism. A large part of military organisation is aimed at ensuring that soldiers remain fighting for causes they do not necessarily believe in. Military discipline attempts to create an unthinking, unquestioning body of soldiers, as fearful of their own side as of the other."* [**Red & Black Revolution**, no. 1]

In short in both Russia and Spain the Bolsheviks wanted an army that would obey them regardless of whether the individual soldiers felt they were doing the correct thing, indeed who would obey through fear of their officers even when they knew what they were doing was wrong. Such a body would be essential for enforcing minority rule over the wishes of the workers. Would a self-managed army be inclined to repress workers' and peasants' strikes and protests? Of course not.

The Makhnovists show that another kind of revolutionary army was possible in the Russian Revolution and that the "*ignorant*" masses could choose their own officers. In other words, the latter-day justifications of the followers of Bolshevism are wrong when they assert that the creation of the top-down, hierarchical Red Army was a result of the "*contradiction between the political consciousness and circumstantial coercion*" and "*a retreat*" because "*officers were appointed and not elected,*" it was a conscript army and "*severe military discipline.*" [John Rees, "*In Defence of October*", **International Socialism**, no. 52, pp. 3-82, p. 46] As can be seen, Trotsky did not consider it as a "*retreat*" or caused by "*circumstances.*" Equally, the Makhnovists managed to organise themselves relatively democratically in the circumstances created by the same civil war.

As such, the differences between the Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks as regards the internal organisation of a revolutionary army are clear. The Bolsheviks applied top-down, bourgeois methods of internal organisation and discipline. The Makhnovists applied democratic internal organisation and discipline as far as possible.

From our discussion of the Bolshevik justifications for its system of appointed officers in the Red Army, it will come as no surprise that as regards the relationship of the soviets to the revolutionary organisation (party) the Makhnovists and Bolsheviks were (again) miles apart. While we discuss this in greater detail in [section 14](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)", we will give a flavour of Bolshevik ideology on this subject here.

From the start, Lenin identified soviet (or working class) power with the power of their own party. In October 1917, Lenin was equating party and class: "*the power of the Bolsheviks -- that is, the power of*



*the proletariat.*" [**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 102] After the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks were clear that the soviets would not have "*all power.*" Rather, the first act of soviet sovereignty was to alienate it into the hands of a Bolshevik government. In response to a few leading Bolsheviks who called for a coalition government, the Bolshevik Central Committee stated that it was "*impossible to refuse a purely Bolshevik government without treason to the slogan of the power of the Soviets, since a majority at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets . . . handed power over to this government.*" [quoted by Robery V. Daniels, **A Documentary History of Communism**, vol. 1, pp. 127-8] How can the "*power of the Soviets*" exist when said soviets immediately "*handed power*" over to another body? Thus the only "*power*" the soviets had was simply the "*power*" to determine who actually held political power.

The question of who held power, the soviets or the party, came into focus when the soviet elections resulted in non-Bolshevik majorities being elected. After the initial honeymoon period, soviet elections started to go badly for the Bolsheviks. Ever since taking power in 1917, the Bolsheviks had become increasingly alienated from the working class. The spring and summer of 1918 saw "*great Bolshevik losses in the soviet elections*" in all provincial city elections that data is available for. The Mensheviks were the main beneficiaries of these election swings (Socialist Revolutionaries also gained) The Bolsheviks forcibly disbanded such soviets. They continually postponed elections and "*pack[ed] local soviets once they could no longer count on an electoral majority*" by giving representation to the organisations they dominated which made workplace elections meaningless. [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, pp. 22-4 and p. 33] In Petrograd, such packing swamped the actual number of workplace delegates, transforming the soviets and making elections irrelevant. Of the 700-plus deputies to the "new" soviet, over half were elected by Bolshevik dominated organisations so ensuring a solid Bolshevik majority even before the factory voting began.

Thus, the regime remained "soviet" in name only. Faced with a defeat in the soviets, the Bolsheviks simply abolished them or changed them to ensure their position. This process, it should be noted, started **before** the outbreak of Civil War in late May 1918, implying that Bolshevik authoritarianism cannot be explained as reactions to difficult objective circumstances.

Unsurprisingly, Bolshevik ideology started to adjust to the position the party found itself in. As Samuel Farber argues, in the "*period of March to June 1918, Lenin began to make frequent distinctions **within** the working class, singling out workers who could still be trusted, denouncing workers whom he accused of abandoning the working class and deserting to the side of the bourgeoisie, and complaining about how the working class had become 'infected with the disease of petty-bourgeois disintegration.'*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 25] Combined with the vision of "working-class" or "soviet" power expressed by the power of his party, this laid the foundations for what came next. In 1919 Lenin fully and explicitly argued that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" was, in fact, the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party:

*"we are reproached with having established a dictatorship of one party . . . we say, 'Yes, it is a dictatorship of one party! This is what we stand for and we shall not shift from that position . . .'"* [**Collected Works**, vol. 29, p. 535]

This quickly become Bolshevik orthodoxy. Trotsky argued in his infamous work **Terrorism and Communism** that there was "*no substitution at all*" when "*the power of the party*" replaces "*the power of the working class*." Zinoviev argued this point at the Second Congress of the Communist International. As he put it:

*"Today, people like Kautsky come along and say that in Russia you do not have the dictatorship of the working class but the dictatorship of the party. They think this is a reproach against us. Not in the least! We have a dictatorship of the working class and that is precisely why we also have a dictatorship of the Communist Party. The dictatorship of the Communist Party is only a function, an attribute, an expression of the dictatorship of the working class . . . [T]he dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920**, vol. 1, pp. 151-2]

Neither Lenin nor Trotsky disagreed. By the end of the civil war, Lenin was arguing that "*the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of the class, because in all capitalist countries (and not only over here, in one of the most backward) the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts . . . that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard . . . the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation.*" [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 21]

This places the Bolshevik betrayals of the Makhnovists in 1919 and 1920 into **political** context. It also explains the Bolshevik opposition to the proposed fourth clause of the 1920 political and military agreement (see [last section](#)). Simply put, at the time (and long afterwards) the Bolsheviks equated the revolution with their own power. As such, Makhnovist calls for soviet self-management threatened the "dictatorship of the proletariat" (i.e. dictatorship of the party) by encouraging working people to participate in the revolution and giving the radically false idea that working-class power could be exercised by working people and their own class organisations.

Lenin, Trotsky and Zinoviev held this position until their deaths. Trotsky, for example, was arguing in 1923 that "*[i]f there is one question which basically not only does not require revision but does not so much as admit the thought of revision, it is the question of the dictatorship of the Party, and its leadership in all spheres of our work.*" [**Leon Trotsky Speaks**, p. 158] Even after the rise of Stalinism, he was still arguing for the "*objective necessity*" of the "*revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party*" in 1937. He stressed that the "*revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution . . . Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the 'dictatorship' of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions.*" [Trotsky, **Writings 1936-37**, pp. 513-4]

This suggests that the later Trotskyist argument that the Bolsheviks were forced by "*objective factors*" to

replace the dictatorship of the proletariat by that of the party is false. At the time, and afterwards, the Bolsheviks did not argue in these terms. The end of soviet democracy was not considered a problem or a retreat for the revolution. The opposite was the case, with the elimination of democracy being raised to an ideological truism to be applied everywhere. Equally, the fact that the Makhnovists did all they could to promote soviet self-management and actually called regional congresses of workers, peasants and insurgents suggests that "*objective factors*" simply cannot explain Bolshevik actions. Simply put, like the Bolshevik betrayals of the Makhnovists, the Bolshevik elimination of soviet democracy by party dictatorship can only be fully understood by looking at Bolshevik ideology.

Little wonder the Makhnovists argued as followed:

*"Since the arrival of the Bolsheviks the dictatorship of their party has been established here. As a party of statist, the Bolshevik Party everywhere has set up state organs for the purpose of governing the revolutionary people. Everything has to be submitted to their authority and take place under their vigilant eye. All opposition, protest, or even independent initiative has been stifled by their Extraordinary Commissions [the secret police, the Cheka]. Furthermore, all these institutions are composed of people who are removed from labour and from revolution. In other words, what has been created is a situation in which the labouring and revolutionary people have fallen under the surveillance and rule of people who are alien to the working classes, people who are inclined to exercise arbitrariness and violence over the workers. Such is the dictatorship of the Bolshevik-Communist Party . . .*

*"We again remind the working people that they will liberate themselves from oppression, misery and violence only through their own efforts. No change in power will help them in this. Only by means of their own free worker-peasant organisations can the workers reach the summit of the social revolution -- complete freedom and real equality."* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.** pp. 116-7]

Which brings us to the next issue, namely working-class freedom. For anarchists, the key point of a revolution is to increase working-class freedom. It means the end of hierarchy and the direct participation in the revolution by the working classes themselves. As Bakunin put it, "*revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses, and that when it is concentrated in those of a few ruling individuals it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction.*" [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 237] For this reason, the Makhnovists (like Bakunin) argued for a revolutionary society based on free federations of worker and peasant organisations (free soviets).

This means that actions which consolidated rule by a few cannot be revolutionary, even if the few are made up of the most revolutionary of the revolutionaries. Thus working class power cannot be equated to the power of a political party, no matter how "*socialist*" or "*revolutionary*" its ideas or rhetoric. This means that Bolshevik restrictions on working class freedom (of speech, assembly, press, organisation) struck at the heart of the revolution. It did not signify the defence of the revolution, but rather its defeat.

Ultimately, as Emma Goldman quickly recognised, what the Bolsheviks called "*defence of the Revolution*" was "*really only the defence of [the] party in power.*" [**My Disillusionment in Russia**, p. 57]

Anarchists had long argued that, to quote Goldman again, there is "*no greater fallacy than the belief that aims and purposes are one thing, while methods and tactics are another. This conception is a potent menace to social regeneration. All human experience teaches that methods and means cannot be separated from the ultimate aim. The means employed become, through individual practice, part and parcel of the final purpose; they influence it, modify it, and presently the aims and means become identical.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 260] The evolution of Bolshevik practice and theory reinforces this argument. The means used had an impact on the course of events, which in turn shaped the next set of means and the ideology used to justify it.

This explains the Makhnovist and Bolshevik differences in relationship to working-class freedom. For anarchists, only freedom or the struggle for freedom can teach people to be free (and so is genuinely revolutionary). This explains why the Makhnovists not only proclaimed freedom of election, speech, press, assembly and organisation for working people, which was an essential revolutionary position, they also implemented it (see [section 7](#)). The Bolsheviks did the reverse, clamping down on the opposition at every occasion (including workers' strikes and protests). For the Makhnovists, working-class freedom was the key gain of the revolution, and so had to be introduced, practised and defended. Hence Makhno:

*"I consider it an inviolable right of the workers and peasants, a right won by the revolution, to call congresses on their own account, to discuss their affairs. That is why the prohibitions of such congresses, and the declaration proclaiming them illegal . . . , represent a direct and insolent violation of the rights of the workers."* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 129]

For the Bolsheviks, working-class freedom was something to fear. Back in 1903, Lenin laid the groundwork for this by arguing that the "*spontaneous development of the labour movement leads to it being subordinated to bourgeois ideology.*" He stressed that "*the working class, exclusively by their own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness . . . the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose quite independently of the spontaneous growth of the labour movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of ideas among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia.*" This meant that "*Social Democratic [i.e. socialist] consciousness . . . could only be brought to them from without.*" [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 82 and pp. 74-5] Clearly, if the workers turned against the party, then the workers were "*being subordinated to bourgeois ideology.*" It was in their own interests, therefore, for the party to subordinate the workers and so soviet democracy became not an expression of working-class power but rather something which undermined it!

This perspective can be seen when the Makhnovists liberated cities. In Alexandrovsk and Katerinoslav, the Bolsheviks proposed to the Makhnovists spheres of action - their **Revkom** (Revolutionary

Committee) would handle political affairs and the Makhnovists military ones. Makhno advised them *"to go and take up some honest trade instead of seeking to impose their will on the workers."* Instead, the Makhnovists called upon *"the working population to participate in a general conference . . . and it was proposed that the workers organise the life of the city and the functioning of the factories with their own forced and their organisations."* [Arshinov **Op. Cit.**, p. 154 and p. 149] The differences between the Bolsheviks and Makhnovists could not be clearer.

Lastly, we should note that while Lenin and the leading Bolsheviks wholeheartedly opposed working-class economic self-management by factory committees and instead urged "efficient" top-down one-man management, the Makhnovists supported working-class self-management of production. Under the Bolsheviks, as Arshinov argued, the *"nationalisation of industry, [while] removing the workers from the hands of individual capitalists, delivered them to the yet more rapacious hands of a single, ever-present capitalist boss, the State. The relations between the workers and this new boss are the same as earlier relations between labour and capital, with the sole difference that the Communist boss, the State, not only exploits the workers, but also punishes them himself. . . . Wage labour has remained what it was before, except that it has taken on the character of an obligation to the State . . . It is clear that in all this we are dealing with a simple substitution of State capitalism for private capitalism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 71] The Makhnovist propaganda, in contrast, stressed the need for workers to socialise the means of production and place it under their direct management by their own class organs. In other words, the abolition of wage slavery by workers' self-management of production.

Unsurprisingly, the Makhnovists supported the Kronstadt rebellion (see the appendix ["What was the Kronstadt uprising?"](#) for more on Kronstadt). Indeed, there is significant overlap between the Kronstadt demands and the ideas of the Makhnovist movement. For example, the Makhnovist idea of free soviets is almost identical to the first three points of the Kronstadt programme and their land policy the same as point 11 of the Kronstadt demands. The Kronstadt rebels also raised the idea of *"free soviets"* and the *"third revolution,"* common Makhnovist slogans (see [section 3](#) of the appendix ["What was the Kronstadt uprising?"](#) for details). As one Bolshevik writer notes, it is *"characteristic that the anarchist-Makhnovists in the Ukraine reprinted the appeal of the Kronstadters, and in general did not hide their sympathy for them."* [quoted by Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 108] Voline also noted that the *"ideas and activities of the Makhnovist peasants were similar in all respects to those of the Kronstadt rebels in 1921."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 575]

In summary, the major difference between the Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks is that the former stuck by and introduced their stated aims of *"soviet power"* and working-class freedom while the latter rejected them once they clashed with Bolshevik party policies.

## 15 How do the modern followers of Bolshevism slander the Makhnovists?

Many modern-day supporters of Bolshevism, on the rare occasions when they do mention the

Makhnovist movement, simply repeat the old Bolshevik (and Stalinist) slanders against them.

For example, this is what Joseph Seymour of the U.S. **Spartacus League** did. Their newspaper **Workers Vanguard** ran a series entitled "*Marxism vs. Anarchism*" and in part 7, during his discussion of the Russian Revolution, Seymour claimed:

*"The most significant counter-revolutionary force under the banner of anarchism was the Ukrainian peasant-based army of Nestor Makhno, which carried out pogroms against Jewish communities and collaborated with White armies against the Bolsheviks."* [**Workers Vanguard**, 8/30/1996, p. 7]

Seymour, needless to say, made these accusations without providing any documentation, and with good reason, for outside of Stalinist hagiographies, no evidence exists to support his claims. As we indicated in [section 9](#), the Makhnovists opposed anti-Semitism and did **not** conduct pogroms. Equally, [section 12](#) proves that the Makhnovists did **not** collaborate with the Whites in any way (although this did not stop the Bolshevik press deliberately spreading the lie that they had).

More recently, the UK Leninist **Revolutionary Communist Group** asserted in their paper that the Makhnovists "*joined with counter-revolutionary White and imperialist armies against socialist Russia. This band of brigands also carried out pogroms against Jewish communities in the Ukraine.*" [**Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!**, issue no. 174, p. 12] No evidence for such a claim was presented in the original review article. When an anarchist pointed out their assertion was "*falling back on a long tradition of Stalinist lies*" and asked for "*any historical references*" to support it, the paper replied by stating that while there were "*several*" references, it would give two: "*E.H. Carr refers to it in his history of the civil war. Also the anarchist historian Paul Avrich mentions it in his work **The anarchists in the Russian Revolution.***" [**Op. Cit.**, no. 175, p. 15]

In reality, neither work says any such thing. Looking at the first (unnamed) one, assuming it is E.H. Carr's **The Bolshevik Revolution** there is no reference to pogroms carried out by the Makhnovists (looking in the index for "Makhno"). Which, perhaps, explains why the paper refused to provide a book title and page number. As far as the second reference goes, Avrich made no such claim in **The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**. He **did** address the issue in his **Anarchist Portraits**, concluding such charges are false.

And the name of the original article? Ironically, it was entitled "*The anarchist school of falsification*"!

However, more sophisticated slanders, lies and distortions have been levelled at the Makhnovists by the supporters of Bolshevism. This is to be expected, as the experience of the Makhnovists effectively refute the claim that the Bolsheviks had no choice but to act as they did. It is hard to maintain a position that "objective conditions" made the Bolsheviks act as they did when another mass revolutionary army, operating in the same environment, did not act in the same way. This means that the Makhnovists are strong evidence that Bolshevik politics played a key role in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution.

Clearly such a conclusion is dangerous to Bolshevism and so the Makhnovist movement must be attacked, regardless of the facts.

A recent example of this is John Rees' essay "*In Defence of October*" (**International Socialism**, no. 52, pp. 3-82). Rees, a member of the UK Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) is at pains to downplay the role of Bolshevik ideology in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. He argues that "objective factors" ensured that the Bolsheviks acted as they did. The "*subjective factor*" was simply a choice between defeat and defence against the Whites: "*Within these limits Bolshevik policy was decisive.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 30] This explains his attack on the Makhnovist movement. Faced with the same "*objective factors*" as the Bolsheviks, the Makhnovists did not act in the same way. As such, the "*subjective factor*" amounts to more than Rees' stark choice and so objective conditions cannot explain everything.

Clearly, then, the Makhnovists undermine his basic thesis. As such, we would expect a less than honest account of the movement and Rees does not disappoint. He talks about the "*muddled anarchism*" of Makhno, dismissing the whole movement as offering no alternative to Bolshevism and being without "*an articulated political programme.*" Ultimately, for Rees, Makhno's "*anarchism was a thin veneer on peasant rebellion*" and while "*on paper*" the Makhnovists "*appeared to have a more democratic programme*" there were "*frauds.*" [p. 57, p. 58, p. 61 and p. 70]

The reality of the situation is totally different. Ignoring the obvious contradiction (i.e. how can the Makhnovists have the appearance of a "*democratic programme*" and, simultaneously, not articulate it?) we shall analyse his account of the Makhnovist movement in order to show exactly how low the supporters of Bolshevism will go to distort the historical record for their own aims (see the appendix "[What was the Kronstadt uprising?](#)" for Rees's distortions about the Kronstadt revolt). Once the selective and edited quotations provided by Rees are corrected, the picture that clearly emerges is that rather than the Makhnovists being "*frauds,*" it is Rees' account which is the fraud (along with the political tradition which inspired it).

Rees presents two aspects of his critique of the Makhnovists. The first is a history of the movement and its relationships (or lack of them) with the Bolsheviks. The second is a discussion of the ideas which the Makhnovists tried to put into practice. Both aspects of his critique are extremely flawed. Indeed, the errors in his history of the movement are so fundamental (and, indeed, so at odds with his references) that it suggests that ideology overcame objectivity (to be polite). The best that can be said of his account is that at least he does not raise the totally discredited accusation that the Makhnovists were anti-Semitic or "*kulaks.*" However, he more than makes up for this by distorting the facts and references he uses (it would be no exaggeration to argue that the only information Rees gets correct about his sources is the page number).

Rees starts by setting the tone, stating that the "*methods used by Makhno and Antonov [a leader of the "Greens" in Tambov] in their fight against the Red Army often mirrored those used by the Whites.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 57] Strangely enough, while he lists some for Antonov, he fails to specify any against Makhno. However, the scene is set. His strongest piece of evidence as regards Makhno's "*methods*" against the

Red Army come from mid-1920 after, it should be noted, the Bolsheviks had engineered the outlawing of the Makhnovist movement and needlessly started the very conflict Rees uses as evidence against Makhno. In other words, he is attacking the Makhnovists for defending themselves against Bolshevik aggression!

He quotes reports from the Ukrainian Front to blacken the Makhnovists, using them to confirm the picture he extracts from *"the diary of Makhno's wife."* These entries, from early 1920, he claims *"betray the nature of the movement"* (i.e. after, as we shall see, the Bolsheviks had engineered the outlawing of the Makhnovists). [**Op. Cit.**, p. 58] The major problem for Rees' case is the fact that this diary is a fake and has been known to be a fake since Arshinov wrote his classic account of the Makhnovists in 1923:

*"After 1920, the Bolsheviks wrote a great deal about the personal defects of Makhno, basing their information on the diary of his so-called wife, a certain Fedora Gaenko . . . . But Makhno's wife is Galina Andreevna Kuz'menko. She has lived with him since 1918. She **never** kept, and therefore never lost, a diary. Thus the documentation of the Soviet authorities is based on a fabrication, and the picture these authorities draw from such a diary is an ordinary lie."* [Arshinov, **History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 226f]

Ironically enough, Rees implicitly acknowledges this by lamely admitting (in an end note) that *"Makhno seems to have had two 'wives'"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 78] And we should note that the source Rees uses for the fake diary entries (W.H. Chamberlin's **The Russian Revolution**) uses as **his** source the very Bolshevik documentation that Arshinov quite correctly denounced over 70 years before Rees put pen to paper. Little wonder Michael Palij, in his detailed account of the movement (**The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno, 1918-1921**), fails to use it. So, in summary, a major part of his account is based on falsehoods, falsehoods exposed as such decades ago. This indicates well the quality of his case against the Makhnovist movement.

As regards the "evidence" he extracts from this fake diary and Red Army reports, it simply shows that Bolsheviks were shot by Makhno's troops and Red Army troops died in combat. This went both ways, of course. In *"military operations the Bolsheviks shot all prisoners. The Makhnovists shot all captured officers unless the Red rank and file strongly interceded for them. The rank and file were usually sent home, though a number volunteered for service with the Insurgents."* Equally, *"[o]n the occupation of a village by the Red Army the Cheka would hunt out and hang all active Makhnovite supporters; an amenable Soviet would be set up; officials would be appointed or imported to organise the poor peasants . . . and three or four Red militia men left as armed support for the new village bosses."* [David Footman, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 292-3] As such, Rees' account of Makhnovist "terror" against the Bolsheviks seems somewhat hypocritical. We can equally surmise that the methods used by the Bolsheviks against the Makhnovists also *"often mirrored those used by the Whites!"* And Rees lambastes socialist Samuel Farber for mentioning the *"Red Terror, but not the Green Terror"* in Farber's discussion of the Tambov revolt! All in all, pretty pathetic.

Rees' concern for the truth can be seen from the fact that he asserts that Makhno's *"rebellion"* was



"smaller" than the Tambov uprising and distinguished from it "only by the muddled anarchism of its leader." [Op. Cit., p. 58] In fact, the Makhnovist movement was the bigger of the two. As Michael Malet notes:

*"The differences between them explain why the Makhnovshchina lasted over four years, the Antonovshchina less than one year. The initial area of the Makhno movement was larger, and later expanded, whereas the Antonov region was restricted to the southern half of one province throughout its existence. The Makhno movement became established earlier, and was well-known before its break with the soviet regime. A crucial factor was the period of peace between the Bolsheviks and Makhno during the first half of 1919, something Antonov never had. It allowed for political and social development as well as military build-up. It followed from this that Makhno attracted much more support, which was increased and deepened by the positive ideology of Makhno and the anarchists who came to help him. This was not a matter of being anti-State and anti-town -- all the Greens, including Antonov, shared this view in a less sophisticated form -- but a positive land policy and a realisation of the need to link up with the towns on a federal basis in the post-revolutionary society."* [Op. Cit., p. 155]

Even in terms of troops, the Makhno movement was larger. The Antonov rebellion had "a peak of around 20,000" troops. [Read, Op. Cit., p. 268] Makhno, in comparison, had a peak of about 40,000 in late 1919 [Palij, Op. Cit., p. 112] (Read states a peak of around 30,000 [Op. Cit., p. 264]). Even by the end of 1920, a few months into the Tambov rebellion (it started in August of that year), the Makhnovists still had 10 to 15 thousand troops. [Palij, Op. Cit., p. 237]

In summary, the movement which lasted longer, covered a larger area and involved more troops is classed by Rees as the smaller of the two! Incredible -- but it does give a flavour of the scholarship involved in his essay. Perhaps by "smaller" Rees simply meant that Makhno was physically shorter than Antonov?

After getting such minor details as size wrong, Rees turns to the actual history of the movement. He looks at the relations between the Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks, accurately stating that they "were chequered." However, he is wrong when he tries to explain what happened by stating they "reflect[ed] the fast changing military situation in the Ukraine throughout the civil war." [Op. Cit., p. 58] In fact, as we will prove, the relationships between the two forces reflected the military situation refracted through the ideology and needs of Bolshevik power. To ignore the ideological factor in the Makhnovist-Bolshevik relationships cannot be justified as the military situation does **not** fully explain what happened.

The Makhnovists co-operated with the Red Army three times. Only two of these periods were formal alliances (the first and last). Discussing the first two pacts, Rees alleges that the Makhnovists broke with the Bolsheviks. The truth is the opposite -- the Bolsheviks turned on the Makhnovists and betrayed them in order to consolidate their power. These facts are hardly unknown to Rees as they are contained in the

very books he quotes from as evidence for his rewritten history.

The first pact between the Makhnovists and the Red Army ended June 1918. According to Rees, "[c]o-operation continued until June 1919 when the Insurgent Army broke from the Red Army" and quotes Michael Palij's book **The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno** as follows: "as soon as Makhno left the front he and his associates began to organise new partisan detachments in the Bolsheviks' rear, which subsequently attacked strongholds, troops, police, trains and food collectors." [Op. Cit., p. 58] Rees is clearly implying that Makhno attacked the Bolsheviks, apparently for no reason. The truth is totally different. It is easy to show this -- all we need to do is look at the book he uses as evidence.

Rees quotes Palij on page 177. This page is from chapter 16, which is called "*The Bolsheviks Break with Makhno.*" As this was not enough of a clue, Palij presents some necessary background for this Bolshevik break. He notes that before the break, "*the Bolsheviks renewed their anti-Makhno propaganda. Trotsky, in particular, led a violent campaign against the Makhno movement.*" He also mentions that "[a]t the same time, the supplies of arms and other war materials to Makhno were stopped, thus weakening the Makhno forces vis-a-vis the Denikin troops." In this context, the Makhnovists Revolutionary Military Council "decided to call a fourth congress of peasants, workers, and partisans" for June 15th, 1919, which Trotsky promptly banned, warning the population that "*participation in the Congress shall be considered an act of state treason against the Soviet Republic and the front.*" [Op. Cit., p. 175 and p. 176]

The Bolsheviks had, of course, tried to ban the third congress in April but had been ignored. This time, they made sure that they were not. Makhno and his staff were not informed of Trotsky's dictatorial order and learned of it three days later. On June 9th, Makhno sent a telegram informing the Bolsheviks that he was leaving his post as leader of the Makhnovists. He "*handed over his command and left the front with a few of his close associates and a cavalry detachment*" while calling upon the partisans to "*remain at the front to hold off Denikin's forces.*" Trotsky ordered his arrest, but Makhno was warned in advance and escaped. On June 15-16th, members of Makhno's staff "*were captured and executed the next day.*" **Now** Palij recounts how "*[a]s soon as Makhno left the front he and his associates began to organise new partisan detachments in the Bolsheviks' rear, which subsequently attacked strongholds, troops, police, trains and food collectors.*" [Op. Cit., p. 177]

Palij "*subsequently*" refers to Makhno after Denikin's breakthrough and his occupation of the Ukraine. "*The oppressive policy of the Denikin regime,*" he notes, "*convinced the population that it was as bad as the Bolshevik regime, and brought a strong reaction that led able young men . . . to leave their homes and join Makhno and other partisan groups.*" [Op. Cit., p. 190] As Makhno put it, "*[w]hen the Red Army in south Ukraine began to retreat . . . as if to straighten the front line, but in reality to evacuate Ukraine . . . only then did my staff and I decide to act.*" [quoted by Palij, Op. Cit., p. 190] After trying to fight Denikin's troops, Makhno retreated and called upon his troops to leave the Red Army and rejoin the fight against Denikin. He "*sent agents amongst the Red troops*" to carry out propaganda urging them to stay and fight Denikin with the Makhnovists, which they did in large numbers. This propaganda was "*combined with sabotage.*" Between these two events, Makhno had entered the territory of pogromist warlord Hryhoryiv (which did **not** contain Red troops as they were in conflict) and assassinated him.

[Op. Cit., p. 191 and p. 173]

It should also be noted that Palij states that it was the Whites who *"were the main enemy that Makhno fought, stubbornly and uncompromisingly, from the end of 1918 to the end of 1919."* [Op. Cit., p. 177]

Clearly, Rees's summary leaves a lot to be desired! Rather than Makhno attacking the Bolsheviks, it was they who broke with him -- as Palij, Rees's source, makes clear. Indeed, Makhno made no attempt to undermine the Red Army's campaign against Denikin (after all, that would have placed his troops and region in danger). Rather, he waited until the Bolsheviks showed that they would not defend the Ukraine against the Whites before he acted. As such, Rees misuses his source material and used Palij as evidence for a viewpoint which is the exact opposite of the one he recounts. The dishonesty is obvious. But, then again, it is understandable, as Trotsky banning a worker, peasant and partisan congress would hardly fit into Rees' attempt to portray the Bolsheviks as democratic socialists overcome by objective circumstances! Given that the Makhnovists had successfully held three such congresses to discuss the war against reaction, how could objective circumstances be blamed for the dictatorial actions of Trotsky and other leading Red Army officers in the Ukraine? Better not to mention this and instead rewrite history by making Makhno break with the Bolsheviks and attack them for no reason!

Rees moves onto the period of co-operation between the insurgents and the Bolsheviks. His version of what happened is that *"Denikin's advance against Makhno's territory in autumn 1919 quickly forced a renewal of the treaty with the Bolsheviks. Makhno harassed Denikin's troops from the rear, making their advance more difficult."* [Op. Cit., p. 58]

A more accurate account of what happened would be that Makhno reorganised his troops after the Bolsheviks had retreated and evacuated the Ukraine. These troops included those that had been left in the Red Army in June, who now left to rejoin him (and brought a few Red Army units along too). After conducting quick and demoralising raids against Denikin's forces, the Makhnovists were forced to retreat to the West (followed by White forces). In late September, near Peregonovka, Makhno inflicted a major defeat against the following Whites and allowed the Makhnovists to attack across Denikin's supply lines (which stopped his attack on Moscow thus, ironically, saving the Bolshevik regime). Makhno's swift attack on the rear of the Whites ensured their defeat. As the correspondent of **Le Temps** observed:

*"There is no doubt that Denikin's defeat is explained more by the uprising of the peasants who brandished Makhno's black flag, then by the success of Trotsky's regular army. The partisan bands of 'Batko' tipped the scales in favour of the Reds."* [quoted by Palij, Op. Cit., p. 208]

Palij argues that it was the *"rapidly changing military situation [which] soon caused a change in the Bolsheviks' attitude toward Makhno."* The two forces meet up on December 24th, 1919. However, *"[a]lthough the Bolsheviks fraternised with the Makhno troops and the commander even offered co-operation, they distrusted Makhno, fearing the popularity he had gained as a result of his successful*

*fight against Denikin.*" [Op. Cit., p. 209] It should also be stressed that **no** formal treaty was signed.

Clearly, Rees' summary leaves a lot to be desired!

This is not the end of it. Rees even attempts to blame the Makhnovists for the attack of General Wrangel. He argues that *"by the end of 1919 the immediate White threat was removed. Makhno refused to move his troops to the Polish front to meet the imminent invasion and hostilities with the Red Army began again on an even more widespread scale."* [Op. Cit., p. 58]

This, needless to say, is a total distortion of the facts. Firstly, it should be noted that the *"imminent"* invasion by Poland Rees mentions did not, in fact, occur until *"the end of April"* (the 26th, to be precise). The break with Makhno occurred as a result of an order issued in early January (the 8th, to be precise). [Michael Palij, Op. Cit., p. 219 and p. 210] Clearly, the excuse of *"imminent"* invasion was a cover, as recognised by a source Rees himself uses, namely Palij's work:

*"The author of the order realised at that time there was no real war between the Poles and the Bolsheviks at that time and he also knew that Makhno would not abandon his region . . . Uborevich [the author] explained that 'an appropriate reaction by Makhno to this order would give us the chance to have accurate grounds for our next steps' . . . [He] concluded: 'The order is a certain political manoeuvre and, at the very least, we expect positive results from Makhno's realisation of this.'"* [Palij, Op. Cit., p. 210]

This is confirmed by Rees' other references. David Footman, whom Rees also uses for evidence against the Makhnovist movement, notes that while it was *"true there were military reasons for reinforcing"* the Polish frontier (although he also notes the significant fact that the war *"was not to break out for another four months"*), it was *"admitted on the Soviet side that this order was primarily 'dictated by the necessity' of liquidating Makhnovshchina as an independent movement. Only when he was far removed from his home country would it be possible to counteract his influence, and to split up and integrate his partisans into various Red Army formations."* He notes that there were *"other occasions (notably in Siberia) of the Soviet authorities solving the problem of difficult partisan leaders by sending them off to fight on distant fronts"* and, of course, that *"Makhno and his staff . . . were perfectly aware of the underlying Soviet motives."* Footman recounts how the Makhnovist staff sent a *"reasoned reply"* to the Bolsheviks, that there *"was no immediate response"* from them and in *"mid-January the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party declared Makhno and his force to be outside the law, and the Red Army attacked."* [The Russian Civil War, pp. 290-1]

In other words, according to the sources Rees himself selects, the Bolsheviks **started** the conflict in order to eliminate opposition to their power!

Needless to say, the Makhnovists **did** realise the political motivations behind the order. As Arshinov notes, *"[s]ending the insurrectionary army to the Polish front meant removing from the Ukraine the main nerve centre of the revolutionary insurrection. This was precisely what the Bolsheviks wanted: they*

*would then be absolute masters of the rebellious region, and the Makhnovists were perfectly aware of this." In addition, "neither the 14th Corps nor any other unit of the Red Army had any ties with the Makhnovist army; least of all were they in a position to give orders to the insurrectionary army." Nor does Rees mention that the Makhnovists considered the move "physically impossible" as "half the men, the entire staff and the commander himself were in hospital with typhus." [Op. Cit., p. 163]*

Consider what Rees is (distortedly) accounting. The beginning of 1920 was a time of peace. The Civil War looked like it was over. The White Generals had been defeated. Now the Bolsheviks turn on their allies after issuing an ultimatum which they knew would never be obeyed. Under the circumstances, a stupider decision cannot be easily found! Moreover, the very logic of the order was a joke. Would be it wise to leave the Ukraine undefended? Of course not and if Red Army units were to stay to defend the region, why not the Makhnovists who actually came from the area in question? Why provoke a conflict when it was possible to transfer Red Army units to the Polish front? Simply put, Rees presents a distorted picture of what was happening in the Ukraine at the time simply so he can whitewash the Bolshevik regime and blacken the Makhnovists. As he himself later notes, the Bolshevik-Makhnovist conflict gave the White General Wrangel the space required to restart the Civil War. Thus the Bolshevik decision to attack the Makhnovists helped prolong the Civil War -- the very factor Rees blames the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and Bolshevik ideology and practice on!

It is **now** that Rees presents his evidence of Makhnovist violence against the Bolsheviks (the Red Army reports and entries from the fake diary of Makhno's wife). Arguing that the entries from the fake diary *"betray the nature of the movement in this period,"* he tries to link them with Makhnovist theory. *"These actions,"* he argues, *"were consistent with an earlier resolution of the Insurgent Army which declared that it was 'the actions of the Bolshevik regime which cause a real danger to the worker-peasant revolution.'" [Op. Cit., p. 59]*

Firstly, given a true account of the second break between the Makhnovists and Bolsheviks, it would be fair to conclude that the resolution was, in fact, correct! However, such facts are not mentioned by Rees, so the reader is left in ignorance.

Secondly, to correct another of Rees' causal mistakes, it should be noted that this resolution was **not** passed by the Insurgent Army. Rather it was passed at the Second Regional Congress of Peasants, Workers and Insurgents held at Hulyai Pole on February 12th, 1919. This congress had 245 delegates, representing 350 districts and was one of four organised by the Makhnovists. Unsurprisingly, these regional congresses are not even mentioned by Rees in his account. This is for obvious reasons -- if the Makhnovists could organise congresses of workers, peasants and insurgents to discuss the progress of the revolution, then why could the Bolsheviks not manage it? Equally, to mention them would also mean mentioning that the Bolsheviks tried to ban one and succeeded in banning another.

Thirdly, the tone of the congress was anti-Bolshevik simply because the Ukraine had had a taste of Bolshevik rule. As Rees himself acknowledges in a roundabout way, the Bolsheviks had managed to alienate the peasantry by their agricultural policies.

Fourthly, the Bolsheviks had engineered the outlawing of the Makhnovists. Thus the actions of the Makhnovists were **not** "*consistent*" with the earlier resolution. They were, in fact, "*consistent*" with self-defence against a repressive state which had attacked them first!

Looking at the congress where the resolution was passed, we find that the list of "*real dangers*" was, quite simply, sensible and, in fact, in line with Leninist rhetoric. The resolution acknowledged the fact that the Bolshevik party was "*demanding a monopoly of the Revolution.*" As we discussed in [section 14](#), it was during this period that the Bolsheviks explicitly started to argue that the "dictatorship of the party" **was** the "dictatorship of the proletariat." The resolution also stated:

*"With deep regret the Congress must also declare that apart from external enemies a perhaps even greater danger, arising from its internal shortcomings, threatens the Revolution of the Russian and Ukrainian peasants and workers. The Soviet Governments of Russia and of the Ukraine, by their orders and decrees, are making efforts to deprive local soviets of peasants and workers' deputies of their freedom and autonomy."* [quoted by Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 267]

It also stated:

*"the political commissars are watching each step of the local soviets and dealing ruthlessly with those friends of peasants and workers who act in defence of peoples' freedom from the agency of the central government . . . The Bolshevik regime arrested left Socialist Revolutionaries and anarchists, closing their newspapers, stifling any manifestation of revolutionary expression."*

Delegates also complained that the Bolshevik government had not been elected, that it was "*imposing upon us its party dictatorship*" and "*attempting to introduce its Bolshevik monopoly over the soviets.*" [quoted by Palij, [**Op. Cit.**, p. 154]

The resolution noted that the current situation was "*characterised by the seizure of power by the political party of Communists-Bolsheviks who do not balk at anything in order to preserve and consolidate their political power by armed force acting from the centre. The party is conducting a criminal policy in regard to the social revolution and in regard to the labouring masses.*" To top it off, point number three read:

*"We protest against the reactionary habits of Bolshevik rulers, commissars, and agents of the Cheka, who are shooting workers, peasants, and rebels, inventing all kinds of excuses . . . The Cheka which were supposed to struggle with counterrevolution . . . have turned in the Bolsheviks' hands into an instrument for the suppression of the will of the people. They have grown in some cases into detachments of several hundred armed men with a variety of arms. We demand that all these forces be dispatched to the front."* [quoted by Vladimir N. Brovkin, **Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War**, pp.

109-10]

We should also point out that Rees selectively quotes the resolution to distort its meaning. The resolution, in fact, *"urges the peasants and workers to watch vigilantly the actions of the Bolshevik regime that cause a real danger to the worker-peasant revolution."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 154] We have listed some of the actions of the Bolsheviks that the congress considered as a *"real danger."* Considering the truth of these complaints, only someone blinded by Bolshevik ideology would consider it strange that worker and peasant delegates should agree to *"watch vigilantly"* those actions of the Bolsheviks which were a *"real danger"* to their revolution!

Lenin (before taking power, of course) had argued that elections and recall to soviets were essential to ensure that the workers control the "workers' state" and that socialism required the elimination of *"special bodies of armed men"* by an armed population. To this day, his followers parrot his claims (while, simultaneously, justifying the exact opposite in Lenin's Russia). Now, is Rees **really** arguing that the Bolshevik monopoly of power, the creation of a secret police and the clamping down on working people's freedom were **not** dangers to the Russian Revolution and should not be watched *"vigilantly"*? If so, then his conception of revolution includes the strange notion that dictatorship by a party does not threaten a revolution! Then again, neither did the Bolsheviks (indeed, they thought calling worker, peasant and partisan congresses to discuss the development of the revolution as the real danger to it!). If not, then he cannot fault the regional congress resolution for pointing out the obvious. As such, Rees' misquoting of the resolution backfires on him.

Significantly, Rees fails to mention that during this period (the first half of 1920), the Bolsheviks *"shot ordinary soldiers as well as their commanders, destroying their houses, confiscating their properties, and persecuting their families. Moreover the Bolsheviks conducted mass arrests of innocent peasants who were suspected of collaborating in some way with the partisans. It is impossible to determine the casualties involved."* The hypocrisy is clear. While Rees presents information (some of it, we stress, from a fake source) on Makhnovist attacks against the Bolshevik dictatorship, he remains silent on the Bolshevik tactics, violence and state terrorism. Given that the Bolsheviks had attacked the Makhnovists, it seems strange that that Rees ignores the *"merciless methods"* of the Bolsheviks (to use Palij's phrase) and concentrates instead on the acts of self-defence forced onto the Makhnovists. Perhaps this is because it would provide too strong a *"flavour"* of the Bolshevik regime? [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 212-3 and p. 213]

Rees makes great play of the fact that White forces took advantage of the conflict between the Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks, as would be expected. However, it seems like an act of ideological faith to blame the victims of this conflict for it! In his attempts to demonise the Makhnovists, he argues that *"[i]n fact it was Makhno's actions against the Red Army which made 'a brief return of the Whites possible.'"* In defence of his claims, Rees quotes from W. Bruce Lincoln's **Red Victory**. However, looking at Lincoln's work we discover that Lincoln is well aware who is to blame for the return of the Whites. Unsurprisingly, it is **not** the Makhnovists:

*"Once Trotsky's Red Army had crushed Iudenich and Kolchak and driven Deniken's forces*

*back upon their bases in the Crimea and the Kuban, it turned upon Makhno's partisan forces with a vengeance . . . [I]n mid-January 1920, after a typhus epidemic had decimated his forces, a re-established Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party declared Makhno an outlaw. Yet the Bolsheviks could not free themselves from Makhno's grasp so easily, and it became one of the supreme ironies of the Russian Civil War that his attacks against the rear of the Red Army made it possible for the resurrected White armies . . . to return briefly to the southern Ukraine in 1920." [Red Victory, p. 327]*

Ignoring the fact that Rees does not bother to give the correct quote (a problem that re-occurs frequently in his essay), it can be seen that he does paraphrase the last sentence of Lincoln's work correctly. Strange, then, that he ignores the rest of his account which clearly indicates that the Bolsheviks "*turned upon*" the Makhnovists and "*declared Makhno an outlaw.*" Obviously such trivial facts as the initial Bolshevik attacks against the Makhnovists are unimportant to understanding what actually happened in this period. Informing his readers that it was the Bolsheviks' betrayal of the Makhnovists which provoked the resistance that "*made it possible for . . . the White armies . . . to return briefly*" would confuse them with facts and so it goes unmentioned.

Lincoln, it must be stressed, concurs with Rees's other main sources (Palij and Footman) on the fact that the Bolsheviks betrayed the Makhnovists! Clearly, Rees has rewritten history and distorted **all** of his main references on the Makhnovist movement. After reading the same fact in three different sources, you would think that the Bolshevik betrayal of the Makhnovists which provoked their resistance against them would warrant **some** mention, but no! In true Stalinist fashion, Rees managed to turn a Bolshevik betrayal of the Makhnovists into a stick with which to beat them with! Truly amazing.

Simply put, if the Bolsheviks had not wanted to impose their rule over the Ukraine, then the conflict with the Makhnovists need not have taken place and Wrangel would not have been in a position to invade the Ukraine. Why did the Bolsheviks act in this way? There was no "*objective factor*" for this action and so we must turn to Bolshevik ideology.

As we proved in [section 14](#), Bolshevik ideology by this time identified Bolshevik party dictatorship as the only expression of "the dictatorship of the proletariat." Does Rees **really** believe that such perspectives had no impact on how the Bolsheviks acted during the Revolution? The betrayal of the Makhnovists can only be understood in terms of the "*subjective factor*" Rees seeks to ignore. If you think, as the Bolsheviks clearly did, that the dictatorship of the proletariat equalled the dictatorship of the party (and vice versa) then anything which threatened the rule of the party had to be destroyed. Whether this was soviet democracy or the Makhnovists did not matter. The Makhnovist idea of worker and peasant self-management, like soviet democracy, could not be reconciled with the Bolshevik ideology. As such, Bolshevik policy explains the betrayals of the Makhnovists.

Not satisfied with distorting his source material to present the Makhnovists as the guilty party in the return of Wrangel, he decides to blame the initial success of Wrangel on them as well. He quotes Michael Palij as follows: "*As Wrangel advanced . . . Makhno retreated north . . . leaving behind small*



*partisan units in the villages and towns to carry out covert destruction of the Bolshevik administrative apparatus and supply bases.*" [Op. Cit., p. 59] He again sources Palij's work on the "effective" nature of these groups, stating that White Colonel Noga reported to headquarters that Makhno was critical to Wrangel's advance.

As regards the claims that Makhno was "critical" to Wrangel's advance, Colonel Noga actually states that it was "*peasant uprisings under Makhno and many other partisan detachments*" which gave "*the Reds no rest.*" [quoted by Palij, Op. Cit., p. 214] However, what Rees fails to mention is that Palij argues that it was the Bolshevik "*policy of terror and exploitation*" which had "*turned almost all segments of Ukrainian society against the Bolsheviks, substantially strengthened the Makhno movement, and consequently facilitated the advance of the reorganised anti-Bolshevik force of General Wrangel from the Crimea into South Ukraine, the Makhno region.*" [Palij, Op. Cit., p. 214] Again, Makhno is blamed for the inevitable results of Bolshevik policies and actions!

It should also be reported that Noga's comments are dated 25th March 1920, while Palij's summary of Makhno's activities retreating from Wrangel was about June 1920 -- 2 months later! As regards this advance by Wrangel, Palij argues that it was the "*outbreak of the Polish-Bolshevik war at the end of April*" which "*benefited Wrangel*" and "*enabled him to launch an offensive against the Bolsheviks in Tavriia on June 6th.*" Indeed, it was after a "*series of battles*" that Wrangel "*penetrated north, forcing a general Bolshevik retreat.*" Now, "*[a]s Wrangel advanced deeper into the Left Bank, Makhno retreated north to the Kharkiv region, leaving behind small partisan units in the villages and towns to carry on covert destruction of the Bolshevik administrative apparatus and supply bases.*" [Op. Cit., p. 219] Again, Rees' account has little bearing to reality or the source material he uses.

Rees continues to re-write history by arguing that "*Makhno did not fight with the Reds again until October 1920 when Wrangel advanced on Makhno's base.*" [Op. Cit., p. 59] In fact, it was the **Makhnovists** who contacted the Bolsheviks in July and August in 1920 with a view to suspending hostilities and co-operating in the fight against Wrangel. This decision was made at a mass assembly of insurgents. Sadly, the Bolsheviks made no response. Only in September, after Wrangel had occupied many towns, did the Bolsheviks enter into negotiations. [Arshinov, Op. Cit., pp. 176-7] This is confirmed by Footman, who states that it is "*agreed that the initiative for joint action against Wrangel came from the Makhnovists*" [Op. Cit., p. 294], as well as by Palij, who notes that "*Makhno was compelled to seek an understanding with the Bolsheviks*" but "*no reply was received.*" It was "*Wrangel's success [which] caused the Bolshevik leaders to reconsider Makhno's earlier proposal.*" [Op. Cit., pp. 222-3] Obviously indicating that the Makhnovists placed the struggle against the White counter-revolution above their own politics would place the Bolsheviks in a bad light, and so Rees fails to give the details behind the agreement of joint action against Wrangel.

As regards this third and final break, Rees states that it was ("*unsurprisingly*") a "*treaty of convenience on the part of both sides and as soon as Wrangel was defeated at the end of the year the Red Army fought Makhno until he gave up the struggle.*" [Op. Cit., p. 59] Which, as far as it goes, is true. Makhno, however, "*assumed [that] the forthcoming conflict with the Bolsheviks could be limited to the realm of ideas*" and that they "*would not attack his movement immediately.*" [Palij, Op. Cit., p. 231] He was

wrong. Instead the Bolsheviks attacked the Makhnovists without warning and, unlike the other breaks, without pretext (although leaflets handed out to the Red Army stated that **Makhno** had "*violat[ed] the agreement*"! [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 236]).

It would be a good idea to reproduce the agreement which the Bolsheviks ripped up. There were two parts, a military and a political one. The military one is pretty straight forward (although the clause on the Makhnovists refusing to accept Red Army detachments or deserters suggests that the Makhnovists' democratic army was seen by many Red Army soldiers as a better alternative to Trotsky's autocratic structure). The political agreement was as follows:

*"1. Immediate release, and an end to the persecution of all Makhno men and anarchists in the territories of the Soviet Republics, except those who carry on armed resistance against Soviet authorities.*

*"2. Makhno men and anarchists were to have complete freedom of expression of their ideas and principles, by speech and the press, provided that nothing was expressed that tended to a violent overthrow of Soviet government, and on condition that military censorship be respected. . .*

*"3. Makhno men and anarchists were to enjoy full rights of participation in elections to the soviets, including the right to be elected, and free participation in the organisation of the forthcoming Fifth All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets . . ." [cited by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 224]*

Needless to say, the Bolsheviks delayed the publication of the political agreement several until several days after the military one was published -- "*thus blurring its real meaning.*" [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 225] Clearly, as it stands, the agreement just gave the Makhnovists and anarchists the rights they should have had according to the Soviet Constitution! Little wonder the Bolsheviks ignored it -- they also ignored their own constitution. However, it is the fourth point of the political agreement which gives the best insight into the nature of Bolshevism. This last point was never ratified by the Bolsheviks as it was "*absolutely unacceptable to the dictatorship of the proletariat.*" [quoted by Palij, **Ibid.**] This clause was:

*"One of the basic principles of the Makhno movement being the struggle for the self-administration of the toilers, the Partisan Army brings up a fourth point: in the region of the Makhno movement, the worker and peasant population is to organise and maintain its own free institutions for economic and political self-administration; this region is subsequently federated with Soviet republics by means of agreements freely negotiated with the appropriate Soviet governmental organ." [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 224]*

Clearly, this idea of worker and peasant self-management, like soviet democracy, could not be reconciled with the Bolshevik support for party dictatorship as the expression of "*the dictatorship of the proletariat*" which had become a Bolshevik ideological truism by that time. Little wonder the

Bolsheviks failed to ratify the fourth clause and violated the other agreements. Simply put, a libertarian alternative to Bolshevism would give the Russian and Ukrainian working masses hope of freedom and make them harder to control. It is unsurprising that Rees fails to discuss the treaty -- it would, yet again, undermine his case that the Bolsheviks were forced by objective circumstances to be dictatorial.

And, of course, let us not forget the circumstances in which this betrayal took place. The country was, as Rees reminds us, in a state of economic disruption and collapse. Indeed, Rees blames the anti-working class and dictatorial actions and policies of the Bolsheviks on the chaos caused by the civil war. Yet here are the Bolsheviks prolonging this very Civil War by turning (yet again!) on their allies. After the defeat of the Whites, the Bolsheviks preferred to attack the Makhnovists rather than allow them the freedom they had been fighting for. Resources which could have been used to aid the economic rebuilding of Russia and the Ukraine were used to attack their former allies. The talents and energy of the Makhnovists were either killed or wasted in a pointless conflict. Should we be surprised? After all, the Bolsheviks had preferred to compound their foes during the Civil War (and, indirectly, aid the very Whites they were fighting) by betraying their Makhnovist allies on two previous occasions (once, because the Makhnovists had dared call a conference of working people to discuss the civil war being fought in their name). Clearly, Bolshevik politics and ideology played a key role in all these decisions. They were **not** driven by terrible objective circumstances (indeed, they made them worse).

Rees obviously distorted the truth about the first two agreements between the Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks. He portrayed the Makhnovists as the guilty party, "breaking" with the Bolsheviks when in fact it was (in both cases) the Bolsheviks who broke with and betrayed the Makhnovists. That explains why he fails to present any information on **why** the first break happened and why he distorts the events of the second. It cannot be said that he was unaware of these facts -- they are in the very books he himself references! As such, we have a clear and intended desire to deceive the reader. As regards the third agreement, while he makes no pretence that the Makhnovists were the guilty party however, he implies that the Bolsheviks had to act as they did before the Makhnovists turned on them. Little wonder, then, that he does not provide the details of the agreement made between the Bolsheviks and Makhnovists -- to do so would have been to expose the authoritarianism of the Bolsheviks. Simply put, Rees' distortions of the source material he uses comes as no surprise. It undermines his basic argument and so cannot be used in its original form. Hence the cherry-picking of quotations to support his case.

After distorting Makhnovist relations with the Bolsheviks, Rees moves on to distorting the socio-political ideas and practice of the Makhnovists. As would be expected from his hatchet-job on the military history of the movement, his account of its social ideas leaves much to be desired. However, both aspects of his critique have much in common. His account of its theoretical ideas and its attempts to apply them again abuse the source material in disgraceful ways.

For example, Rees states that under the Makhnovists "*[p]apers could be published, but the Bolshevik and Left Socialist Revolutionary press were not allowed to call for revolution*" and references Michael Palij's book. [Op. Cit., p. 60] Looking at the page in question, we discover a somewhat different account. According to Palij's work, what the Makhnovists **actually** "*prohibited*" was that these parties should "*propagate armed uprisings against the Makhnovist movement.*" A clear rewriting of the source

material and an indication of how low Leninists will sink. Significantly, Palij also notes that this "*freedom of speech, press, assembly and association*" was implemented "[i]n contrast to the Bolshevik regime" and its policy of crushing such liberties. [Op. Cit. pp. 152-3] Ironically, the military-political agreement of late 1920 between the Reds and Makhnovists included a similar clause, banning expression that "*tended to a violent overthrow of the Soviet government.*" [quoted by Palij, **OP. Cit.**, p. 224] Which means, to use Rees' distorted terminology, that the Bolsheviks banned calls for revolution!

However, this distortion of the source material **does** give us an insight into the mentality of Leninism. After all, according to Palij, when the Makhnovists entered a city or town they "*immediately announced to the population that the army did not intend to exercise political authority.*" The workers and peasants were to set up soviets "*that would carry out the will and orders of their constituents*" as well as "*organis[e] their own self-defence force against counter-revolution and banditry.*" These political changes were matched in the economic sphere as well, as the "*holdings of the landlords, the monasteries and the state, including all livestock and goods, were to be transferred to the peasants*" and "*all factories, plants, mines, and other means of production were to become property of all the workers under control of their professional unions.*" [Op. Cit., p. 151]

In such an environment, a call for "*revolution*" (or, more correctly, "*armed uprisings against the Makhno movement*") could only mean a Bolshevik coup to install a Bolshevik party dictatorship. As the Makhnovists were clearly defending working-class and peasant self-government, then a Bolshevik call for "*armed uprisings*" against them also meant the end of such free soviets and their replacement with party dictatorship. Little wonder Rees distorts his source! Arshinov makes the situation clear:

*"The only restriction that the Makhnovists considered necessary to impose on the Bolsheviks, the left Socialist Revolutionaries and other statists was a prohibition on the formation of those 'revolutionary committees' which sought to impose a dictatorship over the people. In Aleksandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav, right after the occupation of these cities by the Makhnovists, the Bolsheviks hastened to organise **Revkoms (Revolutionary Committees)** seeking to organise their political power and govern the population . . . Makhno advised them to go and take up some honest trade instead of seeking to impose their will on the workers . . . In this context the Makhnovists' attitude was completely justified and consistent. To protect the full freedom of speech, press, and organisation, they had to take measures against formations which sought to stifle this freedom, to suppress other organisations, and to impose their will and dictatorial authority on the workers."* [Op. Cit., p. 154]

Little wonder Rees distorts the issues and transforms a policy to defend the **real** revolution into one which banned a "*call for revolution*"! We should be grateful that he distorted the Makhnovist message for it allows us to indicate the dictatorial nature of the regime and politics Rees is defending.

All of which disproves Rees' assertion that "*the movement never had any real support from the working class. Neither was it particularly interested in developing a programme which would appeal to the*

workers." [Op. Cit., p. 59] Now, Rees had obviously read Palij's summary of Makhnovist ideas. Is he claiming that workers' self-management and the socialisation of the means of production do not "*appeal*" to workers? After all, most Leninists pay lip-service to these ideas. Is Rees arguing that the Bolshevik policies of the time (namely one-man management and the militarisation of labour) "*appealed*" to the workers more than workers' self-management of production? Equally, the Makhnovists argued that the workers should form their own free soviets which would "*carry out the will and orders of their constituents.*" [Palij, Op. Cit., p. 151] Is Rees **really** arguing that the Bolshevik policy of party dictatorship "*appealed*" to the workers more than soviet democracy? If so, then heaven help us if the SWP ever get into power!

Luckily, as Jonathan Aves' book **Workers Against Lenin** proves, this was not the case. Working-class resistance to Bolshevik policies was extremely widespread and was expressed by strikes. It should be noted that the wave of strikes all across Russia which preceded the Kronstadt revolt also raised the demand for soviet democracy. The call for "*free soviets*" was raised by the Kronstadt revolt itself and during the "mini-Kronstadt" in Katerinoslav in June 1921 where the demands of the workers "*were very similar in content with the resolutions of the Kronstadt rebels*" and telegraph operators sent "*messages throughout the Soviet Republic calling for 'free soviets.'*" [Jonathan Aves, **Workers Against Lenin**, p. 172 and p. 173]

Clearly, the Makhnovists **did** create a "*programme that would appeal to the workers.*" However, it is true that the Makhnovists did fail win over more than a minority of workers. This may have been due to the fact that the Makhnovists only freed two cities, both for short periods of time. As Paul Avrich notes, "he found little time to implement his economic programs." [**Anarchist Portraits**, p. 121] Given how Rees bends over backwards to justify Bolshevik policies in terms of "*objective factors,*" it is significant that in his discussion of the Makhnovists such "*objective factors*" as time fail to get a mention!

Thus Rees's attempt to paint the Makhnovists as anti-working class fails. While this is the core of his dismissal of them as a possible "*libertarian alternative to the Bolsheviks,*" the facts do not support his assertions. He gives the example of Makhno's advice to railway workers in Aleksandrovsik "*who had not been paid for many weeks*" that they should "*simply charge passengers a fair price and so generate their own wages.*" He states that this "*advice aimed at reproducing the petit-bourgeois patterns of the countryside.*" [Op. Cit., p. 59] Two points can be raised to this argument.

Firstly, we should highlight the Bolshevik (and so, presumably, "*proletarian*") patterns imposed on the railway workers. Trotsky simply "*plac[ed] the railwaymen and the personnel of the repair workshops under martial law*" and "*summarily ousted*" the leaders of the railwaymen's trade union when they objected." The Central Administrative Body of Railways (Tsektran) he created was run by him "*along strictly military and bureaucratic lines.*" In other words, he applied his ideas on the "*militarisation of labour*" in full. [M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 67] Compared to the Bolshevik pattern, only an ideologue could suggest that Makhno's advice (and it was advice, not a decree imposed from above, as was Trotsky's) can be considered worse. Indeed, by being based on workers' self-management it was infinitely more socialist than the militarised Bolshevik state capitalist system.

Secondly, Rees fails to understand the nature of anarchism. Anarchism argues that it is up to working class people to organise their own activities. This meant that, ultimately, it was up to the railway workers **themselves** (in association with other workers) to organise their own work and industry. Rather than being imposed by a few leaders, **real** socialism can only come from below, built by working people, through their own efforts and own class organisations. Anarchists can suggest ideas and solutions, but ultimately its up to workers (and peasants) to organise their own affairs. Thus, rather than being a source of condemnation, Makhno's comments should be considered as praiseworthy as they were made in a spirit of equality and were based on encouraging workers' self-management.

Ultimately, the best reply to Rees is simply the fact that after holding a "*general conference of the workers of the city*" at which it was "*proposed that the workers organise the life of the city and the functioning of the factories with their own forces and their own organisations*" based on "*the principles of self-management,*" the "*[r]ailroad workers took the first step in this direction*" by "*form[ing] a committee charged with organising the railway network of the region.*" [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 149]

Even more amazing (if that is possible) is Rees' account of the revolution in the countryside. Rees argues that the "*real basis of Makhno's support was not his anarchism, but his opposition to grain requisitioning and his determination not to disturb the peasant economy*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 59] and quotes Palij as follows:

*"Makhno had not put an end to the agricultural inequalities. His aim was to avoid conflicts with the villages and to maintain a sort of united front of the entire peasantry."* [M. Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 214]

However, here is the actual context of the (corrected) quote:

*"Peasants' economic conditions in the region of the Makhno movement were greatly improved at the expense of the estates of the landlords, the church, monasteries, and the richest peasants, but Makhno had not put an end to the agricultural inequalities. His aim was to avoid conflicts within the villages and to maintain a sort of united front of the entire peasantry."* [M. Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 214]

Clearly, Rees has distorted the source material, conveniently missing out the information that Makhno had most definitely "disturbed" the peasant economy at the expense of the rich! And, we are sure that Rees would have a fit if it were suggested that the real basis of Bolshevik support was not their socialism, but their opposition to the war and the Whites!

Amazingly, Rees also somehow manages to forget to mention the peasant revolution which had started in 1917 in his attack against Makhno:

*"Makhno and his associates brought socio-political issues into the daily life of the people, who in turn supported the expropriation of large estates . . . On the eve of open conflict*

*[in late 1917], Makhno assembled all the landowners and rich peasants (kulaks) of the area and took from them all official documents relating to their land, livestock, and equipment. Subsequently an inventory of this property was taken and reported to the people at the session of the local soviet, and then at the regional meeting, It was decided to allow the landlords to share the land, livestock, and tools equally with the peasants."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 71]

Obviously, Rees considers the expropriating of the landlords and kulaks as an act which *"did not disturb the age-old class structure of the countryside"*!

Let us not forget that the official Makhnovist position was that the *"holdings of the landlords, the monasteries, and the state, including all livestock and goods, were to be transferred to the peasants."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 151] At the second congress of workers, peasants and insurgents held in February, 1919, it was resolved that *"all land be transferred to the hands of toiling peasants . . . according to the norm of equal distribution."* [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 155] This meant that every peasant family had as much land as they could cultivate without the use of hired labour. The Makhnovists argued with regards to the kulaks:

*"We are sure that . . . the kulak elements of the village will be pushed to one side by the very course of events. The toiling peasantry will itself turn effortlessly on the kulaks, first by adopting the kulak's surplus land for general use, then naturally drawing the kulak elements into the social organisation."* [cited by Michael Malet, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 118-9]

Thus, just to stress the point, the Makhnovists **did** *"disturb"* the *"age-old class structure of the countryside."*

Clearly, Rees is simply taking nonsense. When he states that Makhnovist land policies *"did not disturb the age-old class structure of the countryside,"* he is simply showing his utter and total disregard for the truth. As the Bolsheviks themselves found out, no mass movement could possibly exist among the peasants without having a positive and levelling land policy. The Makhnovists were no exception.

Rees then states that *"[i]n 1919 the local Bolshevik authorities made mistakes which played into Makhno's hands."* Unsurprisingly enough, he argues that this was because they *"tried to carry through the socialisation of the land, rather than handing it over to the peasants."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 60] In fact, the Bolsheviks did **not** try to implement the *"socialisation"* of land. Rather, they tried to **nationalise** the land and place it under state control -- a radically different concept. Indeed, it was the Makhnovists who argued that the *"land, the factories, the workshops, the mines, the railroads and the other wealth of the people must belong to the working people themselves, to those who work in them, that is to say, they must be socialised."* [contained in Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 273] The Bolsheviks, in contrast, initially *"decreed that all lands formerly belonging to the landlords should be expropriated and transformed into state farms."* [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 156] The peasants quite rightly thought that this just replaced one set of landlords with another, stealing the land which rightfully belonged to them.

After distorting the source material by selective quoting, Rees does it again when he argues that *"by the spring of 1920 they [the Bolsheviks] had reversed the policy towards the peasants and instituted Committees of Poor Peasants, these 'hurt Makhno . . . his heart hardened and he sometimes ordered executions.' This policy helped the Bolshevik ascendancy."* [Op. Cit., p. 60]

Rees quotes Palij as evidence. To refute his argument we need simply quote the same pages:

*"Although they [the Bolsheviks] modified their agricultural policy by introducing on February 5, 1920, a new land law, distributing the former landlords', state and church lands among the peasants, they did not succeed in placating them because of the requisitions, which the peasants considered outright robbery . . . Subsequently the Bolsheviks decided to introduce class warfare into the villages. A decree was issued on May 19, 1920, establishing 'Committees of the Poor' . . . Authority in the villages was delegated to the committees, which assisted the Bolsheviks in seizing the surplus grain . . . The establishment of Committees of the Poor was painful to Makhno because they became not only part of the Bolshevik administrative apparatus the peasants opposed, but also informers helping the Bolshevik secret police in its persecution of the partisans, their families and supporters, even to the extent of hunting down and executing wounded partisans . . . Consequently, Makhno's 'heart hardened and he sometimes ordered executions where some generosity would have bestowed more credit upon him and his movement. That the Bolsheviks preceded him with the bad example was no excuse. For he claimed to be fighting for a better cause.' Although the committees in time gave the Bolsheviks a hold on every village, their abuse of power disorganised and slowed down agricultural life . . . This policy of terror and exploitation turned almost all segments of Ukrainian society against the Bolsheviks, substantially strengthened the Makhno movement, and consequently facilitated the advance of the reorganised anti-Bolshevik force of General Wrangel from the Crimea into South Ukraine, the Makhno region."* [M. Palij, Op. Cit., pp. 213-4]

Amazing what a ". . ." can hide, is it not! Rees turns an account which clearly shows the Bolshevik policy was based on informers, secret police and the murder of rebels as well as being a total disaster into a victory. Moreover, he also transforms it so that the victims are portrayed as the villains. Words cannot do this re-writing of history justice. Yes, indeed, an organisation of informers to the secret police in every village can aid the "ascendancy" of a one-party dictatorship (aided, of course, by overwhelming military force), but it cannot aid the ascendancy of freedom, equality and socialism.

Given the actual record of the Bolsheviks' attempts to break up what they considered the "age-old class structure" of the villages with the "Committees of the Poor," it is clear why Rees distorts his source.

It does seem ironic that Rees attacks the Makhnovists for not pursuing Bolshevik peasant policies. Considering the absolute **failure** of those policies, the fact that Makhno did not follow them is hardly cause for condemnation! Indeed, given the numerous anti-Bolshevik uprisings and large-scale state



repression they provoked, attacking the Makhnovists for not pursuing such insane policies is equally insane. After all, who, in the middle of a Civil War, makes matters worse for themselves by creating more enemies? Only the insane -- or the Bolsheviks!

That Makhnovist land policy was correct and the Bolshevik one wrong can be seen from the fact that the latter changed their policies and brought them into line with the Makhnovist ones. As Palij notes, the Bolsheviks "*modified their agricultural policy by introducing on February 5, 1920, a new land law, distributing the formers landlords', state, and church lands among the peasants.*" This, of course, was a vindication of Makhnovist policy (which dated from 1917!). Makhno "*initiated the peasants' movement, confiscating and distributing landlords' land and goods*" (and, unlike the Bolsheviks, "*encouraging the workers to take over factories and workshops*"). As regards the Bolsheviks attempts to break up what they considered the "*age- old class structure*" of the villages with the "*Committees of the Poor,*" it was, as noted above, a complete disaster and counter-productive. [Op. Cit., p. 213 and p. 250] All in all, the Makhnovist policies were clearly the most successful as regards the peasantry. They broke up the class system in the countryside by expropriating the ruling class and did not create new conflicts by artificially imposing themselves onto the villages.

Lastly, we must also wonder just how sensible it is to "*disturb*" the economy that produces the food you eat. Given that Rees, in part, blames Bolshevik tyranny on the disruption of the economy, it seems incredible that he faults Makhno for not adding to the chaos by failing to "*disrupt the peasant economy*"! However, why let logic get in the way of a good rant!

As well as ignoring the wealth of information on Makhnovist land policy, Rees turns to their attempts to form free agrarian communes. He argues that Makhno's attempts "*to go beyond the traditional peasant economy were doomed*" and quotes Makhno's memoirs which state "*the mass of the people did not go over*" to his peasant communes, which only involved a few hundred families. [Op. Cit., p. 59]

Looking at Makhno's memoirs a somewhat different picture appears. Firstly, Makhno states that there were "*four such agricultural communes within a three- or four-mile radius of Hulyai-Pole,*" but in the whole district "*there were many*" in 1918 (the period being discussed in his memoirs). Makhno recounts how each "*commune consisted of ten families of peasants and workers, totalling a hundred, two hundred or three hundred members*" and the "*management of each commune was conducted by a general meeting of all its members.*" He does state that "*the mass of people did not go over to it*" but, significantly, he argues that this was because of "*the advance of the German and Austrian armies, their own lack of organisation, and their inability to defend this order against the new 'revolutionary' and counter-revolutionary authorities. For this reason the toiling population of the district limited their real revolutionary activity to supporting in every way those bold spirits among them who had settled on the old estates [of the landlords] and organised their personal and economic life on free communal lines.*" [quoted by Paul Avrich, **The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, pp. 130-2]

Of course, failing to mention the time period Makhno was recounting does distort the success of the communes. The Bolsheviks were evacuating the Ukraine as part of their treaty with German and

Austrian Imperialism when the communes were being set up. This left them in a dangerous position, needless to say. By July, 1918, the area was occupied by Austrian troops and it was early 1919 before the situation was stable enough to allow their reintroduction. One commune was named "*Rosa Luxemburg*" (after the Marxist revolutionary martyr) and was mostly destroyed by the Bolsheviks in June 1919 and completely destroyed by the Whites a few days later. In such circumstances, can it be surprising that only a minority of peasants got involved in them? Rather than praise the Makhnovists for positive social experimentation in difficult circumstances, Rees shows his ignorance of the objective conditions facing the revolution. Perhaps if the peasants did not have to worry about the Bolsheviks as well as the Whites, they would have had more members?

All in all, Rees account of Makhnovist ideas on the peasant economy are, to put it mildly, incorrect. They paint a radically different picture of the reality of both Makhnovist ideas and practice as regards the peasantry. Ironically, the soundness of Makhnovist policy in this area can be seen from the fact that the Bolsheviks changed their land policy to bring it into line with it. Not, of course, that you would know that from Rees' account. Nor would you know what the facts of the Bolsheviks' land policy were either. Indeed, Rees uses Michael Palij's book to create a picture of events which is the exact opposite of that contained in it! Very impressive!

Intent on driving the final nail into the coffin, he tries to apply "class analysis" to the Makhnovists. Rees actually states that "*given this social base [i.e the Makhnovists' peasant base] . . . much of Makhno's libertarianism amounted to little more than paper decrees.*" [Op. Cit., p. 60]

Ironically enough, the list of "*paper decrees*" Rees presents (when not false or distorted) are also failings associated with the Bolsheviks (and taken to even more extreme measures by the Bolsheviks)! As such, his lambasting of the Makhnovists seems deeply hypocritical. Moreover, his attempt to ground the few deviations that exist between Makhnovist practice and Makhnovist theory in the peasant base of the army seems an abuse of class analysis. After all, these deviations were also shared by the Bolsheviks. As such, how can Rees justify the Bolshevik deviations from socialist theory in terms of "*objective factors*" yet blame Makhnovist ones on their "*social base*"? Do "*objective factors*" only afflict Leninists?

Take for example his first "*paper*" decree, namely the election of commanders. He states that "*in practice the most senior commanders were appointed by Makhno.*" In other words, the Makhnovists applied this principle extensively but not completely. The Bolsheviks abolished it by decree (and did not blame it on "*exceptional circumstances*" nor consider it as a "*retreat*", as Rees asserts). Now, if Rees' "class analysis" of the limitations of the Makhnovists were true, does this mean that an army of a regime with a proletarian base (as he considers the Bolshevik regime) cannot have elected commanders? This is the logical conclusion of his argument.

Equally, his attempt to "*give a flavour of the movement*" by quoting one of the resolutions adopted by a mass meeting of partisans also backfires (namely, "*to obey the orders of the commanders if the commanders are sober enough to give them*"). Firstly, it should be noted that this was, originally, from a Red Army source. Secondly, drunkenness was a big problem during the civil war (as in any war). It was

one of the easiest ways of forgetting reality at a time when life was often unpleasant and sometimes short. As such, the "*objective factor*" of civil war explains this resolution rather than the social base of the movement! Thirdly, Rees himself quotes a Central Committee member's comment to the Eighth Party Congress that there were so many "*horrifying facts about drunkenness, debauchery, corruption, robbery and irresponsible behaviour of many party members that one's hair stands on end.*" [Op. Cit., p. 66] The Eighth Congress was in 1919. Does this comment give a "*flavour*" of the Bolshevik regime under Lenin? Obviously not, as Rees defends it and blames this list of horrors on the objective factors facing the Bolsheviks. Why does the drunkenness of the Makhnovists come from their "*social base*" while that of the Bolsheviks from "*objective factors*"? Simply put, Rees is insulting the intelligence of his readers.

The Makhnovist resolution was passed by a mass assembly of partisans, suggesting a fundamentally democratic organisation. Rees argues that the civil war resulted in the Bolshevik vices becoming institutionalised in the power of the bureaucracy. However, as can be seen, the Makhnovists practised democracy during the civil war, suggesting that the objective factors Rees tries to blame for the Bolshevik vices simply cannot explain everything. As such, his own example (yet again) backfires on his argument.

Rees claims that "*Makhno held elections, but no parties were allowed to participate in them.*" [Op. Cit., p. 60] This is probably derived from Palij's comment that the free soviets would "*carry out the will and orders of their constituents*" and "*[o]nly working people, not representatives of political parties, might join the soviets.*" [Op. Cit., p. 151] This, in turn, derives from a Makhnovist proclamation from January 1920 which stated:

*"Only labourers who are contributing work necessary to the social economy should participate in the soviets. Representatives of political organisations have no place in worker-peasant soviets, since their participation in a workers' soviet will transform the latter into deputies of the party and can lead to the downfall of the soviet system."* [contained in Peter Arshinov's **History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 266]

Rees' comments indicate that he is not familiar with the make-up of the Russian Soviets of 1917. Unlike the soviets from the 1905 revolution, those in 1917 allowed "*various parties and other organisations to acquire voting representation in the soviet executive committees.*" Indeed, this was "*often how high party leaders became voting delegates to*" such bodies. It should "*be underlined that these party delegates were selected by the leadership of each political organisation, and not by the soviet assembly itself. In other words, these executive committee members were not directly elected by the representatives of the producers*" (never mind by the producers themselves). [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 31]

In addition, Russian Anarchists had often attacked the use of "*party lists*" in soviet elections, which turned the soviets from working-class organs into talking-shops. [Paul Avrich, **The Russian Anarchists**, p. 190] This use of party lists meant that soviet delegates could be anyone. For example, the leading left-

wing Menshevik Martov recounts that in early 1920 a chemical factory "*put up Lenin against me as a candidate [to the Moscow soviet]. I received seventy-six votes he-eight (in an open vote).*" [quoted by Israel Getzler, **Martov**, p. 202] How would either of these two intellectuals actually know and reflect the concerns and interests of the workers they would be "delegates" of? If the soviets were meant to be the delegates of working people, then why should non-working class members of political parties be elected to a soviet?

Given that the people elected to the free soviets would be **delegates** and **not** representatives, this would mean that they would reflect the wishes of their workmates rather than the decisions of the party's central committee. As such, if a worker who was a member of a political party could convince their workmates of their ideas, the delegate would reflect the decisions of the mass assembly. As such, the input of political parties would not be undermined in any way (although their domination would be!).

As such, the Makhnovist ideas on soviets did not, in fact, mean that workers and peasants could **not** elect or send delegates who were members of political parties. They had no problems as such with delegates who happened to be working- class party members. They did have problems with delegates representing only political parties, delegates who were not workers and soviets being mere ciphers covering party rule.

That this was the case can be seen from a few facts. Firstly, the February 1919 congress resolution "*was written by the anarchists, left Socialist Revolutionaries, and the chairman.*" [Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 155] Similarly, the Makhnovist Revolutionary Military Soviet created at the Aleksandrovsk congress in late 1919 had three Communists elected to it. There were 18 delegates from workers at that congress, six were Mensheviks and the remaining 12 included Communists [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 111, p. 124] Clearly, members of political parties were elected to both the congresses and the Revolutionary Military Soviet. As such, the idea that free soviets excluded members of political parties is false -- they simply were not dominated by them (for example, having executives made up of members of a single party or delegating their power to a government as per the national soviet in Russia). This could, of course, change. In the words of the Makhnovist reply to Bolshevik attempts to ban one of their congresses:

*"The Revolutionary Military Council . . . holds itself above the pressure and influence of all parties and only recognises the people who elected it. Its duty is to accomplish what the people have instructed it to do, and to create no obstacles to any left socialist party in the propagation of ideas. Consequently, if one day the Bolshevik idea succeeds among the workers, the Revolutionary Military Council . . . will necessarily be replaced by another organisation, 'more revolutionary' and more Bolshevik."* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 103-4]

As such, the Makhnovists supported the right of working- class self-determination, as expressed by one delegate to Hulyai Pole conference in February 1919:

*"No party has a right to usurp governmental power into its hands . . . We want life, all*

*problems, to be decided locally, not by order from any authority above; and all peasants and workers should decide their own fate, while those elected should only carry out the toilers' wish.*" [quoted by Palij, **Op. Cit.**, p. 154]

Thus, Rees fails to present an accurate account of Makhnovist theory and practice as regards "*free soviets*." Rather than oppose party participation within their soviets and congresses, the Makhnovists opposed the domination of soviets and congresses by political parties, a radically different concept. Like the Kronstadt rebels, they argued for all power to the soviets and not to parties.

Lastly, Rees attacks the Makhnovists for having two security forces, the Cheka-like **razvedka** and the Punitive Commission. How this is an expression of the Makhnovist "*social base*" is hard to explain, as both the Bolsheviks and Whites also had their security forces and counter-intelligence agencies.

While Rees quotes Footman's statement that "*we can safely assume [!] these services were responsible for frequent injustices and atrocities*," he fails to mention that Footman does not provide any examples (hence his comment that we can "*assume*" they occurred!). Footman himself notes that "*[o]f the Makhnovite security services . . . we know very little.*" [David Footman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 288] Rees himself only lists one, namely the summary shooting of a Bolshevik cell discovered in the Army. Given the bloody record of the Bolshevik Cheka (which, again, Rees defends as necessary to defend against the Whites!), this suggests that the crimes of the Makhnovist counter-intelligence pale in comparison.

Rees also quotes the historian Chamberlin that "*Makhno's private Cheka . . . quickly disposed of anyone who was suspected of plotting against his life.*" [**Op. Cit.**, 60] Strangely enough, Rees fails to mention the Bolshevik attempts to assassinate Makhno, including the one in the latter part of May 1919 when, it should be noted, the Makhnovists and Bolsheviks were meant to be in alliance. Nor does he mention that the Cheka "*would hunt out and hang all active Makhnovites.*" [David Footman, **Civil War in Russia**, p. 271 and p. 293]

As regards the last conflict with the Red Army, it should be noted that while "*generalised accusations of Makhnovist atrocities are common*" the facts are it was "*the Makhnovists who stood to gain by liberating prisoners, the Bolsheviks by shooting them.*" This was because "*the Red Army soldiers had been conscripted from elsewhere to do work they neither liked nor understood*" and the "*insurgents had their own homes to defend.*" [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, p. 130] Thus, while Rees quotes Footman's opinion that "*Makhno's later campaigns [were] among the most bloody and vindictive*," these facts suggest that we **cannot** "*safely assume that these [security] services were responsible for frequent injustices and atrocities.*" Clearly, if the Makhnovists were releasing Red Army prisoners (and many of whom were joining Makhno), the picture of an atrocity inflicting army can hardly be a valid picture.

And it should be stressed that Bolshevik terror and violence against the Makhnovists is strangely absent from Rees's account.

Rees presents just **one** concrete example of Makhnovist "*Cheka-like*" violence, namely, the execution of

a Bolshevik cell in December, 1919. It should be noted that the Bolsheviks had been explicitly arguing for Party dictatorship for some time by then. The reason why the Bolsheviks had been "*denied an open trial*" was because they had already been shot. Unfortunately, Makhno gave two contradictory reasons why the Bolsheviks had been killed. This led to the Makhnovist Revolutionary Military Soviet setting up a commission of three to investigate the issue. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the commission exonerated Makhno although Voline, out of the members, seemed to have been genuinely embarrassed by the affair. [Malet, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 51-2] Needless to say, Rees fails to comment on the Bolshevik summary killing of Makhnovist staff in June 1919 or, indeed, any other summary executions conducted by the Bolsheviks against the Makhnovists (including the shooting of prisoners).

Given the summary justice handed out by the Bolshevik Cheka, it seems strange that Rees dismisses the Makhnovist movement on assumptions and one event, yet he does. Obviously, the large-scale and continuous Bolshevik killings of political enemies (including Makhnovists) is irrelevant compared to this one event.

All in all, Rees' attempts to blame the few deviations the Makhnovists had from anarchist theory on the "*social base*" of the movement are a joke. While justifying the far more extreme deviations of Bolshevik theory and practice in terms of "*objective factors*," he refuses to consider this possibility for the Makhnovists. The hypocrisy is clear, if not unexpected.

One last point. Taking Rees' "class analysis" of the Makhnovists seriously, the logical conclusion of his argument is clear. For Rees, a movement which compromises slightly with its principles in the face of extreme "*objective factors*" is "*petty bourgeois*." However, a movement which compromises totally (indeed introduces and justifies the exact opposite of its original claims) in face of the same "*objective factors*" is "*proletarian*." As such, his pathetic attempt at "class analysis" of the Makhnovists simply shows up the dictatorial nature of the Bolsheviks. If trying to live up to libertarian/democratic ideals but not totally succeeding signifies being "*petty-bourgeois*" while dismissing those ideals totally in favour of top-down, autocratic hierarchies is "*proletarian*" then sane people would happily be labelled "*petty-bourgeois*"!

And Rees states that "[n]either Makhno's social programme nor his political regime could provide an alternative to the Bolsheviks"! [Op. Cit., p. 60] Little wonder he distorts that social programme and political regime -- an honest account of both would see that Rees is wrong. The Makhnovist movement clearly shows that not only did Bolshevik policies have a decisive impact on the development of the Russian Revolution, there was a clear alternative to Bolshevik authoritarianism and party dictatorship.

In summary, Rees' attack on the Makhnovists fails. It can be faulted on both factual and logical grounds. His article is so riddled with errors, selective quoting and downright lies that it is factually unreliable. Similarly, his attempt to attack the Makhnovist political theory and practice is equally factually incorrect. His attempt to explain the deviations of Makhnovist practice from its theory in terms of the "*social base*" is simply an insult to the intelligence of the reader and an abuse of class analysis.

A far more compelling analysis would recognise that the Makhnovists were not a perfect social movement but that the deviations of its practice from its theory can be explained by the objective factors it faced. Equally, the example of the Makhnovists shows the weakness of Rees' main argument, namely that the objective factors that Bolshevism faced can solely explain its authoritarian politics. That the Makhnovists, facing the same objective factors, did not act in the same manner as the Bolsheviks shows that Bolshevik ideology played a key role in the failure of the revolution. This explains Rees' clumsy attempts to rewrite the history and theory of the Makhnovshchina.

## 16 What lessons can be learned from the Makhnovists?

The Makhnovist movement was one of the most important events of the Russian Revolution. It was a mass movement of working people who tried and succeeded to implement libertarian ideas in extremely difficult circumstances.

As such, the most important lesson gained from the experience of the Makhno movement is simply that "*objective factors*" cannot and do not explain the degeneration of the Russian Revolution or Bolshevik authoritarianism. Here was a movement which faced the same terrible circumstances as the Bolsheviks faced (White counter-revolution, economic disruption, and so on) and yet did not act in the same manner as the Bolsheviks. Where the Bolsheviks completely abolished army democracy, the Makhnovists extensively applied it. Where the Bolsheviks implemented party dictatorship **over** the soviets, the Makhnovists encouraged and practised soviet self-management. While the Bolsheviks eliminated freedom of speech, press, assembly, the Makhnovists defended and implemented them. The list is endless (see [section 14](#)).

This means that one of the key defences of the Bolshevik Myth, namely that the Bolsheviks had no choice but to act as they did due to "*objective factors*" or "*circumstances*" is totally undermined. As such, it points to the obvious conclusion: Bolshevik ideology influenced the practice of the party, as did their position within the "*workers' state*," and so influenced the outcome of the Revolution. This means that to play down Bolshevik ideology or practice in favour of "*objective factors*", one fails to understand that the actions and ideas generated during the revolution were not "objectively" determined but were **themselves** important and sometimes decisive factors in the outcome.

Take, for example, the Bolshevik decision to betray the Makhnovists in 1920. Neither betrayal was "objectively determined" before-hand. However, it did make perfect sense from a perspective which equated the revolution with the "*dictatorship of the party*." That the first betrayal undoubtedly extended the length of the Civil War by allowing the Whites the space to reorganise under Wrangel also had its impact on Bolshevik theory and practice as well as the "*objective factors*" it had to face.

As such, the Makhnovists give a counter-example to the common pro-Bolshevik argument that the horrors of the Civil War were responsible for the degeneration of the Bolshevik Party and the revolution. In the words of one historian:

*"[The] Insurgent Army . . . was organised on a voluntary basis and respected the principle of election of commanders and staff. The regulations governing conduct were drawn up by commissions of soldiers and approved by general meetings of the units concerned. In other words, it embodied the principles of the soldiers' movement of 1917, principles rejected by the Bolsheviks when they set up the Red Army, supposedly because of their harmful effects on fighting efficiency, a characteristic of them discovered by the Bolsheviks only after they had come to power on the basis of promoting them. But the Insurgent Army, given its size and equipment, was very effective. Some have even credited it with greater responsibility than the Red Army for the defeat of Denikin. It took enormous efforts by the Bolsheviks, including the arrest or shooting of thousands of people, in order to pacify the region . . . even after the Insurgent Army was militarily broken, it took six months to mop up the remnants. . . Within its area of operations, which consisted of only two to three per cent of the total population of European Russia, the Insurgent Army was undoubtedly highly effective. While one can never know how history might have turned out had things been different, the Insurgent Army gives plenty of grounds for thinking that a people's revolutionary war of the kind it represented might have been at least as effective on a national scale with nationwide resources at its disposal as Trotsky and the Red Army's ruthless centralisation. It would not, however, have been compatible with the imposition from above of the Bolshevik leadership's vision of revolution. When the Insurgent Army drove the enemy out of an area they encouraged the local population to solve their own problems. Where the Red Army took over, the Cheka quickly followed. The Bolsheviks themselves were energetically snuffing out the ideals of 1917.*

*"Given such considerations it may be, though it cannot be logically proven one way or the other, that the Bolsheviks' deeply rooted authoritarianism rather than the civil war itself led to the construction of a highly centralised system that aimed at 'complete control' over political and many other aspects of social life. It could even be argued, though it is equally unprovable, that the tendency to authoritarianism, far from ensuring victory, nearly led to catastrophe. For one thing, it helped alienate many workers who felt cheated by the outcome of the revolution, and support for the regime was . . . far from even in this core group . . . [It] may, indeed, have been becoming more alienated as a result of Bolshevik measures depriving it of the means of expression of its growing catalogue of grievances. . . Far from being 'necessary' or even functional, the Bolshevik leadership's obsession with externally imposed discipline and authority might even have made the task of victory in the war more difficult and more costly. If the counter-example of Makhno is anything to go by then it certainly did." [Christopher Read, **From Tsar to Soviets**, pp. 264-5]*

As such, another key lesson to be learned from the Makhno movement is the importance of practising during a revolution the ideas you preach before it. Means and ends are linked, with the means shaping the ends and the ends inspiring the means. As such, if you argue for working-class power and freedom, you cannot dump these aims during a revolution without ensuring that they are never applied after it. As



the Makhnovist movement showed, even the most difficult situations need not hinder the application of revolutionary ideas.

The importance of encouraging working-class autonomy also shines through the Makhnovist experience. The problems facing a social revolution are many, as are the problems involved in constructing a new society. The solutions to these problems cannot be found without the active and full participation of the working class. As the Makhnovist congresses and soviets show, free debate and meaningful meetings are the only means, firstly, to ensure that working-class people are "*the masters of their own lives*," that "*they themselves are making the revolution*," that they "*have gained freedom*." "*Take that faith away*," stressed Alexander Berkman, "*deprive the people of power by setting up some authority over them, be it a political party or military organisation, and you have dealt a fatal blow to the revolution. You will have robbed it of its main source of strength, the masses*." [ABC of Anarchism, p. 82]

Secondly, it allows the participation of all in solving the problems of the revolution and of constructing the new society. Without this input, **real** socialism cannot be created and, at best, some form of oppressive state capitalist regime would be created (as Bolshevism shows). A new society needs the freedom of experimentation, to adapt freely to the problems it faces, to adjust to the needs and hopes of those making it. Without working-class freedom and autonomy, public life becomes impoverished, miserable and rigid as the affairs of all are handed over to a few leaders at the top of a social hierarchy, who cannot possibly understand, let alone solve, the problems affecting society. Freedom allows the working class to take an active part in the revolution. Restricting working-class freedom means the bureaucratisation of the revolution as a few party leaders cannot hope to direct and rule the lives of millions without a strong state apparatus. Simply put, the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself. Either working class people create socialism (and that needs workers' autonomy and freedom as its basis), or some clique will and the result will not be a socialist society.

As the experience of the Makhnovist movement shows, working-class freedom can be applied during a revolution and when it is faced with the danger of counter-revolution.

Another key lesson from the Makhnovist movement is that of the need for effective anarchist organisation. The Makhnovists did not become anarchist-influenced by chance. The hard effort by the local anarchists in Hulyai Pole before and during 1917 paid off in terms of political influence afterwards. Therefore, anarchists need to take a leading role in the struggles of working people (as we indicated in [section I.8.2](#), this was how the Spanish anarchists gained influence as well). As Voline noted, one of the advantages the Makhnovist movement had was "*the activity of . . . libertarian elements in the region . . . [and the] rapidity with which the peasant masses and the insurgents, despite unfavourable circumstances, became acquainted with libertarian ideas and sought to apply them*." [Op. Cit., p. 570]

Arshinov expands on this issue in a chapter of his history ("*The Makhnovshchina and Anarchism*"), arguing that many Russian anarchists "*suffered from the disease of disorganisation*," which led to "*impoverished ideas and futile practice*." Moreover, most did not join the Makhnovist movement, "*remained in their circles and slept through a mass movement of paramount importance*." [Op. Cit., p.

244 and p. 242]

Indeed, it was only in May 1919 that the "*Nabat*" Ukrainian anarchist confederation was organised. This federation worked closely with the Makhnovists and gained influence in the villages, towns and cities within and around the Makhnovist region. In such circumstances, the anarchists were at a disadvantage compared to the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, who had been organised far longer and so had more influence within the urban workers.

While many anarchists did participate effectively and organisationally within many areas of Russia and the Ukraine (gaining influence in Moscow and Petrograd, for example), they were much weaker than the Bolsheviks. This meant that the Bolshevik idea of revolution gained influence (by, it should be noted, appropriating anarchist slogans and tactics). Once in power, the Bolsheviks turned against their rivals, using state repression to effectively destroy the anarchist movement in Russia in April 1918 (see [section 24](#) of the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)" for details). This, incidentally, led to many anarchists coming to the Ukraine to escape repression and many joined the Makhnovists. As Arshinov notes, the Bolsheviks "*knew perfectly well that . . . anarchism in Russia, lacking any contact with a mass movement as important as the Makhnovshchina, did not have a base and could not threaten nor endanger them.*" [Op. Cit., p. 248] Waiting till **after** a revolution starts to build such a base is a dangerous tactic, as the experience of the Russian anarchists shows. As the experience of the Moscow anarchists active in the bakers' union shows, organised working-class support can be an effective deterrent to state repression (the Moscow bakers' union continued to have anarchists active in it until 1921).

It should be noted that this lesson was recognised by the main anarchists associated with the Makhnovists. In exile, Voline argued for the need to build a "*synthesis*" anarchist federation (see [section J.3.2](#)) while Arshinov and Makhno both associated themselves with the Platform (see [section J.3.3](#)).

Another key lesson is the need to combine rural and urban organisation. As Voline argued, the "*absence of a vigorous organised workers' movement which could support that of the peasant insurgents*" was a major disadvantage for the Makhno movement. [Voline, Op. Cit., p. 571] If there had been a workers' movement influenced by anarchist or syndicalist ideas within the Ukrainian towns during the Russian Revolution, the possibilities of constructive work would have been increased immensely. Take the example of when the Makhnovists liberated Aleksandrovsk and organised two workers' conferences. It was only at the insurgents' insistence that the unions agreed to send delegates, but for information only. This was undoubtedly due to the fact that Mensheviks had some influence in the unions and Bolshevik influence was increasing. Both parties may have preferred the Makhnovists to the Whites, but neither accepted anarchist ideas of workers' self-management and so constructive work was limited to the railway workers. In contrast, when Katerinoslav was liberated, the bakers set themselves to preparing the socialisation of their industry and drawing up plans to feed both the army and the civilian population. Unsurprisingly, the bakers had long been under anarcho-syndicalist influence. [Malet, Op. Cit., p. 123 and p. 124]

As the Makhnovists themselves realised, their movement had to be complemented by urban working-class self-activity and self-organisations. While they did all they could to encourage it, they lacked a base within the workers' movement and so their ideas had to overcome the twin barriers of workers' unfamiliarity with both them and their ideas and Marxist influence. With a strong working-class movement influenced by anarchist ideas, the possibilities for constructive work between city and village would have been helped immensely (this can be seen from the example of the Spanish Revolution of 1936, where rural and urban collectives and unions made direct links with each other).

Lastly, there is the lesson to be gained from Makhnovist co-operation with the Bolsheviks. Simply put, the experience shows the importance of being wary towards Bolshevism. As Voline put it, another disadvantage of the Makhnovists was a "*certain casualness, a lack of necessary distrust, towards the Communists.*" [Op. Cit., p. 571] The Makhnovists were betrayed three times by the Bolsheviks, who continually placed maintaining their own power above the needs of the revolution. The anarchists were simply used as cannon fodder against the Whites and once their utility had ended, the Bolsheviks turned their guns on them.

Thus a lesson to be learned is that co-operation between anarchists and Bolsheviks is fraught with danger. As many activists are aware, modern-day supporters of Bolshevism constantly urge everyone to unite "*against the common enemy*" and not to be "*sectarian*" (although, somehow this appeal to non-sectarianism does not stop them printing lying accounts of anarchism!). The Makhnovists took them at their word in early 1919 and soon found out that "*unity*" meant "*follow our orders.*" When the Makhnovists continued to apply their ideas of working-class self-management, the Bolsheviks turned on them. Similarly, in early 1920 the Bolsheviks outlawed the Makhnovists in order to break their influence in the Ukraine. The Makhnovist contribution to the defeat of Denikin (the common enemy) was ignored. Lastly, in mid-1920 the Makhnovists placed the need of the revolution first and suggested an alliance to defeat the common enemy of Wrangel. Once Wrangel had been defeated, the Bolsheviks ripped up the agreement they had signed and, yet again, turned on the Makhnovists. Simply put, the Bolsheviks continually placed their own interests before that of the revolution and their allies. This is to be expected from an ideology based on vanguardism (see [section H.5](#) for further discussion).

This does not mean that anarchists and Leninists should not work together. In some circumstances and in some social movements, this may be essential. However, it would be wise to learn from history and not ignore it and, as such, modern activists should be wary when conducting such co-operation. Ultimately, for Leninists, social movements are simply a means to their end (the seizing of state power by them on behalf of the working class) and anarchists should never forget it.

Thus the lessons of the Makhnovist movement are exceedingly rich. Simply put, the Makhnovshchina show that anarchism is a viable form of revolutionary ideas and can be applied successfully in extremely difficult circumstances. They show that social revolutions need not consist of changing one set of bosses for another. The Makhnovist movement clearly shows that libertarian ideas can be successfully applied in a revolutionary situation.

Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?

## H.3 What are the myths of state socialism?

Ask most people what socialism means and they will point to the former Soviet Union, China, Cuba and a host of other authoritarian, centralised and oppressive party dictatorships. These regimes have in common two things. Firstly, the claim that their rulers are Marxists or socialists. Secondly, that they have successfully alienated millions of working class people from the very idea of socialism. Indeed, the supporters of capitalism simply had to describe the "socialist paradises" as they really were in order to put people off socialism. Moreover, the Stalinist regimes (and their various apologists and even "opponents", like the Trotskyists, who defended them as "*degenerated workers' states*") let the bourgeoisie have an easy time in dismissing all working-class demands and struggles as so many attempts to set up similar party dictatorships.

The association of "*socialism*" or "*communism*" with these dictatorships has often made anarchists wary of calling themselves socialists or communists in case our ideas are associated with them. As Errico Malatesta argued in 1924:

*"I foresee the possibility that the communist anarchists will gradually abandon the term 'communist': it is growing in ambivalence and falling into disrepute as a result of Russian 'communist' despotism. If the term is eventually abandoned this will be a repetition of what happened with the word 'socialist.' We who, in Italy at least, were the first champions of socialism and maintained and still maintain that we are the true socialists in the broad and human sense of the word, ended by abandoning the term to avoid confusion with the many and various authoritarian and bourgeois deviations of socialism. Thus too we may have to abandon the term 'communist' for fear that our ideal of free human solidarity will be confused with the avaricious despotism which has for some time triumphed in Russia and which one party, inspired by the Russian example, seeks to impose worldwide."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 20]

That, to a large degree happened, with anarchists simply calling themselves by that name, without adjectives, to avoid confusion. This, sadly, resulted in two problems. Firstly, it gave Marxists even more potential to portray anarchism as being primarily against the state and not as equally opposed to capitalism, hierarchy and inequality (as we argue in [section H.2.4](#), anarchists have opposed the state as just one aspect of class society). Secondly, extreme right-wingers tried to appropriate the names "*libertarian*" and "*anarchist*" to describe their vision of extreme capitalism as "*anarchism*," they claimed, was simply "*anti-government*" (see [section F](#) for discussion on why "anarcho"-capitalism is not anarchist). To counter these distortions of anarchist ideas, many anarchists have recently re-appropriated the use of the words "*socialist*" and "*communist*," although always in combination with the words "*anarchist*" and "*libertarian*."

Such combination of words is essential as the problem Malatesta predicted still remains. If one thing can

be claimed for the 20th century, it is that it has seen the word "*socialism*" become narrowed and restricted into what anarchists call "*state socialism*" -- socialism created and run from above, by the state (i.e. by the state bureaucracy). This restriction of "socialism" has been supported by both Stalinist and Capitalist ruling elites, for their own reasons (the former to secure their own power and gain support by associating themselves with socialist ideals, the latter by discrediting those ideas by associating them with the horror of Stalinism).

This means that anarchists and other libertarian socialists have a major task on their hands -- to reclaim the promise of socialism from the distortions inflicted upon it by both its enemies (Stalinists and capitalists) and its erstwhile and self-proclaimed supporters (Social Democracy and its various offspring like the Bolsheviks and its progeny like the Trotskyists). A key aspect of this process is a critique of both the practice and ideology of Marxism and its various offshoots. Only by doing this can anarchists prove, to quote Rocker, that "*Socialism will be free, or it will not be at all.*" [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 20]

Such a critique raises the problem of which forms of "*Marxism*" to discuss. There is an extremely diverse range of Marxist viewpoints and groups in existence. Indeed, the different groups spend a lot of time indicating why all the others are not "*real*" Marxists (or Marxist-Leninists, or Trotskyists, and so on) and are just "*sects*" without "*real*" Marxist theory or ideas. This "diversity" is, of course, a major problem (and somewhat ironic, given that some Marxists like to insult anarchists by stating there are as many forms of anarchism as anarchists!). Equally, many Marxists go further than dismissing specific groups. Some even totally reject other branches of their movement as being non-Marxist (for example, some Marxists dismiss Leninism as having little, or nothing, to do with what they consider the "*real*" Marxist tradition to be). This means that discussing Marxism can be difficult as Marxists can argue that our FAQ does not address the arguments of this or that Marxist thinker, group or tendency.

With this in mind, this section of the FAQ will concentrate on the works of Marx and Engels (and so the movement they generated, namely Social Democracy) as well as the Bolshevik tradition started by Lenin and continued (by and large) by Trotsky. These are the core ideas (and the recognised authorities) of most Marxists and so latter derivations of these tendencies can be ignored (for example Maoism, Castroism and so on). It should also be noted that even this grouping will produce dissent as some Marxists argue that the Bolshevik tradition is not part of Marxism. This perspective can be seen in the "*impossiblist*" tradition of Marxism (e.g. the Socialist Party of Great Britain and its sister parties) as well as in the left/council communist tradition (e.g. in the work of such Marxists as Anton Pannekoek and Paul Mattick). The arguments for their positions are strong and well worth reading (indeed, any honest analysis of Marxism and Leninism cannot help but show important differences between the two). However, as the vast majority of Marxists today are also Leninists, we have to reflect this in our FAQ (and, in general, we do so by referring to "mainstream Marxists" as opposed to the small minority of libertarian Marxists).

Another problem arises when we consider the differences not only between Marxist tendencies, but also within a specific tendency before and after its representatives seize power. For example, "*there are . . . very different strains of Leninism . . . there's the Lenin of 1917, the Lenin of the 'April Theses' and State*

**and Revolution.** *That's one Lenin. And then there's the Lenin who took power and acted in ways that are unrecognisable . . . compared with, say, the doctrines of 'State and Revolution.'* . . . *this [is] not very hard to explain. There's a big difference between the libertarian doctrines of a person who is trying to associate himself with a mass popular movement to acquire power and the authoritarian power of somebody who's taken power and is trying to consolidate it. . . that is true of Marx also. There are competing strains in Marx.*" [Noam Chomsky, **Language and Politics**, p. 177]

As such, this section of our FAQ will try and draw out the contradictions within Marxism and indicate what aspects of the doctrine aided the development of the "second" Lenin. The seeds from which authoritarianism grew post-October 1917 existed from the start. Anarchists agree with Noam Chomsky when he stated that he considered it *"characteristic and unfortunate that the lesson that was drawn from Marx and Lenin for the later period was the authoritarian lesson. That is, it's the authoritarian power of the vanguard party and destruction of all popular forums in the interests of the masses. That's the Lenin who became known to later generations. Again, not very surprisingly, because that's what Leninism really was in practice."* [Ibid.]

Ironically, given Marx's own comments on the subject, a key hindrance to such an evaluation is the whole idea and history of Marxism itself. While, as Murray Bookchin noted *"to his lasting credit,"* Marx tried (to some degree) *"to create a movement that looks to the future instead of to the past,"* his followers have not done so. *"Once again,"* Bookchin argues, *"the dead are walking in our midst -- ironically, draped in the name of Marx, the man who tried to bury the dead of the nineteenth century. So the revolution of our own day can do nothing better than parody, in turn, the October Revolution of 1918 and the civil war of 1918-1920 . . . The complete, all-sided revolution of our own day . . . follows the partial, the incomplete, the one-sided revolutions of the past, which merely changed the form of the 'social question,' replacing one system of domination and hierarchy by another."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 174 and p. 175] In Marx's words, the *"tradition of all the dead generations weighs down like a nightmare on the brain of the living."* Marx's own work, and the movements it inspired, now add to this dead-weight. In order to ensure, as Marx put it, the social revolution draws its poetry from the future rather than the past, Marxism itself must be transcended.

Which, of course, means evaluating both the theory **and** practice of Marxism. For anarchists, it seems strange that for a body of work whose followers stress is revolutionary and liberating, its results have been so bad. If Marxism is so obviously revolutionary and democratic, then why have so few of the people who read it drawn those conclusions? How could it be transmuted so easily into Stalinism? Why are there so few **libertarian** Marxists, if it was Lenin (or Social Democracy) which *"misinterpreted"* Marx and Engels? So when Marxists argue that the problem is in the interpretation of the message not in the message itself, anarchists reply that the reason these numerous, allegedly false, interpretations exist at all simply suggests that there are limitations within Marxism **as such** rather than the readings it has been subjected to. When something repeatedly fails (and produces such terrible results), then there has to be a fundamental flaw somewhere.

Thus Cornelius Castoriadis:

*"Marx was, in fact, the first to stress that the significance of a theory cannot be grasped independently of the historical and social practice it inspires and initiates, to which it gives rise, in which it prolongs itself and under cover of which a given practice seeks to justify itself.*

*"Who, today, would dare proclaim that the only significance of Christianity for history is to be found in reading unaltered versions of the Gospels or that the historical practice of various Churches over a period of some 2,000 years can teach us nothing fundamental about the significance of this religious movement? A 'faithfulness to Marx' which would see the historical fate of Marxism as something unimportant would be just as laughable. It would in fact be quite ridiculous. Whereas for the Christian the revelations of the Gospels have a transcendental kernel and an intemporal validity, no theory could ever have such qualities in the eyes of a Marxist. To seek to discover the meaning of Marxism only in what Marx wrote (while keeping quiet about what the doctrine has become in history) is to pretend -- in flagrant contradiction with the central ideas of that doctrine -- that real history doesn't count and that the truth of a theory is always and exclusively to be found 'further on.' It finally comes to replacing revolution by revelation and the understanding of events by the exegesis of texts." ["The Fate of Marxism," pp. 75-84 **The Anarchist Papers**, Dimitrios Roussopoulos (ed.), p. 77]*

This does not mean forsaking the work of Marx and Engels. It means rejecting once and for all the idea that two people, writing over a period of decades over a hundred years ago have all the answers. As should be obvious! Ultimately, anarchists think we have to **build** upon the legacy of the past, not squeeze current events into it. We should stand on the shoulders of giants, not at their feet.

Thus this section of our FAQ will attempt to explain the various myths of Marxism and provide an anarchist critique of Marxism and its offshoots. Of course, the ultimate myth of Marxism is what Alexander Berkman called *"The Bolshevik Myth,"* namely the idea that the Russian Revolution was a success. However, as we discuss this revolution in the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#) we will not do so here except when it provides useful empirical evidence for our critique. Our discussion here will concentrate for the most part on Marxist theory, showing its inadequacies, its problems, where it appropriated anarchist ideas and how anarchism and Marxism differ. This is a big task and this section of the FAQ can only be a small contribution to it.

As noted above, there are minority trends in Marxism which are libertarian in nature (i.e. close to anarchism). As such, it would be simplistic to say that anarchists are *"anti-Marxist"* and we generally do differentiate between the (minority) libertarian element and the authoritarian mainstream of Marxism (i.e. Social-Democracy and Leninism in its many forms). Without doubt, Marx contributed immensely to the enrichment of socialist ideas and analysis (as acknowledged by Bakunin, for example). His influence, as to be expected, was both positive and negative. For this reason he must be read and discussed critically. This FAQ is a contribution to this task of transcending the work of Marx. As with anarchist thinkers, we must take what is useful from Marx and reject the rubbish. But never forget that



anarchists are anarchists precisely because we think that anarchist thinkers have got more right than wrong and we reject the idea of tying our politics to the name of a long dead thinker.

### H.3.1 Do Anarchists and Marxists want the same thing?

Ultimately, the greatest myth of Marxism is the idea that anarchists and most Marxists want the same thing. Indeed, it could be argued that it is anarchist criticism of Marxism which has made them stress the similarity of long term goals with anarchism. *"Our polemics against them [the Marxists],"* Bakunin argued, *"have forced them to recognise that freedom, or anarchy -- that is, the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upward -- is the ultimate goal of social development."* He continued by stressing that the means to this apparently similar end were different. The Marxists, he argues, *"say that [a] state yoke, [a] dictatorship, is a necessary transitional device for achieving the total liberation of the people: anarchy, or freedom, is the goal, and the state, or dictatorship, is the means . . . We reply that no dictatorship can have any other objective than to perpetuate itself, and that it can engender and nurture only slavery in the people who endure it. Liberty can be created only by liberty, by an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upwards."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 179]

As such, it is commonly taken for granted that the ends of both Marxists and Anarchists are the same, we just disagree over the means. However, within this general agreement over the ultimate end (a classless and stateless society), the details of such a society are somewhat different. This, perhaps, is to be expected given the differences in means. As is obvious from Bakunin's argument, anarchists stress the unity of means and goals, that the means which are used affect the goal reached. This unity between means and ends is expressed well by Martin Buber's observation that *"[o]ne cannot in the nature of things expect a little tree that has been turned into a club to put forth leaves."* [**Paths in Utopia**, p. 127] In summary, we cannot expect to reach our end destination if we take a path going in the opposite direction. As such, the agreement on ends may not be as close as often imagined.

So when it is stated that anarchists and state socialists want the same thing, the following should be borne in mind. Firstly, there are key differences on the question of current tactics. Secondly, there is the question of the immediate aims of a revolution. Thirdly, there is the long term goals of such a revolution. These three aspects form a coherent whole, with each one logically following on from the last. As we will show, the anarchist and Marxist vision of each aspect are distinctly different, so suggesting that the short, medium **and** long term goals of each theory are, in fact, different. We will discuss each aspect in turn.

Firstly, the question of the nature of the revolutionary movement. Here anarchists and most Marxists have distinctly opposing ideas. The former argue that both the revolutionary organisation (i.e. an anarchist federation) and the wider labour movement should be organised in line with the vision of society which inspires us. This means that it should be a federation of self-managed groups based on the direct participation of its membership in the decision making process. Power, therefore, is decentralised and there is no division between those who make the decisions and those who execute them. We reject

the idea of others acting on our behalf or on behalf of the people and so urge the use of direct action and solidarity, based upon working class self-organisation, self-management and autonomy. Thus, anarchists apply their ideas in the struggle against the current system, arguing what is "efficient" from a hierarchical or class position is deeply inefficient from a revolutionary perspective.

Marxists disagree. Most Marxists are also Leninists. They argue that we must form "*vanguard*" parties based on the principles of "*democratic centralism*" complete with institutionalised leaderships. They argue that how we organise today is independent of the kind of society we seek and that the party should aim to become the recognised leadership of the working class. Every thing they do is subordinated to this end, meaning that no struggle is seen as an end in itself but rather as a means to gaining membership and influence for the party until such time as it gather enough support to seize power. As this is a key point of contention between anarchists and Leninists, we discuss this in some detail in [section H.5](#) and its related sections and so not do so here.

Obviously, in the short term anarchists and Leninists cannot be said to want the same thing. While we seek a revolutionary movement based on libertarian (i.e. revolutionary) principles, the Leninists seek a party based on distinctly bourgeois principles of centralisation, delegation of power and representative over direct democracy. Both, of course, argue that only their system of organisation is effective and efficient (see [section H.5.8](#) on a discussion why anarchists argue that the Leninist model is not effective from a revolutionary perspective). The anarchist perspective is to see the revolutionary organisation as part of the working class, encouraging and helping those in struggle to clarify the ideas they draw from their own experiences and its role is to provide a lead rather than a new set of leaders to be followed (see [section J.3.6](#) for more on this). The Leninist perspective is to see the revolutionary party as the leadership of the working class, introducing socialist consciousness into a class which cannot generate itself (see [section H.5.1](#)).

Given the Leninist preference for centralisation and a leadership role by hierarchical organisation, it will come as no surprise that their ideas on the nature of post-revolutionary society are distinctly different from anarchists. While there is a tendency for Leninists to deny that anarchists have a clear idea of what will immediately be created by a revolution (see [section H.1.4](#)), we do have concrete ideas on the kind of society a revolution will immediately create. This vision is in almost every way different from that proposed by most Marxists.

Firstly, there is the question of the state. Anarchists, unsurprisingly enough, seek to destroy it. Simply put, while anarchists want a stateless and classless society and advocate the means appropriate to those ends, most Marxists argue that in order to reach a stateless society we need a new "*workers*" state, a state, moreover, in which their party will be in charge. Trotsky, writing in 1906, made this clear when he argued that "*[e]very political party deserving of the name aims at seizing governmental power and thus putting the state at the service of the class whose interests it represents.*" [quoted by Israel Getzler, "*Marxist Revolutionaries and the Dilemma of Power*", pp. 88-112, **Revolution and Politics in Russia**, Alexander and Janet Rabinowitch and Ladis K.D. Kristof (eds.), p. 105] This fits in with Marx's 1852 comments that "*Universal Suffrage is the equivalent of political power for the working class of England,*

where the proletariat forms the large majority of the population . . . Its inevitable result, here, is **the political supremacy of the working class.**" [Collected Works, vol. 11, pp. 335-6] In other words, "political power" simply means the ability to nominate a government. Thus Engels:

*"In every struggle of class against class, the next end fought for is political power; the ruling class defends its political supremacy, that is to say its safe majority in the Legislature; the inferior class fights for, first a share, then the whole of that power, in order to become enabled to change existing laws in conformity with their own interests and requirements. Thus the working class of Great Britain for years fought ardently and even violently for the People's Charter [which demanded universal suffrage and yearly general elections], which was to give it that political power."* [Collected Works, vol. 24, p. 386]

While Marxists like to portray this new government as *"the dictatorship of the proletariat,"* anarchists argue that, in fact, it will be the dictatorship **over** the proletariat. This is because if the working class **is** the ruling class (as Marxists claim) then, anarchists argue, how can they delegate their power to a government and remain so? Either the working class directly manages its own affairs (and so society) or the government does. We discuss this issue in [section H.3.7](#) any state is simply rule by a few and so is incompatible with socialism. The obvious implication of this is that Marxism seeks party rule, not working class direct management of society (as we discuss in [section H.3.8](#), the Leninist tradition is extremely clear on this matter).

Then there is the question of the building blocks of socialism. Yet again, there is a clear difference between anarchism and Marxism. Anarchists have always argued that the basis of socialism is working class organisations, created in the struggle against capitalism and the state (see [section H.1.4](#) for details). This applies to both the social and economic structure of a post-revolutionary society. For most forms of Marxism, a radically different picture has been the dominant one. As we discuss in [section H.3.10](#), Marxists only reached a similar vision for the political structure of socialism in 1917 when Lenin supported the soviets as he framework of his workers' state. However, as we prove in [section H.3.11](#), he did so for instrumental purposes only, namely as the best means of assuring Bolshevik power. If the soviets clashed with the party, it was the latter which took precedence. Unsurprisingly, the Bolshevik mainstream moved from *"All Power to the Soviets"* to *"dictatorship of the party"* rather quickly. Thus, unlike anarchism, most forms of Marxism aim for party power, a "revolutionary" government above the organs of working class self-management.

Economically, there are also clear differences. Anarchists have consistently argued that the workers *"ought to be the real managers of industries."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 157] To achieve this, we have pointed to various organisations over time, such as factory committees and labour unions as the *"medium which Socialist forms of life could find . . . realisation."* Thus they would *"not only [be] an instrument for the improvement of the conditions of labour, but also of [were capable of] becoming an organisation which might . . . take into its hands the management of production."* [Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, pp. 22-3]

As we discuss in more detail in [section H.3.12](#), Lenin, in contrast, saw socialism as being constructed on the basis of structures and techniques (including management ones) developed under capitalism. Rather than see socialism as being built around new, working class organisations, Lenin saw it being constructed on the basis of developments in capitalist organisation. *"The Leninist road to socialism,"* notes one expert on Lenin, *"emphatically ran through the terrain of monopoly capitalism. It would, according to Lenin, abolish neither its advanced technological base nor its institutionalised means for allocating resources or structuring industry. . . The institutionalised framework of advanced capitalism could, to put it shortly, be utilised for realisation of specifically socialist goals. They were to become, indeed, the principal (almost exclusive) instruments of socialist transformation."* [Neil Harding, **Leninism**, p.145] As Lenin explained, socialism is *"nothing but the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly. In other words, Socialism is nothing but state capitalist monopoly made to benefit the whole people; by this token it ceases to be capitalist monopoly."* [**The Threatening Catastrophe and how to avoid it**, p. 37]

The role of workers' in this vision was basically unchanged. Rather than demand, like anarchists, workers' self-management of production in 1917, Lenin raised the demand for *"universal, all-embracing workers' control over the capitalists."* [**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power**, p. 52] Once the Bolsheviks were in power, the workers' own organs (the factory committees) were integrated into a system of state control, losing whatever power they once held at the point of production. Lenin then modified this vision by raising *"one-man management"* over the workers (see [section H.3.14](#)). In other words, a form of **state** capitalism in which workers would still be wage slaves under bosses appointed by the state. Unsurprisingly, the *"control"* workers exercised over their bosses (i.e. those with **real** power in production) proved to be as elusive in production as it was in the state. In this, Lenin undoubtedly followed the lead of the **Communist Manifesto** which stressed state ownership of the means of production without a word about workers' self-management of production. As we discuss in [section H.3.13](#), state "socialism" cannot help being *"state capitalism"* by its very nature.

Needless to say, as far as means go, few anarchists and syndicalists are complete pacifists. As syndicalist Emile Pouget argued, *"[h]istory teaches that the privileged have never surrendered their privileges without having been compelled so to do and forced into it by their rebellious victims. It is unlikely that the bourgeoisie is blessed with an exceptional greatness of soul and will abdicate voluntarily."* This meant that *"[r]ecourse to force . . . will be required."* [**The Party Of Labour**] This does not mean that libertarians glorify violence or argue that all forms of violence are acceptable (quite the reverse!), it simply means that for self-defence against violent opponents violence is, unfortunately, sometimes required.

The way an anarchist revolution would defend itself also shows a key difference between anarchism and Marxism. As we discussed in [section H.2.1](#), anarchists (regardless of Marxist claims) have always argued that a revolution needs to defend itself. This would be organised in a federal, bottom-up way as the social structure of a free society. It would be based on voluntary working class militias. As Bakunin put it, *"the peasants, like the industrial city workers, should unite by federating the fighting battalions,*

*district by district, this assuring a common co-ordinated defence against internal and external enemies.*" [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 190] This model of working class self-defence was applied successfully in both the Spanish and Ukrainian revolutions (by the CNT-FAI and the Makhnovists, respectively). In contrast, the Bolshevik method of defending a revolution was the top-down, hierarchical and centralised "Red Army" (see [section 14](#) of the appendix on "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)" for details). As the example of the Makhnovists (see the appendix on "[Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?](#)") showed, the "Red Army" was not the only way the Russian Revolution could have been defended although it was the only way Bolshevik power could be.

So while Anarchists have consistently argued that socialism must be based on working class self-management of production and society based on working class organisations, the Leninist tradition has not supported this vision (although it has appropriated some of its imagery to gain popular support). Clearly, in terms of the immediate aftermath of a revolution, anarchists and Leninists do not seek the same thing. The former want a free society organised and run from below-upwards by the working class based on workers self-management of production while the latter seek party power in a new state structure which would preside over an essentially state capitalist economy.

Lastly, there is the question of the long term goal. Even in this vision of a classless and stateless society there is very little in common between anarchist communism and Marxist communism, beyond the similar terminology used to describe it. This is blurred by the differences in terminology used by both theories. Marx and Engels had raised in the 1840s the (long term) goal of "*an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all*" replacing "*the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms,*" in the **Communist Manifesto**. Before this "*vast association of the whole nation*" was possible, the proletariat would be "*raise[d] . . . to the position of ruling class*" and "*all capital*" would be "*centralise[d] . . . in the hands of the State, i.e. of the proletariat organised as the ruling class.*" As economic classes would no longer exist, "the public power would lose its political character" as political power "*is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another.*" [**Manifesto of the Communist Party**, p. 53]

It was this, the means to the end, which was the focus of much debate (see [section H.1.1](#) for details). However, it cannot be assumed that the ends desired by Marxists and anarchists are identical. The argument that the "*public power*" could stop being "*political*" (i.e. a state) is a tautology, and a particularly unconvincing one at that. After all, if "*political power*" is defined as being an instrument of class rule it automatically follows that a classless society would have a non-political "*public power*" and so be without a state! This does not imply that a "*public power*" would no longer exist as a structure within (or, more correctly, over) society, it just implies that its role would no longer be "*political*" (i.e. an instrument of class rule). Given that, according to the Manifesto, the state would centralise the means of production, credit and transportation and then organise it "*in accordance with a common plan*" using "*industrial armies, especially for agriculture*" this would suggest that the state structure would remain even after its "*political*" aspects had, to use Engels term, "*withered away.*" [Marx and Engels, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 52-3]

From this perspective, the difference between anarchist communism and Marxist-communism is clear. *"While both,"* notes John Clark, *"foresee the disappearance of the state, the achievement of social management of the economy, the end of class rule, and the attainment of human equality, to mention a few common goals, significant differences in ends still remain. Marxist thought has inherited a vision which looks to high development of technology with a corresponding degree of centralisation of social institutions which will continue even after the coming of the social revolution. . . . The anarchist vision sees the human scale as essential, both in the techniques which are used for production, and for the institutions which arise from the new modes of association . . . In addition, the anarchist ideal has a strong hedonistic element which has seen Germanic socialism as ascetic and Puritanical."* [**The Anarchist Moment**, p. 68]

Moreover, it is unlikely that such a centralised system could become stateless and classless in actuality. As Bakunin argued, in the Marxist state *"there will be no privileged class. Everybody will be equal, not only from the judicial and political but also from the economic standpoint. This is the promise at any rate . . . So there will be no more class, but a government, and, please note, an extremely complicated government which, not content with governing and administering the masses politically . . . will also administer them economically, by taking over the production and **fair** sharing of wealth, agriculture, the establishment and development of factories, the organisation and control of trade, and lastly the injection of capital into production by a single banker, the State."* Such a system would be, in fact, *"the reign of the **scientific mind**, the most aristocratic, despotic, arrogant and contemptuous of all regimes"* based on *"a new class, a new hierarchy of real or bogus learning, and the world will be divided into a dominant, science-based minority and a vast, ignorant majority."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 266]

George Barrett's words also seem appropriate:

*"The modern Socialist . . . have steadily worked for centralisation, and complete and perfect organisation and control by those in authority above the people. The anarchist, on the other hand, believes in the abolition of that central power, and expects the free society to grow into existence from below, starting with those organisations and free agreements among the people themselves. It is difficult to see how, by making a central power control everything, we can be making a step towards the abolition of that power."* [**Objections to Anarchism**]

As Brain Morris notes, *"Bakunin's fears that under Marx's kind of socialism the workers would continue to labour under a regimented, mechanised, hierarchical system of production, without direct control over their labour, has been more than confirmed by the realities of the Bolshevik system. Thus, Bakunin's critique of Marxism has taken on an increasing relevance in the age of bureaucratic State capitalism."* [**Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 132]

Therefore, anarchists are not convinced that a highly centralised structure (as a state is) managing the economic life of society can be part of a truly classless society. While economic class as defined in

terms of property may not exist, social classes (defined in terms of inequality of power and wealth) will continue simply because the state is designed to create and protect minority rule (see [section H.3.7](#)). As Bolshevik and Stalinist Russia showed, nationalising the means of production does not end class society. As Malatesta argued:

*"When F. Engels, perhaps to counter anarchist criticisms, said that once classes disappear the State as such has no **raison d'etre** and transforms itself from a government of men into an administration of things, he was merely playing with words. Whoever has power over things has power over men; whoever governs production also governs the producers; who determines consumption is master over the consumer.*

*"This is the question; either things are administered on the basis of free agreement of the interested parties, and this is anarchy; or they are administered according to laws made by administrators and this is government, it is the State, and inevitably it turns out to be tyrannical.*

*"It is not a question of the good intentions or the good will of this or that man, but of the inevitability of the situation, and of the tendencies which man generally develops in given circumstances." [Life and Ideas, p. 145]*

The anarchist vision of the future society, therefore, does not exactly match the state communist vision, as much as the latter would like to suggest it does. The difference between the two is authority, which cannot be anything but the largest difference possible. Anarchist economic and organisational theories are built around an anti-authoritarian core and this informs both our means and aims. For anarchists, the Leninist vision of socialism is unattractive. Lenin continually stressed that his conception of socialism and "state capitalism" were basically identical. Even in **State and Revolution**, allegedly Lenin's most libertarian work, we discover this particularly unvisionary and uninspiring vision of "socialism":

*"All citizens are transformed into the salaried employees of the state . . . All citizens become employees and workers of a **single** national state 'syndicate' . . . The whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory with equality of work and equality of pay." [Essential Works of Lenin, p. 348]*

To which, anarchists point to Engels and his comments on the tyrannical and authoritarian character of the modern factory (as we discuss in [section H.4.4](#)). Engels, let us not forget, had argued against the anarchists that large-scale industry (or, indeed, any form of organisation) meant that "authority" was required (organisation meant that "the will of a single individual will always have to subordinate itself, which means that questions are settled in an authoritarian way."). He (like the factory owner he was) stated that factories should have "*Lasciate ogni autonomia, voi che entrate*" ("Leave, ye that enter in, all autonomy behind") written above their doors. This obedience, Engels argued, was necessary even under socialism, as applying the "forces of nature" meant "a veritable despotism independent of all social organisation." This meant that "[w]anting to abolish authority in large-scale industry is tantamount to

wanting to abolish industry itself." [Marx-Engels Reader, p. 731] Clearly, Lenin's idea of turning the world into one big factory takes on an extremely frightening nature given Engels lovely vision of the lack of freedom in industry.

For these reasons anarchists reject the simplistic Marxist analysis of inequality being rooted simply in economic class. Such an analysis, as the comments of Lenin and Engels prove, show that social inequality can be smuggled in by the backdoor of a proposed classless and stateless society. Thus Bookchin:

*"Basic to anti-authoritarian Socialism ---specifically, to Anarchist Communism -- is the notion that hierarchy and domination cannot be subsumed by class rule and economic exploitation, indeed, that they are more fundamental to an understanding of the modern revolutionary project. Before 'man' began to exploit 'man,' he began to dominate woman . . . Power of human over human long antedates **the very formation of classes and economic modes of social oppression.** . . . This much is clear: it will no longer do to insist that a classless society, freed from material exploitation, will necessarily be a liberated society. There is nothing in the social future to suggest that bureaucracy is incompatible with a classless society, the domination of women, the young, ethnic groups or even professional strata."* [Toward an Ecological Society, pp. 208-9]

Ultimately, anarchists see that *"there is a realm of domination that is broader than the realm of material exploitation. The tragedy of the socialist movement is that, steeped in the past, it uses the methods of domination to try to 'liberate' us from material exploitation."* Needless to say, this is doomed to failure. Socialism *"will simply mire us in a world we are trying to overcome. A non-hierarchical society, self-managed and free of domination in all its forms, stands on the agenda today, not a hierarchical system draped in a red flag."* [Murray Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 272 and pp. 273-4]

In summary, it cannot be said that anarchists and most Marxists want the same thing. While they often use the same terms, these terms often hide radically different concepts. Just because, say, anarchists and mainstream Marxists talk about *"social revolution," "socialism," "all power to the soviets"* and so on, it does not mean that we mean the same thing by them. For example, the phrase *"all power to the soviets"* for anarchists means exactly that (i.e. that the revolution must be directly managed by working class organs). Leninists mean *"all power to a central government elected by a national soviet congress."* Similarly with other similar phrases (which shows the importance of looking at the details of any political theory and its history).

We have shown that discussion over ends is as important as discussion over means as they are related. As Kropotkin once pointed out, those who downplay the importance of discussing the *"order of things which . . . should emerge from the coming revolution"* in favour of concentrating on *"practical things"* are being less than honest as *"far from making light of such theories, they propagate them, and all that they do now is a logical extension of their ideas. In the end those words 'Let us not discuss theoretical questions' really mean: 'Do not subject our theory to discussion, but help us to put it into*



*execution.*" [Words of a Rebel, p. 200]

Hence the need to critically evaluate both ends and means. This shows the weakness of the common argument that anarchists and Leftists share some common visions and so we should work with them to achieve those common things. Who knows what happens after that? As can be seen, this is not the case. Many aspects of anarchism and Marxism are in opposition and cannot be considered similar (for example, what a Leninist considers as socialism is extremely different to what an anarchist thinks it is). If you consider "*socialism*" as being a "*workers' state*" presided over by a "*revolutionary*" government, then how can this be reconciled with the anarchist vision of a federation of self-managed communes and workers' associations? As the Russian Revolution shows, only by the armed might of the "*revolutionary*" government crushing the anarchist vision.

The only thing we truly share with these groups is a mutual opposition to existing capitalism. Having a common enemy does not make someone friends. Hence anarchists, while willing to work on certain mutual struggles, are well aware there is substantial differences in both terms of means and goals. The lessons of revolution in the 20th Century is that once in power, Leninists will repress anarchists, their current allies against the capitalist system. This is does not occur by accident, it flows from the differences in vision between the two movements, both in terms of means and goals.

## H.3.2 Is Marxism "*socialism from below*"?

Some Marxists, such as the **International Socialist Tendency**, like to portray their tradition as being "*socialism from below*." Under "*socialism from below*," they place the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, arguing that they and they alone have continued this, the true, ideal of socialism (Hal Draper's essay "*The Two Souls of Socialism*" seems to have been the first to argue along these lines). They contrast this idea of "*democratic*" socialism "*from below*" with "*socialism from above*," in which they place reformist socialism (social democracy, Labourism, etc.), elitist socialism (Lassalle and others who wanted educated and liberal members of the middle classes to liberate the working class) and Stalinism (bureaucratic dictatorship over the working class).

For those who uphold this idea, "*Socialism from below*" is simply the self-emancipation of the working class by its own efforts. To anarchist ears, the claim that Marxism (and in particular Leninism) is socialism "*from below*" sounds paradoxical, indeed laughable. This is because anarchists from Proudhon onwards have used the imagery of socialism being created and run from below upwards. They have been doing so for far longer than Marxists have. As such, "*socialism from below*" simply sums up the ***anarchist*** ideal!

Thus we find Proudhon in 1848 talking about being a "*revolutionary from below*" and that every "*serious and lasting Revolution*" was "*made from below, by the people*." A "*Revolution from above*" was "*pure governmentalism, the negation of collective activity, of popular spontaneity*" and is "*the oppression of the wills of those below*." [quoted by George Woodcock, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 143] For Proudhon, the means of this revolution "*from below*" would be working class associations for

both credit (mutual banks) and production (workers' associations or co-operatives). The workers, *"organised among themselves, without the assistance of the capitalist"* would march by *"Work to the conquest of the world"* by the *"force of principle."* Thus capitalism would be reformed away by the actions of the workers themselves. The *"problem of association,"* Proudhon argues, *"consists in organising . . . the **producers**, and by this subjecting capital subordinating power. Such is the war of liberty against authority, a war of the producer against the non-producer; a war of equality against privilege . . . An agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave."* [quoted by K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 148 and p. 157]

Similarly, Bakunin saw an anarchist revolution as coming *"from below."* As he put it, *"liberty can be created only by liberty, by an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upward."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 179] Elsewhere he writes that *"popular revolution"* would *"create its own organisation from the bottom upwards and from the circumference inwards, in accordance with the principle of liberty, and not from the top downwards and from the centre outwards, as in the way of authority."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 170] His vision of revolution and revolutionary self-organisation and construction from below was a core aspect of his anarchist ideas, arguing repeatedly for *"the free organisation of the people's lives in accordance with their needs -- not from the top down, as we have it in the State, but from the bottom up, an organisation formed by the people themselves . . . a free union of associations of agricultural and factory workers, of communes, regions, and nations."* He stressed that *"the politics of the Social Revolution"* was *"the abolition of the State"* and *"the economic, altogether free organisation of the people, an organisation from below upward, by means of federation."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 297-8]

While Proudhon wanted to revolutionise society, he rejected revolutionary means to do so (i.e. collective struggle, strikes, insurrection, etc.). Bakunin, however, was a revolutionary in this, the popular, sense of the word. Yet he shared with Proudhon the idea of socialism being created by the working class itself. As he put it, in *"a social revolution, which in everything is diametrically opposed to a political revolution, the actions of individuals hardly count at all, whereas the spontaneous action of the masses is everything. All that individuals can do is clarify, propagate and work out the ideas corresponding to the popular instinct, and, what is more, to contribute their incessant efforts to revolutionary organisation of the natural power of the masses -- but nothing else beyond that; the rest can and should be done by the people themselves . . . revolution can be waged and brought to its full development only through the spontaneous and continued mass action of groups and associations of the people."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 298-9]

Therefore, the idea of *"socialism from below"* is a distinctly anarchist notion, one found in the works of Proudhon and Bakunin and repeated by anarchists ever since. As such, to hear Marxists appropriate this obviously anarchist terminology and imagery appears to many anarchists as opportunistic and attempt to cover the authoritarian reality of mainstream Marxism with anarchist rhetoric. However, there are "libertarian" strains of Marxism which are close to anarchism. Does this mean that there are no elements of a *"socialism from below"* to be found in Marx and Engels?

If we look at Marx, we get contradictory impressions. On the one hand, he argued that freedom *"consists in converting the state from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it."* Combine this with his comments on the Paris Commune (see his *"The Civil War in France"*), we can say that there are clearly elements of *"socialism from below"* in Marx's work. On the other hand, he often stresses the need for strict centralisation of power. In 1850, for example, he argued that the workers must *"not only strive for a single and indivisible German republic, but also within this republic for the most determined centralisation of power in the hands of the state authority."* This was because *"the path of revolutionary activity" can "proceed only from the centre."* This meant that the workers must be opposed to the *"federative republic"* planned by the democrats and *"must not allow themselves to be misguided by the democratic talk of freedom for the communities, of self-government, etc."* This centralisation of power was essential to overcome local autonomy, which would allow *"every village, every town and every province"* to put *"a new obstacle in the path"* the revolution due to *"local and provincial obstinacy."* Decades later, Marx dismisses Bakunin's vision of *"the free organisation of the worker masses from bottom to top"* as *"nonsense."* [**Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 537, p. 509 and p. 547]

Thus we have a contradiction. While arguing that the state must become subordinate to society, we have a central power imposing its will on *"local and provincial obstinacy."* This implies a vision of revolution in which the centre (indeed, *"the state authority"*) forces its will on the population, which (by necessity) means that the centre power is *"superimposed upon society"* rather than *"subordinate"* to it. Given his dismissal of the idea of organisation from bottom to top, we cannot argue that by this he meant simply the co-ordination of local initiatives. Rather, we are struck by the *"top-down"* picture of revolution Marx presents. Indeed, his argument from 1850 suggests that Marx favoured centralism not only in order to prevent the masses from creating obstacles to the revolutionary activity of the *"centre,"* but also to prevent them from interfering with their own liberation.

Looking at Engels, we discover him writing that *"[a]s soon as our Party is in possession of political power it has simply to expropriate the big landed proprietors just like the manufacturers in industry . . . thus restored to the community [they] are to be turned over by us to the rural workers who are already cultivating them and are to be organised into co-operatives."* He even states that this expropriation may *"be compensated,"* depending on *"the circumstances which we obtain power, and particularly by the attitude adopted by these gentry."* [**Marx-Engels Selected Writings**, pp. 638-9] Thus we have the party taking power, then expropriating the means of life **for the workers** and, lastly, *"turning over"* these to them. While this fits into the general scheme of the **Communist Manifesto**, it cannot be said to be *"socialism from below"* which can only signify the direct expropriation of the means of production by the workers themselves, organising themselves into free producer associations to do so.

This vision of revolution as the party coming to power can be seen from Engels' warning that the *"worse thing that can befall the leader of an extreme party is to be compelled to assume power at a time when the movement is not yet ripe for the domination of the class he represents and for the measures this domination implies."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 10, p. 469] Needless to say, such a vision is hard to equate with *"socialism from below"* which implies the active participation of the working class in the direct management of society from the bottom-up. If the leaders *"assume power"* then **they** have the real power, not the class they claim to *"represent."* Equally, it seems strange that socialism can be equated

with a vision which equates "*domination*" of a class being achieved by the fact a leader "*represents*" it. Can the working class really be said to be the ruling class if its role in society is to select those who exercise power on its behalf (i.e. to select representatives)? Bakunin quite rightly answered in the negative. While representative democracy may be acceptable to ensure bourgeois rule, it cannot be assumed that it be utilised to create a socialist society. It was designed to defend class society and its centralised and top-down nature reflects this role.

Moreover, Marx and Engels had argued in **The Holy Family** that the "*question is not what this or that proletarian, or even the whole of the proletariat at the moment considers as its aim. The question is what the proletariat is, and what, consequent on that being, it will be compelled to do.*" [quoted by Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 280] As Murray Bookchin argues:

*"These lines and others like them in Marx's writings were to provide the rationale for asserting the authority of Marxist parties and their armed detachments over and even against the proletariat. Claiming a deeper and more informed comprehension of the situation than 'even the whole of the proletariat at the given moment,' Marxist parties went on to dissolve such revolutionary forms of proletarian organisation as factory committees and ultimately to totally regiment the proletariat according to lines established by the party leadership."* [Op. Cit., p. 289]

Thus the ideological underpinning of a "*socialism from above*" is expounded, one which dismisses what the members of the working class actually want or desire at a given point (a position which Trotsky, for one, explicitly argued). A few years later, they argued in **The Communist Manifesto** that "*a portion of the bourgeois goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.*" They also noted that the Communists are "*the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties . . . [and] they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the general results of the proletarian movement.*" [Selected Works, p. 44 and p. 46] This gives a privileged place to the party (particularly the "*bourgeois ideologists*" who join it), a privileged place which their followers had no problem abusing in favour of party power and hierarchical leadership from above. As we discuss in [section H.5](#), Lenin was just expressing orthodox Social-Democratic (i.e. Marxist) policy when he argued that socialist consciousness was created by bourgeois intellectuals and introduced into the working class from outside. Against this, we have to note that the Manifesto states that the proletarian movement was "*the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority*" (although, as discussed in [section H.1.1](#), when they wrote this the proletariat was a **minority** in all countries bar Britain). [Op. Cit., p. 45]

Looking at the tactics advocated by Marx and Engels, we see a strong support for "*political action*" in the sense of participating in elections. This support undoubtedly flows from Engel's comments that universal suffrage "*in an England two-thirds of whose inhabitants are industrial proletarians means the exclusive political rule of the working class with all the revolutionary changes in social conditions*

*which are inseparable from it.*" [Collected Works, vol. 10, p. 298 Marx argued along identical lines. [Op. Cit., vol. 11, pp. 335-6] However, how could an entire class, the proletariat organised as a "movement" exercise its power under such a system? While the atomised voting to nominate representatives (who, in reality, held the real power in society) may be more than adequate to ensure bourgeois, i.e. minority, power, could it be used for proletarian, i.e. majority, power?

This is because such institutions are designed to place policy-making in the hands of representatives and do not (indeed, cannot) constitute a *"proletariat organised as a ruling class."* If public policy, as distinguished from administrative activities, is not made by the people themselves, in federations of self-managed assemblies, then a movement of the vast majority in the precise sense of the term cannot exist. For people to acquire real power over their lives and society, they must establish institutions organised and run, as Bakunin constantly stressed, from below. This would necessitate that they themselves directly manage their own affairs, communities and workplaces and, for co-ordination, mandate federal assemblies of revocable and strictly controllable delegates, who will execute their decisions. Only in this sense can a majority class, especially one committed to the abolition of all classes, organise as a class to manage society.

As such, Marx and Engels tactics are at odds with any idea of *"socialism from below."* While, correctly, supporting strikes and other forms of working class direct action (although, significantly, Engels dismissed the general strike) they placed that support within a general political strategy which emphasised electioneering and representative forms. This, however, is a form of struggle which can only really be carried out by means of leaders. The role of the masses is minor, that of voters. The focus of the struggle is at the top, in parliament, where the duly elected leaders are. As Luigi Galleani argued, this form of action involved the *"ceding of power by all to someone, the delegate, the representative, individual or group."* This meant that rather than the anarchist tactic of *"direct pressure put against the ruling classes by the masses,"* the Socialist Party *"substituted representation and the rigid discipline of the parliamentary socialists,"* the inevitably resulted in it *"adopt[ing] class collaboration in the legislative arena, without which all reforms would remain a vain hope."* It also resulted in the socialists needing *"authoritarian organisations"*, i.e. ones which are centralised and disciplined from above down. [The End of Anarchism?, p. 14, p. 12 and p. 14] The end result was the encouragement of a viewpoint that reforms (indeed, the revolution) would be the work of leaders acting on behalf of the masses whose role would be that of voters and followers, not active participants in the struggle (see [section J.2](#) for a discussion on direct action and why anarchists reject electioneering).

By the 1890s, the top-down and essentially reformist nature of these tactics had made their mark in both Engels politics and the practical activities of the Social-Democratic parties. Engels *"introduction"* to Marx's **The Class Struggles in France** indicated how far Marxism had progressed. Engels, undoubtedly influenced by the rise of Social-Democracy as an electoral power, stressed the use of the ballot box as the ideal way, if not the only way, for the party to take power. He notes that *"[w]e, the 'revolutionists', the 'overthrowers'"* were *"thriving far better on legal methods than on illegal methods and overthrow"* and the bourgeoisie *"cry despairingly . . . legality is the death of us"* and were *"much more afraid of the legal than of the illegal action of the workers' party, of the results of elections than of those of rebellion."* He argued that it was essential *"not to fitter away this daily increasing shock force [of party*

voters] in vanguard skirmishes, but to keep it intact until the decisive day." [Selected Writings, p. 656, p. 650 and p. 655]

The net effect of this would simply be keeping the class struggle within the bounds decided upon by the party leaders, so placing the emphasis on the activities and decisions of those at the top rather than the struggle and decisions of the mass of working class people themselves. As we noted in [section H.1.1](#), when the party was racked by the "revisionism" controversy after Engels death, it was fundamentally a conflict between those who wanted the party's rhetoric to reflect its reformist tactics and those who sought the illusion of radical words to cover the reformist practice. The decision of the Party to support their state in the First World War simply proved that radical words cannot defeat reformist tactics.

Needless to say, from this contradictory inheritance, Marxists had two ways of proceeding. Either they become explicitly anti-state (and so approach anarchism) or become explicitly in favour of party and state power and so, by necessity, "revolution from above." The council communists and other libertarian Marxists followed the first path, the Bolsheviks and their followers the second. As we discuss in the [next section](#), Lenin explicitly dismissed the idea that Marxism proceeded "only from below," stating that this was an anarchist principle. Nor was he shy in equating party power with working class power. Indeed, this vision of socialism as involving party power was not alien to the mainstream social-democracy Leninism split from. The leading left-wing Menshevik Martov argued as follows:

*"In a class struggle which has entered the phase of civil war, there are bound to be times when the advance guard of the revolutionary class, representing the interests of the broad masses but ahead of them in political consciousness, is obliged to exercise state power by means of a dictatorship of the revolutionary minority. Only a short-sighted and doctrinaire viewpoint would reject this prospect as such. The real question at stake is whether this dictatorship, which is unavoidable at a certain stage of any revolution, is exercised in such a way as to consolidate itself and create a system of institutions enabling it to become a permanent feature, or whether, on the contrary, it is replaced as soon as possible by the organised initiative and autonomy of the revolutionary class or classes as a whole. The second of these methods is that of the revolutionary Marxists who, for this reason, style themselves Social Democrats; the first is that of the Communists."* [The Mensheviks in the Russian Revolution, Abraham Ascher (Ed.), p. 119]

All this is to be expected, given the weakness of the Marxist theory of the state. As we discuss in [section H.3.7](#), Marxists have always had an a-historic perspective on the state, considering it as purely an instrument of class rule rather than what it is, an instrument of **minority** class rule. For anarchists, the "State is the minority government, from the top downward, of a vast quantity of men." This automatically means that a socialism, like Marx's, which aims for a socialist government and a workers' state automatically becomes, against the wishes of its best activists, "socialism from above." As Bakunin argued, Marxists are "worshippers of State power, and necessarily also prophets of political and social discipline and champions of order established from the top downwards, always in the name of universal

*suffrage and the sovereignty of the masses, for whom they save the honour and privilege of obeying leaders, elected masters.*" [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 265 and pp. 237-8]

For this reason anarchists from Bakunin onwards have argued for a bottom-up federation of workers' councils as the basis of revolution and the means of managing society after capitalism and the state have been abolished. If these organs of workers' self-management are co-opted into a state structure (as happened in Russia) then their power will be handed over to the real power in any state -- the government and its bureaucracy. The state is the delegation of power -- as such, it means that the idea of a "workers' state" expressing "workers' power" is a logical impossibility. If workers are running society then power rests in their hands. If a state exists then power rests in the hands of the handful of people at the top, not in the hands of all. The state was designed for minority rule. No state can be an organ of working class (i.e. majority) self-management due to its basic nature, structure and design.

So, while there are elements of "*socialism from below*" in the works of Marx and Engels they are placed within a distinctly centralised and authoritarian context which undermines them. As John Clark summarises, "*in the context of Marx's consistent advocacy of centralist programmes, and the part these programmes play in his theory of social development, the attempt to construct a libertarian Marxism by citing Marx's own proposals for social change would seem to present insuperable difficulties.*" [Op. Cit., p. 93]

### H.3.3 Is Leninism "*socialism from below*"?

As discussed in the [last section](#), Marx and Engels left their followers with an ambiguous legacy. On the one hand, there **are** elements of "*socialism from below*" in their politics (most explicitly in Marx's comments on the libertarian influenced Paris Commune). On the other, there are distinctly centralist and statist themes in their work.

From this legacy, Leninism took the statist themes. Which explains why anarchists think the idea of Leninism being "*socialism from below*" is incredible. Simply put, the actual comments and actions of Lenin and his followers show that they had no commitment to a "*socialism from below.*" As we will indicate, Lenin disassociated himself repeatedly from the idea of politics "*from below,*" considering it (quite rightly) an anarchist idea. In contrast, he stressed the importance of a politics which somehow combined action "*from above*" and "*from below.*" For those Leninists who maintain that their tradition is "*socialism from below*" (indeed, the only "*real*" socialism "*from below*"), this is a major problem and, unsurprisingly, they generally fail to mention it.

So what was Lenin's position on "*from below*"? In 1904, during the debate over the party split into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, Lenin stated that the argument "*[b]ureaucracy versus democracy is in fact centralism versus autonomism; it is the organisational principle of revolutionary Social-Democracy as opposed to the organisational principle of opportunist Social-Democracy. The latter strives to proceed from the bottom upward, and, therefore, wherever possible . . . upholds autonomism and 'democracy,' carried (by the overzealous) to the point of anarchism. The former strives to proceed from the top*

*downward. . .*" [**Collected Works**, vol. 7, pp. 396-7] Thus it is the non-Bolshevik ("*opportunist*") wing of Marxism which bases itself on the "*organisational principle*" of "*from the bottom upward*," not the Bolshevik tradition (as we note in [section H.5.5](#), Lenin also rejected the "*primitive democracy*" of mass assemblies as the basis of the labour and revolutionary movements). Moreover, this vision of a party run from the top down was enshrined in the Bolshevik ideal of "*democratic centralism*" (see [section H.5.5](#)). How you can have "*socialism from below*" when your "*organisational principle*" is "*from the top downward*" is not explained by Leninist exponents of "*socialism from below*."

Lenin repeated this argument in his discussion on the right tactics to apply during the near revolution of 1905. He mocked the Mensheviks for only wanting "*pressure from below*" which was "*pressure by the citizens on the revolutionary government*." Instead, he argued for "*pressure . . . from above as well as from below*," where "*pressure from above*" was "*pressure by the revolutionary government on the citizens*." He notes that Engels "*appreciated the importance of action from above*" and that he saw the need for "*the utilisation of the revolutionary governmental power*." Lenin summarised his position (which he considered as being in line with that of orthodox Marxism) by stating that "*[l]imitation, in principle, of revolutionary action to pressure from below and renunciation of pressure also from above is anarchism*." [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, pp. 189-90, p. 193, p. 195 and p. 196] This seems to have been a common Bolshevik position at the time, with Stalin stressing in the same year that "*action only from 'below'*" was "*an anarchist principle, which does, indeed, fundamentally contradict Social-Democratic tactics*." [**Collected Works**, vol. 1, p. 149]

It is in this context of "*above and below*" in which we must place Lenin's comments in 1917 that socialism was "*democracy from below, without a police, without a standing army, voluntary social duty by a militia formed from a universally armed people*." [**Collected Works**, vol. 24, p. 170] Given that Lenin had rejected the idea of "*only from below*" as an anarchist principle (which it is), we need to bear in mind that this "*democracy from below*" was **always** placed in the context of a Bolshevik government. Lenin always stressed that the **Bolsheviks** would "*take over full state power*," that they "*can and must take state power into their own hands*." His "*democracy from below*" always meant representative government, **not** popular power or self-management. The role of the working class was that of voters and so the Bolsheviks' first task was "*to convince the majority of the people that its programme and tactics are correct*." The second task "*that confronted our Party was to capture political power*." The third task was for "the Bolshevik Party" to "**administer Russia**." [**Selected Works**, vol. 2, p. 352, p. 328 and p. 589] Thus Bolshevik power was equated with working class power.

Towards the end of 1917, he stressed this vision of a Bolshevik run "*democracy from below*" by arguing that "*[a]fter the 1905 revolution Russia was ruled by 130,000 landowners . . . yet they tell us that Russia will not be able to be governed by the 240,000 members of the Bolshevik party*." He even equated rule by the party with rule by the class -- "*the power of the Bolsheviks -- that is, the power of the proletariat*," while admitting that the proletariat could not actually govern itself. As he put it, "*[w]e know that just any labourer or any cook would be incapable of taking over immediately the administration of the State . . . We demand that the teaching of the business of government be conducted by the class-conscious workers and soldiers*." The "*conscious workers must be in control, but they can attract to the*



*actual work of management the real labouring and oppressed masses.*" Ironically, he calls this system "*real popular self-administration*" and "*teaching the people to manage their own affairs.*" He also indicated that once in power, the Bolsheviks "*shall be fully and unreservedly for a strong government and centralism.*" [**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power**, pp. 61-2, p. 66, p. 69 and p. 75]

Clearly, Lenin's position had not changed. The goal of the revolution was simply a Bolshevik government, which, if it was to be effective, had to have the real power in society. Thus, socialism would be implemented from above, by the "*strong*" government of the "*conscious workers*" who would be "*in control.*" While, eventually, the "*labouring*" masses would take part in the administration of state decisions, the initial role of the workers could be the same as under capitalism. And, we must note, there is a difference between making policy and taking part in administration (i.e. between the "*work of management*" and management itself), a difference Lenin obscures.

All of which, perhaps, explains the famous leaflet addressed to the workers of Petrograd immediately after the October Revolution, informing that "*the revolution has won.*" The workers were called upon to "*show . . . the greatest firmness and endurance, in order to facilitate the execution of all the aims of the new People's Government.*" They were asked to "*cease immediately all economic and political strikes, to take up your work, and do it in perfect order . . . All to your places.*" It stated that the "*best way to support the new Government of Soviets in these days*" was "*by doing your job.*" [cited by John Read, **Ten Days that Shook the World**, pp. 341-2] Which smacks far more of "*socialism from above*" than "*socialism from below*"!

The implications of Lenin's position became clearer after the Bolsheviks had taken power in 1917. In that situation, it was not a case of "*dealing with the general question of principle, whether in the epoch of the democratic revolution it is **admissible** to pass from pressure from below to pressure from above.*" [Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 24, p. 190] Rather, it was the concrete situation of a "revolutionary" government exercising power "*from above*" onto the very class it claimed to represent. Thus we have a power over the working class which was quite happy to exercise coercion to ensure its position. As Lenin explained to his political police, the Cheka, in 1920:

*"Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the other hand, revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 42, p. 170]

It could be argued that this position was forced on Lenin by the problems facing the Bolsheviks in the Civil War, but such an argument is flawed. This is for two reasons. Firstly, according to Lenin himself civil war was inevitable and so, unsurprisingly, Lenin considered his comments as universally applicable. Secondly, this position fits in well with the idea of pressure "*from above*" exercised by the "*revolutionary*" government against the masses (and nothing to do with any sort of "*socialism from below*"). Indeed, "*wavering*" and "*unstable*" elements is just another way of saying "*pressure from below*," the attempts by those subject to the "*revolutionary*" government to influence its policies. As we

noted in [section H.1.2](#), it was in this period (1919 and 1920) that the Bolsheviks openly argued that the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*" was, in fact, the "*dictatorship of the party*" (see [section H.3.8](#) on how the Bolsheviks modified the Marxist theory of the state in line with this). Rather than the result of the problems facing Russia at the time, Lenin's comments simply reflect the unfolding of certain aspects of his ideology when his party held power (as we make clear in the appendix on "[How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?](#)", the ideology of the ruling party and the ideas held by the masses are also factors in history).

To show that Lenin's comments were not caused by circumstantial factors, we can turn to his infamous work **Left-Wing Communism**. In this 1920 tract, written for the Second Congress of the Communist International, Lenin lambasted those Marxists who argued for direct working class power against the idea of party rule (i.e. the various council communists around Europe). We have already noted in [section H.1.2](#) that Lenin had argued in that work that it was "*ridiculously absurd and stupid*" to "*a contrast in general between the dictatorship of the masses and the dictatorship of the leaders.*" [p. 25] Here we provide his description of the "*top-down*" nature of Bolshevik rule:

*"The interrelations between leaders-Party-class-masses . . . now present themselves concretely in Russia in the following form. The dictatorship is exercised by the proletariat which is organised in the Soviets and is led by the Communist Party . . . The Party, which holds annual congresses . . . is directed by a Central Committee of nineteen elected at the congress, while the current work in Moscow [the capital] had to be carried on by [two] still smaller bodies . . . which are elected at the plenary sessions of the Central Committee, five members of the Central Committee in each bureau. This, then, looks like a real 'oligarchy.' Not a single important political or organisational question is decided by any State institution in our republic [sic!] without the guiding instructions of the Central Committee of the Party.*

*"In its work the Party relies directly on the **trade unions** . . . In reality, all the controlling bodies of the overwhelming majority of the unions . . . consists of Communists, who secure the carrying out of all the instructions of the Party. Thus . . . we have a . . . very powerful proletarian apparatus, by means of which the Party is closely linked up with the **class** and with **the masses**, and by means of which, under the leadership of the Party, the **class dictatorship** of the class is realised." [Left-Wing Communism, pp. 31-2]*

Combined with "*non-Party workers' and peasants' conferences*" and Soviet Congresses, this was "*the general mechanism of the proletarian state power viewed 'from above,' from the standpoint of the practical realisation of the dictatorship*" and so "*all talk about 'from above' or 'from below,' about 'the dictatorship of leaders' or 'the dictatorship of the masses,' cannot but appear to be ridiculous, childish nonsense.*" [Op. Cit., p. 33] Perhaps this explains why he did not bother to view "*proletarian*" state power "*from below*," from the viewpoint of the proletariat? If he did, perhaps he would have recounted the numerous strikes and protests broken by the Cheka under martial law, the gerrymandering and disbanding of soviets, the imposition of "*one-man management*" onto the workers in production, the

turning of the unions into agents of the state/party and the elimination of working class freedom by party power? After all, **if** the congresses of soviets were *"more democratic"* than anything in the *"best democratic republics of the bourgeois world,"* the Bolsheviks would have no need for non-Party conferences *"to be able to watch the mood of the masses, to come closer to them, to respond to their demands."* [Op. Cit., p. 33 and p. 32] How the Bolsheviks *"responded"* to these conferences and their demands is extremely significant. They disbanded them. This was because *"[d]uring the disturbances"* of late 1920, *"they provided an effective platform for criticism of Bolshevik policies."* Their frequency was decreased and they *"were discontinued soon afterward."* [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 203]

At the Comintern congress itself, Zinoviev announced that *"the dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 1, p. 152] Trotsky, for his part, also universalised Lenin's argument when he pondered the important decisions of the revolution and who would make them in his reply to the anarchist delegate from the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist union the CNT:

*"Who decides this question [and others like it]? We have the Council of People's Commissars but it has to be subject to some supervision. Whose supervision? That of the working class as an amorphous, chaotic mass? No. The Central Committee of the party is convened to discuss . . . and to decide . . . Who will solve these questions in Spain? The Communist Party of Spain."* [Op. Cit., p. 174]

As is obvious, Trotsky was drawing general lessons for the international revolutionary movement. Needless to say, he still argued that the *"working class, represented and led by the Communist Party, [was] in power here"* in spite of it being *"an amorphous, chaotic mass"* which did not make any decisions on important questions affecting the revolution!

Incidentally, his and Lenin's comments of 1920 disprove Trotsky's later assertion that it was *"[o]nly after the conquest of power, the end of the civil war, and the establishment of a stable regime"* when *"the Central Committee little by little begin to concentrate the leadership of Soviet activity in its hands. Then would come Stalin's turn."* [**Stalin**, vol. 1, p. 328] While it was definitely the *"conquest of power"* by the Bolsheviks which lead to the marginalisation of the soviets, this event cannot be shunted to after the civil war as Trotsky would like (particularly as Trotsky admitted that *"[a]fter eight months of inertia and of democratic chaos, came the dictatorship of the Bolsheviks."* [Op. Cit., vol. 2, p. 242]). We must note (see sections [H.1.2](#) or [H.3.8](#)) Trotsky argued for the *"objective necessity"* of the *"revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party"* until his death.

Clearly, the claim that Leninism (and its various off-shoots like Trotskyism) is *"socialism from below"* is hard to take seriously. As proven above, the Leninist tradition is explicitly against the idea of *"only from below,"* with Lenin explicitly stating that it was an *"anarchist stand"* to be for *"'action only from below', not 'from below and from above'"* which was the position of Marxism. [**Collected Works**, vol. 9, p. 77] Once in power, Lenin and the Bolsheviks implemented this vision of *"from below and from above,"* with

the highly unsurprising result that *"from above"* quickly repressed *"from below"* (which was dismissed as *"wavering"* by the masses). This was to be expected, for a government to enforce its laws, it has to have power over its citizens and so socialism *"from above"* is a necessary side-effect of Leninist theory.

Ironically, Lenin's argument in **State and Revolution** comes back to haunt him. In that work he had argued that the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* meant *"democracy for the people"* which *"imposes a series of restrictions on the freedom of the oppressors, the exploiters, the capitalists."* These must be crushed *"in order to free humanity from wage-slavery; their resistance must be broken by force; it is clear that where there is suppression there is also violence, there is no freedom, no democracy."* [Essential Works of Lenin, pp. 337-8] If the working class itself is being subject to *"suppression"* then, clearly, there is *"no freedom, no democracy"* for that class -- and the people *"will feel no better if the stick with which they are being beaten is labelled 'the people's stick'."* [Bakunin, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 338]

Thus, when Leninists argue that they stand for the *"principles of socialism from below"* and state that this means the direct and democratic control of society by the working class then, clearly, they are being less than honest. Looking at the tradition they place themselves, the obvious conclusion which must be reached is that Leninism is **not** based on *"socialism from below"* in the sense of working class self-management of society (i.e. the only condition when the majority can *"rule"* and decisions truly flow from below upwards). At best, they subscribe to the distinctly bourgeois vision of *"democracy"* as being simply the majority designating (and trying to control) its rulers. At worse, they defend politics which have eliminated even this form of democracy in favour of party dictatorship and *"one-man management"* armed with *"dictatorial"* powers in industry (most members of such parties do not know how the Bolsheviks gerrymandered and disbanded soviets to maintain power, raised the dictatorship of the party to an ideological truism and wholeheartedly advocated *"one-man management"* rather than workers' self-management of production). As we discuss in [section H.5](#), this latter position flows easily from the underlying assumptions of vanguardism which Leninism is based on.

So, Lenin, Trotsky and so on simply cannot be considered as exponents of *"socialism from below."* Any one who makes such a claim is either ignorant of the actual ideas and practice of Bolshevism or they seek to deceive. For anarchists, *"socialism from below"* can only be another name, like libertarian socialism, for anarchism (as Lenin, ironically enough, acknowledged). This does not mean that *"socialism from below,"* like *"libertarian socialism,"* is identical to anarchism, it simply means that libertarian Marxists and other socialists are far closer to anarchism than mainstream Marxism.

### H.3.4 Don't anarchists just quote Marxists selectively?

No, far from it. While it is impossible to quote everything a person or an ideology says, it is possible to summarise those aspects of a theory which influenced the way it developed in practice. As such, **any** account is *"selective"* in some sense, the question is whether this results in a critique rooted in the ideology and its practice or whether it presents a picture at odds with both. As Maurice Brinton puts it in the introduction to his classic account of workers' control in the Russian Revolution:

*"Other charges will also be made. The quotations from Lenin and Trotsky will not be denied but it will be stated that they are 'selective' and that 'other things, too' were said. Again, we plead guilty. But we would stress that there are hagiographers enough in the trade whose 'objectivity' . . . is but a cloak for sophisticated apologetics . . . It therefore seems more relevant to quote those statements of the Bolsheviks leaders of 1917 which helped determine Russia's evolution [towards Stalinism] rather those other statements which, like the May Day speeches of Labour leaders, were for ever to remain of rhetoric."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. xv]

Hence the need to discuss all aspects of Marxism rather than take what its adherents like to claim for it as granted. In this, we agree with Marx himself who argued that we cannot judge people by what they say about themselves but rather what they do. Unfortunately while many self-proclaimed Marxists (like Trotsky) may quote these comments, fewer apply them to their own ideology or actions (again, like Trotsky).

This can be seen from the almost ritualistic way many Marxists response to anarchist (or other) criticisms of their ideas. When they complain that anarchists "*selectively*" quote from the leading proponents of Marxism, they are usually at pains to point people to some document which they have selected as being more "*representative*" of their tradition. Leninists usually point to Lenin's **State and Revolution**, for example, for a vision of what Lenin "*really*" wanted. To this anarchists reply by, as we discussed in section H.1.7 ([Haven't you read Lenin's "State and Revolution"?](#)), pointing out that much of that passes for 'Marxism' in **State and Revolution** is anarchist and, equally important, it was not applied in practice. This explains an apparent contradiction. Leninists point to the Russian Revolution as evidence for the democratic nature of their politics. Anarchists point to it as evidence of Leninism's authoritarian nature. Both can do this because there is a substantial difference between Bolshevism before it took power and afterwards. While the Leninists ask you to judge them by their manifesto, anarchists say judge them by their record!

Simply put, Marxists quote selectively from their own tradition, ignoring those aspects of it which would be unappealing to potential recruits. While the leaders may know their tradition has skeletons in its closet, they try their best to ensure no one else gets to know. Which, of course, explains their hostility to anarchists doing so! That there is a deep divide between aspects of Marxist rhetoric and its practice and that even its rhetoric is not consistent we will now prove. By so doing, we can show that anarchists do not, in fact, quote Marxist's "*selectively*."

As an example, we can point to the leading Bolshevik Grigorii Zinoviev. In 1920, as head of the Communist International he wrote a letter to the Industrial Workers of the World, a revolutionary labour union, which stated that the "*Russian Soviet Republic. . . is the most highly centralised government that exists. It is also the most democratic government in history. For all the organs of government are in constant touch with the working masses, and constantly sensitive to their will.*" [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 2, p. 928] The same year, he explained in a Communist journal that "*soviet rule in Russia could not have been maintained for three years -- not even three weeks*

-- *without the iron dictatorship of the Communist Party. Any class conscious worker must understand that the dictatorship of the working class can be achieved only by the dictatorship of its vanguard, i.e., by the Communist Party . . . All questions . . . , on which the fate of the proletarian revolution depends absolutely, are decided . . . in the framework of the party organisations.*" [quoted by Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, pp. 239-40] It seems redundant to note that the second quote is the accurate one, the one which matches the reality of Bolshevik Russia. Therefore it is hardly "*selective*" to quote the latter and not the former, rather it expresses what was actually happening.

This duality and the divergence between practice and rhetoric comes to the fore when Trotskyists discuss Stalinism and try to counter pose the Leninist tradition to it. For example, we find the British SWP's Chris Harman arguing that the "*whole experience of the workers' movement internationally teaches that only by regular elections, combined with the right of recall by shop-floor meetings can rank-and-file delegates be made really responsible to those who elect them.*" [**Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe**, pp. 238-9] Significantly, Harman does not mention that both Lenin and Trotsky rejected this experience (see [section H.3.8](#) for a full discussion on how Leninism argues for state power explicitly to eliminate such control from below). How can Trotsky's comment that the "*revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is . . . an objective necessity*" be reconciled with it? And what of the claim that the "*revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution*"? [**Writings 1936-37**, pp. 513-4] Or his similar argument sixteen years earlier that the Party was "*entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy*"? [quoted by Maurice Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 78]

The ironies do not stop there, of course. Harman correctly notes that under Stalinism, the "*bureaucracy is characterised, like the private capitalist class in the West, by its control over the means of production.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 147] However, he fails to note that it was **Lenin**, in early 1918, who had raised and then implemented such "*control*" in the form of "*one-man management.*" As he put it: "*Obedience, and unquestioning obedience at that, during work to the one-man decisions of Soviet directors, of the dictators elected or appointed by Soviet institutions, vested with dictatorial powers.*" [**Six Theses on the Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, p. 44] To **fail** to note this link between Lenin and the Stalinist bureaucracy on this issue is quoting "*selectively.*"

The contradictions pile up. He argues that "*people who seriously believe that workers at the height of revolution need a police guard to stop them handing their factories over to capitalists certainly have no real faith in the possibilities of a socialist future.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 144] Yet this does not stop him praising the regime of Lenin and Trotsky and contrasting it with Stalinism, in spite of the fact that this was precisely what the Bolsheviks **did** from 1918 onwards! Indeed this tyrannical practice played a role in provoking the strikes in Petrograd which preceded the Kronstadt revolt in 1921, when "*the workers wanted the special squads of armed Bolsheviks, who carried out a purely police function, withdrawn from the factories.*" Paul Avrich, **Kronstadt 1921**, p. 42] It seems equally strange that Harman denounces the Stalinist suppression of the Hungarian revolution for workers' democracy and socialism while he defends the Bolshevik suppression of the Kronstadt revolt for the same goals (and as we discuss in "[What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?](#)", the rationales both regimes used to justify their actions

were akin).

Similarly, when Harman argues that if by "*political party*" it is "*meant a party of the usual sort, in which a few leaders give orders and the masses merely obey . . . then certainly such organisations added nothing to the Hungarian revolution.*" However, as we discuss in [section H.5](#), such a party was **precisely** what Leninism argued for and applied in practice. Simply put, the Bolsheviks were never a party "*that stood for the councils taking power.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 186 and p. 187] As Lenin repeatedly stressed, its aim was for the Bolshevik party to take power **through** the councils (see [section H.3.11](#)).

This confusion between what was promised and what was done is a common feature of Leninism. Felix Morrow, for example, wrote what is usually considered the definitive Trotskyist work on the Spanish Revolution (in spite of it being, as we discuss in the appendix "[Marxists and Spanish Anarchism](#)," deeply flawed). In that work he states that the "*essential points of a revolutionary program [are] all power to the working class, and democratic organs of the workers, peasants and combatants, as the expression of the workers' power.*" [**Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain**, p. 133] How this can be reconciled with Trotsky's comment, written in the same year, that "*a revolutionary party, even after seizing power . . . is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society.*"? Or the opinion that it was "*only thanks to the party dictatorship [that] were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat*"? [**Stalinism and Bolshevism**] Or Lenin's opinion that "*an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship*" and that it "*can be exercised only by a vanguard*"? [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 21] How can the working class "*have all power*" if power is held by a vanguard party? Particularly when this party has power specifically to enable it "*overcom[e] the vacillation of the masses themselves.*" [Trotsky, **The Moralists and Sycophants**, p. 59]

Given all this, who is quoting who "*selectively*"? The Marxists who ignore what the Bolsheviks did when in power and repeatedly point to Lenin's **State and Revolution** or the anarchists who link what they did with what they said outside of that holy text? Considering this absolutely contradictory inheritance, anarchists feel entitled to ask the question "*Will the real Leninist please stand up?*" What is it to be, popular democracy or party rule? If we look at Bolshevik practice, the answer is the latter. As we discuss in [section H.3.8](#), the likes of Lenin and Trotsky concur, incorporating the necessity of party power into their ideology as a lesson of the revolution. As such, anarchists do not feel they are quoting Leninism "*selectively*" when they argue that it is based on party power, not working class self-management. That Leninists often publicly deny this aspect of their own ideology or, at best, try to rationalise and justify it, suggests that when push comes to shove (as it does in every revolution) they will make the same decisions and act in the same way!

In addition there is the question of what could be called the "*social context.*" Marxists often accuse anarchists of failing to place the quotations and actions of, say, the Bolsheviks into the circumstances which generated them. By this they mean that Bolshevik authoritarianism can be explained purely in terms of the massive problems facing them (i.e. the rigours of the Civil War, the economic collapse and chaos in Russia and so on). As we discuss this question in "[What caused the degeneration of the Russian](#)

["Revolution?"](#), we will simply summarise the anarchist reply by noting that this argument has three major problems with it. Firstly, there is the problem that Bolshevik authoritarianism started **before** the start of the Civil War (as we discuss in the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#)) and, moreover, continued **after** its ends. As such, the Civil War cannot be blamed. The second problem is simply that Lenin continually stressed that civil war and economic chaos was inevitable during a revolution. If Leninist politics cannot handle the inevitable then they are to be avoided. Equally, if Leninists blame what they should **know** is inevitable for the degeneration of the Bolshevik revolution it would suggest their understanding of what revolution entails is deeply flawed. The last problem is simply that the Bolsheviks did not care. As Samuel Farber notes, *"there is no evidence indicating that Lenin or any of the mainstream Bolshevik leaders lamented the loss of workers' control or of democracy in the soviets, or at least referred to these losses as a retreat, as Lenin declared with the replacement of War Communism by NEP in 1921."* [**Before Stalinism**, p. 44] Hence the continuation (indeed, intensification) of Bolshevik authoritarianism after their victory in the civil war. Given this, it is significant that many of the quotes from Trotsky given above date from the late 1930s. To argue, therefore, that *"social context"* explains the politics and actions of the Bolsheviks seems incredulous.

Lastly, it seems ironic that Marxists accuse anarchists of quoting *"selectively."* After all, as proven in [section H.2](#), this is **exactly** what Marxists do to anarchism! Indeed, anarchists often make good propaganda out of such activity by showing how selective their accounts are and how at odds they are with what anarchism actually stands for and what anarchists actually do (see the appendix of our FAQ on ["Anarchism and Marxism"](#)).

In summary, rather than quote *"selectively"* from the works and practice of Marxism, anarchists summarise those tendencies of both which, we argue, contribute to its continual failure in practice as a revolutionary theory. Moreover, Marxists themselves are equally as *"selective"* as anarchists in this respect. Firstly, as regards anarchist theory and practice and, secondly, as regards their own.

### **H.3.5 Has Marxist appropriation of anarchist ideas changed it?**

As is obvious in any account of the history of socialism, Marxists (of various schools) have appropriated key anarchist ideas and (often) present them as if Marxists thought of them first.

For example, as we discuss in [section H.3.10](#), it was anarchists who first raised the idea of smashing the bourgeois state and replacing it with the fighting organisations of the working class (such as unions, workers' councils, etc.). It was only in 1917, decades after anarchists had first raised the idea, that Marxists started to argue these ideas but, of course, with a twist. While anarchists meant that working class organisations would be the basis of a free society, Lenin saw these organs as the best means of achieving Bolshevik party power.

Similarly with the libertarian idea of the *"militant minority."* By this, anarchists and syndicalists meant groups of workers who gave an example by their direct action which their fellow workers could imitate



(for example by leading wildcat strikes which would use flying pickets to get other workers to join in). This "militant minority" would be at the forefront of social struggle and would show, by example, practice and discussion, that their ideas and tactics were the correct ones. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, Bolsheviki argued that this idea was similar to their idea of a vanguard party. This ignored two key differences. Firstly that the libertarian "*militant minority*" did not aim to take power on behalf of the working class but rather to encourage it, by example, to manage its own struggles and affairs (and, ultimately, society). Secondly, that "*vanguard parties*" are organised in hierarchical ways alien to the spirit of anarchism. While both the "*militant minority*" and "*vanguard party*" approaches are based on an appreciation of the uneven development of ideas within the working class, vanguardism transforms this into a justification for party rule **over** the working class by a so-called "*advanced*" minority (see [section H.5](#) for a full discussion). Other concepts, such as "*workers' control*," direct action, and so on have suffered a similar fate.

As such, while Marxists have appropriated certain anarchist concepts, it does not mean that they mean exactly the same thing by them. Rather, as history shows, radically different concepts can be hidden behind similar sounding rhetoric. As Murray Bookchin argued, many Marxist tendencies "*attach basically alien ideas to the withering conceptual framework of Marxism -- not to say anything new but to preserve something old with ideological formaldehyde -- to the detriment of any intellectual growth that the distinctions are designed to foster. This is mystification at its worst, for it not only corrupts ideas but the very capacity of the mind to deal with them. If Marx's work can be rescued for our time, it will be by dealing with it as an invaluable part of the development of ideas, not as pastiche that is legitimated as a 'method' or continually 'updated' by concepts that come from an alien zone of ideas.*" [Toward an Ecological Society, p. 242f]

This is not some academic point. The ramifications of Marxists appropriating such "*alien ideas*" (or, more correctly, the rhetoric associated with those ideas) has had negative impacts on actual revolutionary movements. For example, Lenin's definition of "*workers' control*" was radically different than that current in the factory committee movement during the Russian Revolution (which had more in common with anarchist and syndicalist use of the term). The similarities in rhetoric, allowed the factory committee movement to put its weight behind the Bolsheviki. Once in power, Lenin's position was implemented while that of the factory committees was ignored. Ultimately, Lenin's position was a key factor in creating state capitalism rather than socialism in Russia (see [section H.3.14](#) for more details).

This, of course, does not stop modern day Leninists appropriating the term workers' control "*without bating an eyelid. Seeking to capitalise on the confusion of now rampant in the movement, these people talk of 'workers' control' as if a) they meant by those words what the politically unsophisticated mean (i. e. that working people should themselves decide about the fundamental matters relating to production) and b) as if they -- and the Leninist doctrine to which they claim to adhere -- had always supported demands of this kind, or as if Leninism had always seen in workers' control the universally valid foundation of a new social order, rather than just a slogan to be used for manipulatory purposes in specific and very limited historical contexts.*" [Maurice Brinton, **The Bolsheviki and Workers' Control**, p. iv] [Section H.3.14](#) discusses this further.

Thus the fact that Leninists have appropriated libertarian (and working class) ideas and demands does not, in fact, mean that we aim for the same thing (as we discuss in [section H.3.1](#), this is far from the case). The use of anarchist/popular rhetoric and slogans means little and we need to look at the content of the ideas proposed. Given the legacy of the appropriation of libertarian terminology to popularise authoritarian parties and its subsequent jettison in favour of authoritarian policies once the party is in power, anarchists have strong grounds to take Leninist claims with a large pinch of salt!

Equally with examples of actual revolutions. As Martin Buber notes, while *"Lenin praises Marx for having 'not yet, in 1852, put the concrete question as to what should be set up in place of the State machinery after it had been abolished,'" Lenin argued that "it was only the Paris Commune that taught Marx this."* However, as Buber correctly points out, the Paris Commune *"was the realisation of the thoughts of people who had put this question very concretely indeed . . . the historical experience of the Commune became possible only because in the hearts of passionate revolutionaries there lived the picture of a decentralised, very much 'de-Statized' society, which picture they undertook to translate into reality. The spiritual fathers of the Commune had such that ideal aiming at decentralisation which Marx and Engels did not have, and the leaders of the Revolution of 1871 tried, albeit with inadequate powers, to begin the realisation of that idea in the midst of revolution."* [**Paths in Utopia**, pp. 103-4] Thus, while the Paris Commune and other working class revolts are praised, their obvious anarchistic elements (as predicted by anarchist thinkers) are not mentioned. This results in some strange dichotomies. For example, Bakunin's vision of revolution is based on a federation of workers' councils, predating Marxist support for such bodies by decades, yet Marxists argue that Bakunin's ideas have nothing to teach us. Or, the Paris Commune being praised by Marxists as the first *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* when it implements federalism, delegates being subjected to mandates and recall and raises the vision of a socialism of associations while anarchism is labelled "petit-bourgeois" in spite of the fact that these ideas can be found in works of Proudhon and Bakunin which predate the 1871 revolt!

From this, we can draw two facts. Firstly, anarchism has successfully predicted certain aspects of working class revolution. Anarchist K.J. Kenafick stated the obvious when he argues that any *"comparison will show that the programme set out [by the Paris Commune] is . . . the system of Federalism, which Bakunin had been advocating for years, and which had first been enunciated by Proudhon. The Proudhonists . . . exercised considerable influence in the Commune. This 'political form' was therefore not 'at last' discovered; it had been discovered years ago; and now it was proven to be correct by the very fact that in the crisis the Paris workers adopted it almost automatically, under the pressure of circumstance, rather than as the result of theory, as being the form most suitable to express working class aspirations."* [**Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx**, pp. 212-3] Thus, rather than being somehow alien to the working class and its struggle for freedom, anarchism in fact bases itself on the class struggle. This means that it should come as no surprise when the ideas of anarchism are developed and applied by those in struggle, for those ideas are just generalisations derived from past working class struggles! If anarchism ideas are applied spontaneously by those in struggle, it is because those involved are themselves drawing similar conclusions from their own experiences.

The other fact is that while mainstream Marxism often appropriated certain aspects of libertarian theory

and practice, it does so selectively and places them into an authoritarian context which undermines their libertarian nature. Hence anarchist support for workers councils becomes transformed into a means to ensure party power (i.e. state authority) rather than working class power or self-management (i.e. no authority). Similarly, anarchist support for leading by example becomes transformed into support for party rule (and often dictatorship). Ultimately, the practice of mainstream Marxism shows that libertarian ideas cannot be transplanted selectively into an authoritarian ideology and be expected to blossom. Significantly, those Marxists who **do** apply anarchist ideas honestly are usually labelled by their orthodox comrades as "*anarchists*."

As an example of Marxists appropriating libertarian ideas honestly, we can point to the council communist and currents within autonomist Marxism. The council communists broke with the Bolsheviks over the question of whether the party would exercise power or whether the workers' councils would. Needless to say, Lenin labelled them an "*anarchist deviation*." Currents within Autonomist Marxism have built upon the council communist tradition, stressing the importance of focusing analysis on working class struggle as the key dynamic in capitalist society.

In this they go against the mainstream Marxist orthodoxy and embrace a libertarian perspective. As libertarian socialist Cornelius Castoriadis argued, "*the economic theory expounded [by Marx] in **Capital** is based on the postulate that capitalism has managed completely and effectively to transform the worker -- who only appears there only as labour power -- into a commodity; therefore the use value of labour power -- the use the capitalist makes of it -- is, as for any commodity, completely determined by the use, since its exchange value -- wages -- is determined solely by the laws of the market . . . This postulate is necessary for there to be a 'science of economics' along the physico-mathematical model Marx followed . . . But he contradicts the most essential fact of capitalism, namely, that the use value and exchange value of labour power are objectively indeterminate; they are determined rather by the struggle between labour and capital both in production and in society. Here is the ultimate root of the 'objective' contradictions of capitalism . . . The paradox is that Marx, the 'inventor' of class struggle, wrote a monumental work on phenomena determined by this struggle in which the struggle itself was entirely absent.*" [Political and Social Writings, vol. 2, p. 203] Castoriadis explained the limitations of Marx's vision most famously in his "*Modern Capitalism and Revolution*." [Op. Cit., pp. 226-343]

By rejecting this heritage which mainstream Marxism bases itself on and stressing the role of class struggle, Autonomist Marxism breaks decisively with the Marxist mainstream and embraces a position previously associated with anarchists and other libertarian socialists. The key role of class struggle in invalidating all deterministic economic "*laws*" was expressed by French syndicalists at the start of the twentieth century. This insight predated the work of Castoriadis and the development of Autonomist Marxism by over 50 years and is worth quoting at length:

*"the keystone of socialism [. . .] proclaimed that 'as a general rule, the average wage would be no more than what the worker strictly required for survival'. And it was said: 'That figure is governed by capitalist pressure alone and this can even push it below the minimum necessary for the working man's subsistence . . . The only rule with regard to wage levels is the plentiful or scarce supply of man-power . . .'*

*"By way of evidence of the relentless operation of this law of wages, comparisons were made between the worker and a commodity: if there is a glut of potatoes on the market, they are cheap; if they are scarce, the price rises . . . It is the same with the working man, it was said: his wages fluctuate in accordance with the plentiful supply or dearth of labour!*

*"No voice was raised against the relentless arguments of this absurd reasoning: so the law of wages may be taken as right . . . for as long as the working man [or woman] is content to be a commodity! For as long as, like a sack of potatoes, she remains passive and inert and endures the fluctuations of the market . . . For as long as he bends his back and puts up with all of the bosses' snubs, . . . the law of wages obtains.*

*"But things take a different turn the moment that a glimmer of consciousness stirs this worker-potato into life. When, instead of dooming himself to inertia, spinelessness, resignation and passivity, the worker wakes up to his worth as a human being and the spirit of revolt washes over him: when he bestirs himself, energetic, wilful and active . . . [and] once the labour bloc comes to life and bestirs itself . . . then, the laughable equilibrium of the law of wages is undone." [Emile Pouget, **Direct Action**]*

And Marx, indeed, had compared the worker to a commodity, stating that labour power *"is a commodity, neither more nor less than sugar. The former is measured by the clock, the latter by the scale."* [**Marx-Engels Selected Works**, p. 72] However, as Castoridas argued, unlike sugar the extraction of the use value of labour power *"is not a technical operation; it is a process of bitter struggle in which half the time, so to speak, the capitalists turn out to be losers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 248] A fact which Pouget stressed in his critique of the mainstream socialist position:

*"A novel factor has appeared on the labour market: the will of the worker! And this factor, not pertinent when it comes to setting the price of a bushel of potatoes, has a bearing upon the setting of wages; its impact may be large or small, according to the degree of tension of the labour force which is a product of the accord of individual wills beating in unison -- but, whether it be strong or weak, there is no denying it.*

*"Thus, worker cohesion conjures up against capitalist might a might capable of standing up to it. The inequality between the two adversaries -- which cannot be denied when the exploiter is confronted only by the working man on his own -- is redressed in proportion with the degree of cohesion achieved by the labour bloc. From then on, proletarian resistance, be it latent or acute, is an everyday phenomenon: disputes between labour and capital quicken and become more acute. Labour does not always emerge victorious from these partial struggles: however, even when defeated, the struggle workers still reap some benefit: resistance from them has obstructed pressure from the employers and often forced the employer to grant some of the demands put." [Op. Cit.]*

The best currents of autonomist Marxism share this anarchist stress on the power of working people to transform society and to impact on how capitalism operates. Unsurprisingly, most autonomist Marxists reject the idea of the vanguard party and instead, like the council communists, stress the need for **autonomist** working class self-organisation and self-activity (hence the name!). They agree with Pouget when he argued that *"Direct action spells liberation for the masses of humanity . . . [It] puts paid to the age of miracles -- miracles from Heaven, miracles from the State -- and, in contraposition to hopes vested in 'providence' (no matter what they may be) it announces that it will act upon the maxim: salvation lies within ourselves!"* [Op. Cit.] As such, they draw upon anarchistic ideas and rhetoric (for many, undoubtedly unknowingly) and draw anarchistic conclusions. This can be seen from the works of the leading US Autonomist Marxist Harry Cleaver. His excellent essay *"Kropotkin, Self-Valorisation and the Crisis of Marxism"* is by far the best Marxist account of Kropotkin's ideas and shows the similarities between communist-anarchism and autonomist Marxism. [Anarchist Studies, vol.2 , no. 2, pp. 119-36] Both, he points out, share a *"common perception and sympathy for the power of workers to act autonomously"* regardless of the *"substantial differences"* on other issues. [Reading Capital Politically, p. 15]

As such, the links between the best Marxists and anarchism can be substantial. This means that some Marxists have taken on board many anarchist ideas and have forged a version of Marxism which is basically libertarian in nature. Unfortunately, such forms of Marxism have always been a minority current within it. Most cases have seen the appropriation of anarchist ideas by Marxists simply as part of an attempt to make mainstream, authoritarian Marxism more appealing and such borrowings have been quickly forgotten once power has been seized.

Therefore appropriation of rhetoric and labels should not be confused with similarity of goals and ideas. The list of groupings which have used inappropriate labels to associate their ideas with other, more appealing, ones is lengthy. Content is what counts. If libertarian sounding ideas **are** being raised, the question becomes one of whether they are being used simply to gain influence or whether they signify a change of heart. As Bookchin argues:

*"Ultimately, a line will have to be drawn that, by definition, excludes any project that can tip decentralisation to the side of centralisation, direct democracy to the side of delegated power, libertarian institutions to the side of bureaucracy, and spontaneity to the side of authority. Such a line, like a physical barrier, must irrevocably separate a libertarian zone of theory and practice from the hybridised socialisms that tend to denature it. This zone must build its anti-authoritarian, utopian, and revolutionary commitments into the very recognition it has of itself, in short, into the very way it defines itself. . . . to admit of domination is to cross the line that separates the libertarian zone from the [state] socialist."* [Op. Cit., pp. 223-4]

Unless we know exactly what we aim for, how to get there and who our **real** allies are we will get a nasty surprise once our self-proclaimed "allies" take power. As such, any attempt to appropriate anarchist rhetoric into an authoritarian ideology will simply fail and become little more than a mask

obscuring the real aims of the party in question. As history shows.

## H.3.6 Is Marxism the only revolutionary politics which have worked?

Some Marxists will dismiss our arguments, and anarchism, out of hand. This is because anarchism has not lead a "*successful*" revolution while Marxism has. The fact, they assert, that there has never been a serious anarchist revolutionary movement, let alone an anarchist revolution, in the whole of history proves that Marxism works. For some Marxists, practice determines validity. Whether something is true or not is not decided intellectually in wordy publications and debates, but in reality.

For Anarchists, such arguments simply show the ideological nature of most forms of Marxism. The fact is, of course, that there has been many anarchistic revolutions which, while ultimately defeated, show the validity of anarchist theory (the ones in Spain and in the Ukraine being the most significant). Moreover, there have been serious revolutionary anarchist movements across the world, the majority of them crushed by state repression (usually fascist or communist based). However, this is not the most important issue, which is the fate of these "*successful*" Marxist movements and revolution. The fact that there has never been a "Marxist" revolution which has not become a party dictatorship proves the need to critique Marxism.

So, given that Marxists argue that Marxism is **the** revolutionary working class political theory, its actual track record has been appalling. After all, while many Marxist parties have taken part in revolutions and even seized power, the net effect of their "success" have been societies bearing little or no relationship to socialism. Rather, the net effect of these revolutions has been to discredit socialism by associating it with one-party states presiding over state capitalist economies.

Equally, the role of Marxism in the labour movement has also been less than successful. Looking at the first Marxist movement, social democracy, it ended by becoming reformist, betraying socialist ideas by (almost always) supporting their own state during the First World War and going so far as crushing the German revolution and betraying the Italian factory occupations in 1920. Indeed, Trotsky stated that the Bolshevik party was "*the only revolutionary*" section of the Second International, which is a damning indictment of Marxism. [Stalin, vol. 1, p. 248] Just as damning is the fact that neither Lenin or Trotsky noticed it! Indeed, Lenin praised the "*fundamentals of parliamentary tactics*" of German and International Social Democracy, expressing the opinion that they were "*at the same time implacable on questions of principle and always directed to the accomplishment of the final aim*" in his obituary of August Bebel in 1913! [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 248] For those that way inclined, some amusement can be gathered comparing Engels glowing predictions for these parties and their actual performance (in the case of Spain and Italy, his comments seem particularly ironic).

As regards Bolshevism itself, the one "revolutionary" party in the world, it avoided the fate of its sister parties simply because there no question of applying social democratic tactics within bourgeois

institutions as these did not exist. Moreover, the net result of its seizure of power was, first, a party dictatorship and state capitalism under Lenin, then the creation of Stalinism and a host of Trotskyist sects who spend a considerable amount of time justifying and rationalising the ideology and actions of the Bolsheviks which helped create the Stalinism (see the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#) for a discussion).

Clearly, a key myth of Marxism is the idea that it has been a successful movement. In reality, its failures have been consistent and devastating so suggesting its time to re-evaluate the whole ideology and embrace a revolutionary theory like anarchism. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to argue that every "success" of Marxism has, in fact, proved that the anarchist critique of Marxism was correct. Thus, as Bakunin predicted, the Social-Democratic parties became reformist and the "dictatorship of the proletariat" became the "dictatorship *over* the proletariat." With "victories" like these, Marxism does not need failures! Thus Murray Bookchin:

*"A theory which is so readily 'vulgarised,' 'betrayed,' or, more sinisterly, institutionalised into bureaucratic power by nearly all its adherents may well be one that lends itself to such 'vulgarisations,' 'betrayals,' and bureaucratic forms as a normal condition of its existence. What may seem to be 'vulgarisations,' 'betrayals,' and bureaucratic manifestations of its tenets in the heated light of doctrinal disputes may prove to be the fulfilment of its tenets in the cold light of historical development."* [**Toward an Ecological Society**, p. 196]

Hence the overwhelming need to critically evaluate Marxist ideas and history (such as the Russian Revolution -- see the appendix on ["The Russian Revolution"](#)). Unless we honestly discuss and evaluate all aspects of revolutionary ideas, we will never be able to build a positive and constructive revolutionary movement. By seeking the roots of Marxism's problems, we can enrich anarchism by avoiding possible pitfalls and recognising and building upon its strengths (i.e. where anarchists have identified, however incompletely, problems in Marxism which bear on revolutionary ideas, practice and transformation).

If this is done, anarchists are sure that Marxist claims that Marxism is **the** revolutionary theory will be exposed for the baseless rhetoric they are.

### H.3.7 What is wrong with the Marxist theory of the state?

For anarchists, the idea that a state (any state) can be used for socialist ends is simply ridiculous. This is because of the nature of the state as an instrument of minority class rule. As such, it precludes the mass participation required for socialism and would create a new form of class society.

As we discussed in [section B.2](#), the state is defined by certain characteristics (most importantly, the centralisation of power into the hands of a few). Thus, for anarchists, "the word 'State' . . . should be

*reserved for those societies with the hierarchical system and centralisation.*" [Peter Kropotkin, **Ethics**, p. 317f] This defining feature of the state has not come about by chance. As Kropotkin argued in his classic history of the state, *"a social institution cannot lend itself to all the desired goals, since, as with every organ, [the state] developed according to the function it performed, in a definite direction and not in all possible directions."* This means, by *"seeing the State as it has been in history, and as it is in essence today"* the conclusion anarchists *"arrive at is for the abolition of the State."* Thus the state has *"developed in the history of human societies to prevent the direct association among men [and women] to shackle the development of local and individual initiative, to crush existing liberties, to prevent their new blossoming -- all this in order to subject the masses to the will of minorities."* [**The State: Its Historic Role**, p. 56]

So if the state, as Kropotkin stresses, is defined by *"the existence of a power situated above society, but also of a territorial concentration as well as the concentration in the hands of a few of many functions in the life of societies"* then such a structure has not evolved by chance. Therefore *"the pyramidal organisation which is the essence of the State"* simply *"cannot lend itself to a function opposed to the one for which it was developed in the course of history,"* such as the popular participation from below required by social revolution and socialism. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 10, p. 59 and p. 56] Based on this evolutionary analysis of the state, Kropotkin, like all anarchists, drew the conclusion *"that the State organisation, having been the force to which the minorities resorted for establishing and organising their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy these privileges."* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 82]

This does **not** mean that anarchists dismiss differences between types of state, think the state has not changed over time or refuse to see that different states exist to defend different ruling minorities. Far from it. Anarchists argue that *"[e]very economic phase has a political phase corresponding to it, and it would be impossible to touch private property unless a new mode of political life be found at the same time."* *"A society founded on serfdom,"* Kropotkin explained, *"is in keeping with absolute monarchy; a society based on the wage system, and the exploitation of the masses by the capitalists finds its political expression in parliamentarianism."* As such, the state form changes and evolves, but its basic function (defender of minority rule) and structure (delegated power into the hands of a few) remains. Which means that *"a free society regaining possession of the common inheritance must seek, in free groups and free federations of groups, a new organisation, in harmony with the new economic phase of history."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 54]

So, as with any social structure, the state has evolved to ensure that it carries out its function. In other words, the state is centralised because it is an instrument of minority domination and oppression. Insofar as a social system is based on decentralisation of power, popular self-management and participation and free federation from below upwards, it is not a state. If a social system is, however, marked by delegated power and centralisation it is a state and cannot be, therefore, a instrument of social liberation. Rather it will become, slowly but surely, *"whatever title it adopts and whatever its origin and organisation may be"* what the state has always been, a instrument for *"oppressing and exploiting the masses, of defending the oppressors and the exploiters."* [**Anarchy**, p. 20] Which, for obvious reasons, is why anarchists argue for the destruction of the state by a free federation of self-managed communes and workers'



councils (see sections [I.5](#) and [H.1.4](#) for further discussion).

This explains why anarchists reject the Marxist definition and theory of the state. For Marxists, *"the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another."* While it has been true that, historically, it is *"the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which, through the medium of the state, becomes also the politically dominant class, and this acquires the means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class,"* this need not always be the case. The state is *"at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy,"* although it *"cannot avoid having to lop off at once as much as possible"* of it *"until such time as a generation reared in new, free social conditions is able to throw the entire lumber of the state on the scrap heap."* This new state, often called the *"dictatorship of the proletariat,"* would slowly *"wither away"* (or *"dies out"*) as classes disappear and the state *"at last . . . becomes the real representative of the whole of society"* and so *"renders itself unnecessary."* Engels is at pains to differentiate this position from that of the anarchists, who demand *"the abolition of the state out of hand."* [Engels, **Marx-Engels Selected Works**, p. 258, pp. 577-8, p. 528 and p. 424]

For anarchists, this argument has deep flaws. Simply put, unlike the anarchist one, this is not an empirically based theory of the state. Rather, we find such a theory mixed up with a metaphysical, non-empirical, a-historic definition which is based not on what the state **is** but rather what is **could** be. Thus the argument that the state *"is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another"* is trying to draw out an abstract *"essence"* of the state rather than ground what the state is on empirical evidence and analysis. This perspective, anarchists argue, simply confuses two very different things, namely the state and popular social organisation, with potentially disastrous results. By calling the popular self-organisation required by a social revolution the same name as a hierarchical and centralised body constructed for, and evolved to ensure, minority rule, the door is wide open to confuse popular power with party power, to confuse rule by the representatives of the working class with working class self-management of the revolution and society.

As we discussed in [section H.2.1](#), anarchist opposition to the idea of a *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* should not be confused with idea that anarchists do not think that a social revolution needs to be defended. Rather, our opposition to the concept rests on the confusion which inevitably occurs when you mix up scientific analysis with metaphysical concepts. By drawing out an a-historic definition of the state, Engels helped ensure that the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* became the *"dictatorship over the proletariat"* by implying that centralisation and delegated power into the hands of the few can be considered as an expression of popular power.

To explain why, we need only to study the works of Engels himself. Engels, in his famous account of the **Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State**, defined the state as follows:

*"The state is . . . by no means a power forced on society from without . . . Rather, it is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is an admission . . . that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms . . . in order that these antagonisms and classes with*

*conflicting economic interests might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have power seemingly standing above society that would alleviate the conflict . . . this power, arisen out of society but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it, is the state."* [Marx-Engels: Selected Writings, p. 576]

The state has two distinguishing features, firstly (and least importantly) it *"divides its subjects according to territory."* The second *"is the establishment of a public power which no longer directly coincides with the population organising itself as an armed force. This special public power is necessary because a self-acting armed organisation of the population has become impossible since the split into classes . . . This public power exists in every state; it consists not merely of armed men but also of material adjuncts, prisons and institutions of coercion of all kinds."* Thus *"an essential feature of the state is a public power distinct from the mass of the people."* [Op. Cit., pp. 576-7 and pp. 535-6]

In this, as can be seen, the Marxist position concurs with the anarchist. He discusses the development of numerous ancient societies to prove his point. Talking of Greek society, he argues that it was based on a popular assembly which was *"sovereign"* plus a council. This social system was not a state because *"when every adult male member of the tribe was a warrior, there was as yet no public authority separated from the people that could have been set up against it. Primitive democracy was still in full bloom, and this must remain the point of departure in judging power and the status of the council."* [Op. Cit., pp. 525-6]

Discussing the descent of this society into classes, he argues that this required *"an institution that would perpetuate, not only the newly-rising class division of society, but the right of the possessing class to exploit the non-possessing class and the rule of the former over the latter."* Unsurprisingly, *"this institution arrived. The state was invented."* The original communal organs of society were *"superseded by real governmental authorities"* and the defence of society (*"the actual 'people in arms'"*) was *"taken by an armed 'public power' at the service of these authorities and, therefore, also available against the people."* With the rise of the state, the communal council was *"transformed into a senate."* [Op. Cit., p. 528 and p. 525] Thus the state arises specifically to exclude popular self-government, replacing it with minority rule conducted via a centralised, hierarchical top-down structure (*"government . . . is the natural protector of capitalism and other exploiters of popular labour."* [Bakunin, Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 239]).

This account of the rise of the state is at direct odds with Engels argument that the state is simply an instrument of class rule. For the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* to be a state, it would have to constitute a power above society, be different from the people armed, and so be *"a public power distinct from the mass of the people."* However, Marx and Engels are at pains to stress that the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* will not be such a regime. However, how can you have something (namely *"a public power distinct from the mass of the people"*) you consider as *"an essential feature"* of a state missing in an institution you call the same name? It is a bit like calling a mammal a *"new kind of reptile"* in spite of the former not being cold-blooded, something you consider as *"an essential feature"* of the latter!

This contradiction helps explain Engels' comments that "[w]e would therefore propose to replace *state everywhere* by *Gemeinwesen*, a good old German word which can very well convey the meaning of the French word '*commune*'" He even states that the Paris Commune "was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word." However, this comment does not mean that Engels sought to remove any possible confusion on the matter, for he still talked of "the state" as "only a transitional institution which is used in the struggle, in the revolution, to hold down one's adversaries by force . . . so long as the proletariat still *uses* the state, it does not use it in the interests of freedom but in order to hold down its adversaries, and as soon as it becomes possible to speak of freedom the state as such ceases to exist." [Op. Cit., p. 335] Thus the state would still exist and, furthermore, is **not** identified with the working class as a whole ("a self-acting armed organisation of the population"), rather it is an institution standing apart from the "people armed" which is used, by the proletariat, to crush its enemies.

(As an aside, we must stress that to state that it only becomes possible to "speak of freedom" after the state and classes cease to exist is a serious theoretical error. Firstly, it means to talk about "freedom" in the abstract, ignoring the reality of class and hierarchical society. To state the obvious, in class society working class people have their freedom restricted by the state, wage labour and other forms of social hierarchy. The aim of social revolution is the conquest of liberty by the working class by overthrowing hierarchical rule. Freedom for the working class, by definition, means stopping any attempts to restrict that freedom by its adversaries. To state the obvious, it is not a "restriction" of the freedom of would-be bosses to resist their attempts to impose their rule! As such, Engels, yet again, fails to consider revolution from a working class perspective -- see [section H.4.7](#) for another example of this flaw.

Moreover his comments have been used to justify restrictions on working class freedom, power and political rights by Marxist parties once they have seized power. "Whatever power the State gains," correctly argues Bookchin, "it always does so at the expense of popular power. Conversely, whatever power the people gain, they always acquire at the expense of the State. To legitimate State power, in effect, is to delegitimize popular power." [Remaking Society, p. 160])

Elsewhere, we have Engels arguing that "the characteristic attribute of the former state" is that while society "had created its own organs to look after its own special interests" in the course of time "these organs, at whose head was the state power, transformed themselves from the servants of society into the masters of society." [Op. Cit., p. 257] Ignoring the obvious contradiction with his earlier claims that the state and communal organs were different, with the former destroying the latter, we are struck yet again by the idea of the state as being defined as an institution above society. Thus, if the post revolutionary society is marked by "the state" being dissolved into society, placed under its control, then it is not a state. To call it a "new and truly democratic" form of "state power" makes as little sense as calling a motorcar a "new" form of bicycle. As such, when Engels argues that the Paris Commune "was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word" or that when the proletariat seizes political power it "abolishes the state as state" we may be entitled to ask what it is, a state or not a state. [Op. Cit., p. 335 and p. 424] It cannot be both, it cannot be a "public power distinct from the mass of the people" **and** "a self-acting armed organisation of the population." If it is the latter, then it does not have what Engels considered as "an essential feature of the state" and cannot be considered one. If it is the former, then any claim that such a regime is the rule of the working class is automatically invalidated. That Engels mocked the anarchists for seeking a revolution "without a provisional government and in the total absence of any

*state or state-like institution, which are to be destroyed"* we can safely say that it is the former. [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 156] Given that "*primitive democracy*," as Engels noted, defended itself against its adversaries without such an institution shows that to equate the defence of working class freedom with the state is not only unnecessary, it simply leads to confusion. For this reason anarchists do not confuse the necessary task of defending and organising a social revolution with creating a state.

Thus, the problem for Marxism is that the empirical definition of the state collides with the metaphysical, the actual state with its Marxist essence. As Italian Anarchist Camillo Berneri argued, "*The Proletariat' which seizes the state, bestowing on it the complete ownership of the means of production and destroying itself as proletariat and the state 'as the state' is a metaphysical fantasy, a political hypotaxis of social abstractions.*" [*The Abolition and Extinction of the State*," **Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review**, no. 4, p. 50]

This is no academic point, as we explain in the [next section](#) this confusion has been exploited to justify party power **over** the proletariat. Thus, as Berneri argues, Marxists "*do not propose the armed conquest of the commune by the whole proletariat, but they propose the conquest of the State by the party which imagines it represents the proletariat. The Anarchists allow the use of direct power by the proletariat, but they understand by the organ of this power to be formed by the entire corpus of systems of communist administration -- corporate organisations [i.e. industrial unions], communal institutions, both regional and national -- freely constituted outside and in opposition to all political monopoly by parties and endeavouring to a minimum administrative centralisation.*" Thus "*the Anarchists desire the destruction of the classes by means of a social revolution which eliminates, with the classes, the State.*" [*Dictatorship of the Proletariat and State Socialism*", **Op. Cit.**, p. 52] Anarchists are opposed to the state because it is not neutral, it cannot be made to serve our interests. The structures of the state are only necessary when a minority seeks to rule over the majority. We argue that the working class can create our own structures, organised and run from below upwards, to ensure the efficient running of everyday life.

By confusing two radically different things, Marxism ensures that popular power is consumed and destroyed by the state, by a new ruling elite. In the words Murray Bookchin:

*"Marx, in his analysis of the Paris Commune of 1871, has done radical social theory a considerable disservice. The Commune's combination of delegated policy-making with the execution of policy by its own administrators, a feature of the Commune which Marx celebrated, is a major failing of that body. Rousseau quite rightly emphasised that popular power cannot be delegated without being destroyed. One either has a fully empowered popular assembly or power belongs to the State."* [*Theses on Libertarian Municipalism*", pp. 9-22, **The Anarchist Papers**, Dimitrios Roussopoulos (ed.), p. 14]

If power belongs to the state, then the state is a public body distinct from the population and, therefore, not an instrument of working class power. Rather, as an institution designed to ensure minority rule, it

would ensure its position within society and become either the ruling class itself or create a new class which instrument it would be. As we discuss in section H.3.9 ( "[\*Is the state simply an agent of economic power?\*](#)") the state cannot be considered as a neutral instrument of class rule, it has specific interests in itself which can and does mean it can play an oppressive and exploitative role in society independently of a ruling class.

Which brings us to the crux of the issue whether this "new" state will, in fact, be unlike any other state that has ever existed. Insofar as this "new" state is based on popular self-management and self-organisation, anarchists argue that such an organisation cannot be called a state as it is **not** based on delegated power. "As long as," as Bookchin stresses, "*the institutions of power consisted of armed workers and peasants as distinguished from a professional bureaucracy, police force, army, and cabal of politicians and judges, they were no[t] a State . . . These institutions, in fact comprised a revolutionary people in arms . . . not a professional apparatus that could be regarded as a State in any meaningful sense of the term.*" ["Looking Back at Spain," pp. 53-96, **The Radical Papers**, p. 86]

This was why Bakunin was at pains to emphasis that a "*federal organisation, from below upward, of workers' associations, groups, communes, districts, and ultimately, regions and nations*" could not be considered as the same as "*centralised states*" and "*contrary to their essence.*" [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 13] So when Lenin argues in **State and Revolution** that in the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*" the "*organ of suppression is now the majority of the population, and not the minority*" and that "*since the majority of the people **itself** suppresses its oppressors, a 'special force' for the suppression [of the bourgeoisie] is **no longer necessary***" he is confusing two fundamentally different things. As Engels made clear, such a social system of "*primitive democracy*" is not a state. However, when Lenin argues that "*the more the functions of state power devolve upon the people generally, the less need is there for the existence of this power,*" he is implicitly arguing that there would be, in fact, a "*public power distinct from mass of the people*" and so a state in the normal sense of the word based on delegated power, "*special forces*" separate from the armed people and so on. [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 301]

That such a regime would not "*wither away*" has been proven by history. The state machine does not (indeed, **cannot**) represent the interests of the working classes due to its centralised, hierarchical and elitist nature -- all it can do is represent the interests of the party in power, its own bureaucratic needs and privileges and slowly, but surely, remove itself from popular control. This, as anarchists have constantly stressed, is why the state is based on the delegation of power, on hierarchy and centralisation. The state is organised in this way to facilitate minority rule by excluding the mass of people from taking part in the decision making processes within society. If the masses actually did manage society directly, it would be impossible for a minority class to dominate it. Hence the need for a state. Which shows the central fallacy of the Marxist theory of the state, namely it argues that the rule of the proletariat will be conducted by a structure, the state, which is designed to exclude the popular participation such a concept demands!

Considered another way, "*political power*" (the state) is simply the power of minorities to enforce their wills. This means that a social revolution which aims to create socialism cannot use it to further its aims.

After all, if the state (i.e. "*political power*") has been created to further minority class rule (as Marxists and anarchists agree) then, surely, this function has determined how the organ which exercises it has developed. Therefore, we would expect organ and function to be related and impossible to separate.

So when Marx argued that the "*conquest of political power becomes the great duty of the proletariat*" because "*the lords of the land and of capital always make use of their political privileges to defend and perpetuate their economic monopolies and enslave labour,*" he drew the wrong conclusion. [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 85] Building on a historically based (and so evolutionary) understanding of the state, anarchists concluded that it was necessary not to seize political power (which could only be exercised by a minority within any state) but rather to destroy it, to dissipate power into the hands of the working class, the majority. By ending the regime of the powerful by destroying their instrument of rule, the power which was concentrated into their hands automatically falls back into the hands of society. Thus, working class power can only be concrete once "*political power*" is shattered and replaced by the social power of the working class based on its own class organisations (such as factory committees, workers' councils, unions, neighbourhood assemblies and so on). As Murray Bookchin put it:

*"the slogan 'Power to the people' can only be put into practice when the power exercised by social elites is dissolved into the people. Each individual can then take control of his [or her] daily life. If 'Power to the people' means nothing more than power to the 'leaders' of the people, then the people remain an undifferentiated, manipulated mass, as powerless after the revolution as they were before."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 20f]

In practice, this means that any valid social revolution needs to break the new state and **not** replace it with another one. This is because, in order to be a state, any state structure must be based on delegated power, hierarchy and centralisation ("*every State, even the most Republican and the most democratic . . . are in essence only machine governing the masses from above*" and "[i]f there is a State, there must necessarily be domination, and therefore slavery; a State without slavery, overt or concealed, is unthinkable -- and that is why we are enemies of the State." [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 211 and p. 287]). This means that if power is devolved to the working class then the state no longer exists as its "*essential feature*" (of delegated power) is absent. What you have is a new form of the "*primitive democracy*" which existed before the rise of the state. While this new, modern, form of self-management will have to defend itself against those seeking to recreate minority power, this does not mean that it becomes a state. After all, "*primitive democracy*" had to defend itself against its adversaries and so that, in itself, does not (as Engels acknowledges) mean it is a state. Thus defence of a revolution, as anarchists have constantly stressed, does not equate to a state as it fails to address the key issue, namely who has **power** in the system -- the masses or their leaders.

This issue is fudged by Marx. In his comments on Bakunin's question in "*Statism and Anarchy*" about "*Will the entire proletariat head the government?*", Marx argues in response:

*"Does in a trade union, for instance, the whole union constitute the executive committee?"*

*Will all division of labour in a factory disappear and also the various functions arising from it? And will everybody be at the top in Bakunin's construction built from the bottom upwards? There will in fact be no below then. Will all members of the commune also administer the common affairs of the region? In that case there will be no difference between commune and region. 'The Germans [says Bakunin] number nearly 40 million. Will, for example, all 40 million be members of the government?' Certainly, for the thing begins with the self-government of the commune."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, pp. 150-1]

As Alan Carter argues, *"this might have seemed to Marx [over] a century ago to be satisfactory rejoinder, but it can hardly do today. In the infancy of the trade unions, which is all Marx knew, the possibility of the executives of a trade union becoming divorced from the ordinary members may not have seemed to him to be a likely outcome, We, however, have behind us a long history of union leaders 'selling out' and being out of touch with their members. Time has ably demonstrated that to reject Bakunin's fears on the basis of the practice of trade union officials constitutes a woeful complacency with regard to power and privilege -- a complacency that was born ample fruit in the form of present Marxist parties and 'communist' societies . . . [His] dispute with Bakunin shows quite clearly that Marx did not stress the continued control of the revolution by the mass of the people as a prerequisite for the transcendence of all significant social antagonisms."* [Marx: A Radical Critique, pp. 217-8]

As we discussed in [section H.3.1](#), Marx's "Address to the Communist League," with its stress on "the most determined centralisation of power in the hands of the state authority" and that "the path of revolutionary activity . . . can only proceed with full force from the centre," suggests that Bakunin's fears were valid and Marx's answer simply inadequate. [Marx-Engels Reader, p. 509] Simply put, if, as Engels argues, the "an essential feature of the state is a public power distinct from the mass of the people," then, clearly Marx's argument of 1850 (and others like it) signifies a state in the usual sense of the word, one which has to be "distinct" from the mass of the population in order to ensure that the masses are prevented from interfering with their own revolution.

Ultimately, the question, of course, is one of power. Does the "executive committee" have the fundamental decision making power in society, or does that power lie in the mass assemblies upon which a federal socialist society is built? If the former, we have rule by a few party leaders and the inevitable bureaucratisation of the society and a state in the accepted sense of the word. If the latter, we have a basic structure of a free and equal society and a new organisation of popular self-management which eliminates, by self-management, the existence of a public power above society. This is not playing with words. It signifies the key issue of social transformation, an issue which Marxism tends to ignore or confuse matters about when discussing. Bookchin clarifies what is at stake:

*"To some neo-Marxists who see centralisation and decentralisation merely as difference of degree, the word 'centralisation' may merely be an awkward way of denoting means for **co-ordinating** the decisions made by decentralised bodies. Marx, it is worth noting, greatly confused this distinction when he praised the Paris Commune as a 'working, not a*

*parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time.' In point of fact, the consolidation of 'executive and legislative' functions in a single body was regressive. It simply identified the process of policy-making, a function that rightly should belong to the people in assembly, with the technical execution of these policies, a function that should be left to strictly administrative bodies subject to rotation, recall, limitations of tenure . . . Accordingly, the melding of policy formation with administration placed the institutional emphasis of classical [Marxist] socialism on centralised bodies, indeed, by an ironical twist of historical events, bestowing the privilege of formulating policy on the 'higher bodies' of socialist hierarchies and their execution precisely on the more popular 'revolutionary committees' below." [Toward an Ecological Society, pp. 215-6]*

By confusing co-ordination with the state (i.e. with delegation of power), Marxism opens the door wide open to the "dictatorship of the proletariat" being a state "in the proper sense." Not only does Marxism open that door, it even invites the state "in the proper sense" of the word in! This can be seen from Engels comment that just as "each political party sets out to establish its rule in the state, so the German Social-Democratic Workers' Party is striving to establish *its* rule, the rule of the working class." [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-syndicalism**, p. 94] By confusing rule by the party "in the state" with "rule of the working class," Engels is confusing party power and popular power. For the party to "establish *its* rule," the state in the normal sense (i.e. a structure based on the delegation of power) has to be maintained. As such, the "dictatorship of the proletariat" signifies the delegation of power by the proletariat into the hands of the party and that implies a "public power distinct from the mass of the people" and so minority rule. This aspect of Marxism, as we argue in the [next section](#), was developed under the Bolsheviks and became "the dictatorship of the party" (i.e. the dictatorship **over** the proletariat).

It is for this reason why anarchists are extremely critical of Marxist ideas of social revolution. As Alan Carter argues:

*"It is to argue not against revolution, but against 'revolutionary' praxis employing central authority. It is to argue that any revolution must remain in the hands of the mass of people and that they must be aware of the dangers of allowing power to fall into the hands of a minority in the course of the revolution. Latent within Marxist theory . . . is the tacit condoning of political inequality in the course and aftermath of revolutionary praxis. Only when such inequality is openly and widely rejected can there be any hope of a libertarian communist revolution. The lesson to learn is that we must oppose not revolutionary practice, but **authoritarian** 'revolutionary' practice. Such authoritarian practice will continue to prevail in revolutionary circles as long as the Marxist theory of the state and the corresponding theory of power remain above criticism within them." [Marx: A Radical Critique, p. 231]*

In summary, the Marxist theory of the state is simply a-historic and postulates some kind of state "essence" which exists independently of actual states and their role in society. To confuse the organ



required by a minority class to execute and maintain its rule and that required by a majority class to manage society is to make a theoretical error of great magnitude. It opens the door to the idea of party power and even party dictatorship. As such, the Marxism of Marx and Engels is confused on the issue of the state. Their comments fluctuate between the anarchist definition of the state (based, as it is, on generalisations from historical examples) and the a-historic definition (based not on historical example but rather derived from a supra-historical analysis). Trying to combine the metaphysical with the scientific, the authoritarian with the libertarian, can only leave their followers with a confused legacy and that is what we find.

Since the death of the founding fathers of Marxism, their followers have diverged into two camps. The majority have embraced the metaphysical and authoritarian concept of the state and proclaimed their support for a "*workers' state*." This is represented by social-democracy and its radical offshoot, Leninism. As we discuss in the [next section](#), this school has used the Marxist conception of the state to allow for rule over the working class by the "*revolutionary*" party. The minority has become increasingly and explicitly anti-state, recognising that the Marxist legacy is contradictory and that for the proletariat to directly manage society then there can be no power above them. To this camp belongs the libertarian Marxists of the council communist, Situationist and other schools of thought which are close to anarchism.

### H.3.8 What is wrong with the Leninist theory of the state?

As discussed in the [last section](#), there is a contradiction at the heart of the Marxist theory of the state. On the one hand, it acknowledges that the state, historically, has always been an instrument of minority rule and is structured to ensure this. On the other, it argues that you can have a state (the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*") which transcends this historical reality to express an abstract essence of the state as an "*instrument of class rule*." This means that Marxism usually confuses two very different concepts, namely the state (a structure based on centralisation and delegated power) and the popular self-management and self-organisation required to create and defend a socialist society.

This confusion between two fundamentally different concepts proved to be disastrous when the Russian Revolution broke out. Confusing party power with working class power, the Bolsheviks aimed to create a "workers' state" in which their party would be in power (see [section 5](#) of the appendix on "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)"). As the state was an instrument of class rule, it did not matter if the new "workers' state" was centralised, hierarchical and top-down like the old state as the structure of the state was considered irrelevant in evaluating its role in society. Thus, while Lenin seemed to promise a radical democracy in which the working class would directly manage its own affairs in his **State and Revolution**, in practice implemented a "*dictatorship of the proletariat*" which was, in fact, "*the organisation of the vanguard of the oppressed as the ruling class*." [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 337] In other words, the vanguard party in the position of head of the state, governing on behalf of the working class which, as we argued in the [last section](#), meant that the new "workers' state" was fundamentally a state in the usual sense of the word. This quickly led to a dictatorship **over**, not of, the proletariat (as Bakunin had predicted).

This development did not come as a surprise to anarchists, who long argued that a state is an instrument of minority rule and cannot change its nature. To use the state to affect socialist change is impossible, simply because it is not designed for such a task. As we argued in [section B.2](#), the state is based on centralisation of power explicitly to ensure minority rule and for this reason has to be abolished during a social revolution.

Ironically, the theoretical lessons Leninists gained from the experience of the Russian Revolution confirm the anarchist analysis that the state structure exists to facilitate minority rule and marginalise and disempower the majority to achieve that rule. This can be seen from the significant revision of the Marxist position which occurred once the Bolshevik party became the ruling party. Simply put, after 1917 leading representatives of Leninism stressed that the idea that state power was **not** required to repress resistance by the ex-ruling class as such, but, in fact, was necessitated by the divisions within the working class. In other words, state power was required because the working class was not able to govern itself and so required a grouping (the party) above it to ensure the success of the revolution and overcome any "*wavering*" within the masses themselves.

While we have discussed this position in [section H.1.2](#) and so will be repeating ourselves to some degree, it is worth summarising again the arguments put forward to justify this revision. This is because they confirm what anarchists have always argued, namely that the state is an instrument of minority rule and **not** one by which working class people can manage their own affairs directly. As the quotations from leading Leninists make clear, it is **precisely** this feature of the state which recommends it for party (i.e. minority) power. In other words, the contradiction at the heart of the Marxist theory of the state we pointed out in the [last section](#) has been resolved in Leninism. It supports the state precisely because it is "*a public power distinct from the mass of the people,*" rather than an instrument of working class self-management of society.

Needless to say, latter day followers of Leninism point to Lenin's apparently democratic, even libertarian sounding, 1917 work, **The State and Revolution** when asked about the Leninist theory of the state. As our discussion of the Russian revolution in the appendix "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)" proves, the ideas expounded in his pamphlet were rarely, if at all, applied in practice by the Bolsheviks. Moreover, it was written before the seizure of power. In order to see the validity of his argument we must compare it to his and his fellow Bolshevik leaders opinions once the revolution had "succeeded." What lessons did they generalise from their experiences and how did these lessons relate to **State and Revolution**?

This change can be seen from Trotsky, who argued quite explicitly that "*the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard*" and that "*the necessity for state power arises from an insufficient cultural level of the masses and their heterogeneity.*" Only with "*support of the vanguard by the class*" can there be the "*conquest of power*" and it was in "*this sense the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are the work of the whole class, but only under the leadership of the vanguard.*" Thus, rather than the working class as a whole seizing power, it is the "*vanguard*" which takes power -- "*a revolutionary party, even*

*after seizing power . . . is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society.*" [**Stalinism and Bolshevism**]

Thus state power is required to **govern the masses**, who cannot exercise power themselves. As Trotsky put it, "[t]hose who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat." [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**] Clearly, the state is envisioned as an instrument existing **above** society, above the working class, and its "necessity" is not driven by the need to defend the revolution, but rather in the "insufficient cultural level of the masses." Indeed, "party dictatorship" is required to create "the state form of the proletariat."

This idea that state power was required due to the limitations within the working class is reiterated a few years later in 1939:

*"The very same masses are at different times inspired by different moods and objectives. It is just for this reason that a centralised organisation of the vanguard is indispensable. Only a party, wielding the authority it has won, is capable of overcoming the vacillation of the masses themselves . . . if the dictatorship of the proletariat means anything at all, then it means that the vanguard of the proletariat is armed with the resources of the state in order to repel dangers, including those emanating from the backward layers of the proletariat itself."* [**The Moralists and Sycophants**, p. 59]

Needless to say, **by definition** everyone is "backward" when compared to the "vanguard of the proletariat." Moreover, as it is this "vanguard" which is "armed with the resources of the state" and **not** the proletariat as a whole we are left with one obvious conclusion, namely party dictatorship rather than working class democracy. How Trotsky's position is compatible with the idea of the working class as the "ruling class" is not explained. However, it fits in well with the anarchist analysis of the state as an instrument designed to ensure minority rule. Other, equally elitist arguments were expressed by Trotsky twenty years earlier when he held the reins of power.

In 1920, he argued that while the Bolsheviks have "more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of the party," in fact "it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party." This, just to state the obvious, was his argument seventeen years later. "In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class," Trotsky added, "there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class." [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 109] In early 1921, he argued again for Party dictatorship at the Tenth Party Congress. His comments made there against the **Workers' Opposition** within the Communist Party make his position clear:

*"The Workers' Opposition has come out with dangerous slogans, making a fetish of democratic principles! They place the workers' right to elect representatives above the Party, as if the party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship*

*temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy. It is necessary to create amongst us the awareness of the revolutionary birthright of the party, which is obliged to maintain its dictatorship, regardless of temporary wavering even in the working classes. This awareness is for us the indispensable element. The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy.*" [quoted by Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 209]

The similarities with his arguments of 1939 are obvious. Unsurprisingly, he maintained this position in the intervening years. He stated in 1922 that *"we maintain the dictatorship of our party!"* [**The First Five Years of the Communist International**, vol. 2, p. 255] The next year saw him arguing that *"[i]f there is one question which basically not only does not require revision but does not so much as admit the thought of revision, it is the question of the dictatorship of the Party."* He stressed that *"[o]ur party is the ruling party"* and that *"[t]o allow any changes whatever in this field"* meant *"bring[ing] into question all the achievements of the revolution and its future."* He indicated the fate of those who **did** question the party's "leading role": *"Whoever makes an attempt on the party's leading role will, I hope, be unanimously dumped by all of us on the other side of the barricade."* [**Leon Trotsky Speaks**, p. 158 and p. 160]

By 1927, when Trotsky was in the process of being "dumped" on the "other side of the barricade" by the ruling bureaucracy, he **still** argued for Party dictatorship. The **Platform of the Opposition** includes *"the Leninist principle, inviolable for every Bolshevnik, that the dictatorship of the proletariat is and can be realised only through the dictatorship of the party."* The document stresses the *"dictatorship of the proletariat [sic!] demands as its very core a single proletarian party,"* that *"the dictatorship of the proletariat demands a single and united proletarian party as the leader of the working masses and the poor peasantry."*

Ten years later, he explicitly argued that the *"revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party"* was *"an objective necessity imposed upon us by the social realities -- the class struggle, the heterogeneity of the revolutionary class, the necessity for a selected vanguard in order to assure the victory."* This *"dictatorship of a party"* was essential and *"we can not jump over this chapter"* of human history. He stressed that the *"revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution"* and argued that *"the party dictatorship"* could **not** be replaced by *"the 'dictatorship' of the whole toiling people without any party."* This was because the *"level of political development among the masses"* was not "high" enough as *"capitalism does not permit the material and the moral development of the masses."* [Trotsky, **Writings 1936-37**, pp. 513-4]

Thus, for Trotsky over a twenty year period, the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* was fundamentally a *"dictatorship of the party."* While the working class may be allowed some level of democracy, the rule of the party was repeatedly given precedence. While the party may be placed into power by a mass revolution, once there the party would maintain its position of power and dismiss attempts by the working class to replace it as *"wavering"* or *"vacillation"* due to the *"insufficient cultural level of the masses and their heterogeneity."* In other words, the party dictatorship was required to protect working class people from themselves, their tendency to change their minds based on debates between difference

political ideas and positions, make their own decisions, reject what is in their best interests (as determined by the party), and so on. Thus the underlying rationale for democracy (namely that it reflects the changing will of the voters, their "*passing moods*" so to speak) is used to justify party dictatorship!

As noted in [section H.1.2](#), Trotsky on this matter was simply following Lenin's lead, who had admitted at the end of 1920 that while "*the dictatorship of the proletariat*" was "*inevitable*" in the "*transition of socialism*," it is "*not exercised by an organisation which takes in all industrial workers*." The reason, he states, "*is given in the theses of the Second Congress of the Communist International on the role of political parties*" (more on which later). This means that "*the Party, shall we say, absorbs the vanguard of the proletariat, and this vanguard exercises the dictatorship of the proletariat*." This was required because "*in all capitalist countries . . . the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts*." Therefore, it "*can be exercised only by a vanguard*." [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 20 and p. 21] As we pointed out in [section H.3.3](#), Lenin argued that "*revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves*." [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 42, p. 170] Needless to say, Lenin failed to mention this aspect of his system in **The State and Revolution** (a failure usually repeated by his followers). It is, however, a striking confirmation of Bakunin's comments "*the State cannot be sure of its own self-preservation without an armed force to defend it against its own **internal enemies**, against the discontent of its own people*." [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 265]

Looking at the lessons leading leaders of Leninism gained from the experience of the Russian Revolution, we have to admit that the Leninist "*workers' state*" will not be, in fact, a "*new*" kind of state, a "*semi-state*," or, to quote Lenin, a "*new state*" which "*is **no longer** a state in the proper sense of the word*." If, as Lenin argued in early 1917, the state "*in the proper sense of the term is domination over the people by contingents of armed men divorced from the people*," then Bolshevism in power quickly saw the need for a state "*in the proper sense*." [**Selected Works**, vol. 2, p. 60] While this state "*in the proper sense*" had existed from the start of Bolshevik rule (see "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)"), it was only from 1919 onwards (at the latest) that the leaders of Bolshevism had openly brought what they said into line with what they did. It was only by being a "*state in the proper sense*" could the Bolshevik party rule and exercise "*the dictatorship of the party*" over the "*wavering*" working class.

So when Lenin states that "*Marxism differs from anarchism in that it recognises **the need for a state** for the purpose of the transition to socialism*," anarchists agree. Insofar as "Marxism" aims for, to quote Lenin, the party to "*take state power into [its] own hands*," to become "*the governing party*" and considers one of its key tasks for "*our Party to capture political power*" and to "*administer*" a country, then we can safely say that the state needed is a state "*in the proper sense*," based on the centralisation and delegation of power into the hands of a few. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 60, p. 589, p. 328 and p. 589]

This recreation of the state "*in the proper sense*" did not come about by chance or simply because of the "*will to power*" of the leaders of Bolshevism. Rather, there are strong institutional pressures at work within any state structure (even a "*semi-state*") to turn it back into a "*proper*" state. We discuss this in

more detail in [section H.3.9](#). However, we should not ignore that many of the roots of Bolshevik tyranny can be found in the contradictions of the Marxist theory of the state. As noted in the [last section](#), for Engels, the seizure of power by the party meant that the working class was in power. The Leninist tradition builds on this confusion between party and class power. It is clear that the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*" is, in fact, rule by the party. In Lenin's words:

*"Engels speaks of a government that is required for the domination of a class . . . Applied to the proletariat, it consequently means a government that is required for the domination of the proletariat, i.e. the dictatorship of the proletariat for the effectuation of the socialist revolution."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 8, p. 279]

The role of the working class in this state was also indicated, as "*only a revolutionary dictatorship supported by the vast majority of the people can be at all durable.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 291] In other words the "*revolutionary government*" has the power, not the working class in whose name it governs. In 1921 he made this explicit: "*To govern you need an army of steeled revolutionary Communists. We have it, and it is called the Party.*" The "*Party is the leader, the vanguard of the proletariat, which rules directly.*" For Lenin, as "*long as we, the Party's Central Committee and the whole Party, continue to run things, that is govern we shall never -- we cannot -- dispense with . . . removals, transfers, appointments, dismissals, etc.*" [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 32, p. 62, p. 98 and p. 99] So much for "*workers' power*," "*socialism from below*" and other such rhetoric.

This vision of "socialism" being rooted in party power over the working class was the basis of the Communist International's resolution of the role of the party. This resolution is, therefore, important and worth discussing.

It argues that the Communist Party "*is part of the working class,*" namely its "*most advanced, most class-conscious, and therefore most revolutionary part.*" It is "*distinguished from the working class as a whole in that it grasps the whole historic path of the working class in its entirety and at every bend in that road endeavours to defend not the interests of individual groups or occupations but the interests of the working class as a whole.*" [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 1, p. 191] However, in response it can be argued that this simply means the "*interests of the party*" as only it can understand what "*the interests of the working class as a whole*" actually are. Thus we have the possibility of the party substituting its will for that of the working class simply because of what Leninists term the "*uneven development*" of the working class. As Alan Carter argues, these "*conceptions of revolutionary organisation maintain political and ideological domination by retaining supervisory roles and notions of privileged access to knowledge . . . the term 'class consciousness' is employed to facilitate such domination over the workers. It is not what the workers think, but what the party leaders think they ought to think that constitutes the revolutionary consciousness imputed to the workers.*" The ideological basis for a new class structure is created as the "*Leninist revolutionary praxis . . . is carried forward to post-revolutionary institutions,*" [**Marx: A Radical Critique**, p. 175]

The resolution stresses that before the revolution, the party "*will encompass . . . only a minority of the*

workers." Even after the "seizure of power," it will still "not be able to unite them all into its ranks organisationally." It is only after the "final defeat of the bourgeois order" will "all or almost all workers begin to join" it. Thus the party is a **minority** of the working class. The resolution then goes on to state that "[e]very class struggle is a political struggle. This struggle, which inevitably becomes transformed into civil war, has as its goal the conquest of political power. Political power cannot be seized, organised, and directed other than by some kind of political party." [Op. Cit., p. 192, p. 193] And as the party is a "part" of the working class which cannot "unite" all workers "into its ranks," this means that political power can only be "seized, organised, and directed" by a **minority**.

Thus we have minority rule, with the party (or more correctly its leaders) exercising political power. The idea that the party "must **dissolve** into the councils, that the councils can **replace** the Communist Party" is "fundamentally wrong and reactionary." This is because, to "enable the soviets to fulfil their historic tasks, there must . . . be a strong Communist Party, one that does not simply 'adapt' to the soviets but is able to make them renounce 'adaptation' to the bourgeoisie." [Op. Cit., p. 196] Thus rather than the workers' councils exercising power, their role is simply that of allowing the Communist Party to seize political party.

The underlying assumptions behind this resolution and its implications were clear by Zinoviev during his introductory speech to the congress meeting on the role of the party which finally agreed the resolution:

*"Today, people like Kautsky come along and say that in Russia you do not have the dictatorship of the working class but the dictatorship of the party. They think this is a reproach against us. Not in the least! We have a dictatorship of the working class and that is precisely why we also have a dictatorship of the Communist Party. The dictatorship of the Communist Party is only a function, an attribute, an expression of the dictatorship of the working class . . . [T]he dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party." [Op. Cit., pp. 151-2]*

Little wonder that Bertrand Russell, on his return from Lenin's Russia in 1920, wrote that "[f]riends of Russia here [in Britain] think of the dictatorship of the proletariat as merely a new form of representative government, in which only working men and women have votes, and the constituencies are partly occupational, not geographical. They think that 'proletariat' means 'proletariat,' but 'dictatorship' does not quote mean 'dictatorship.' This is the opposite of the truth. When a Russian Communist speak of a dictatorship, he means the word literally, but when he speaks of the proletariat, he means the word in a Pickwickian sense. He means the 'class-conscious' part of the proletariat, i.e. the Communist Party. He includes people by no means proletarian (such as Lenin and Tchicherin) who have the right opinions, and he excludes such wage-earners as have not the right opinions, whom he classifies as lackeys of the **bourgeoisie**." Significantly, Russell pointed, like Lenin, to the Comintern resolution on the role of the Communist Party. In addition, Russell notes the reason why this party dictatorship was required: "No conceivable system of free elections would give majorities to the Communists, either in the town or country." [The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism, pp. 26-27 and pp. 40-1]

Nor are followers of Bolshevism shy in repeating its elitist conclusions. Tony Cliff, for example, showed his lack of commitment to working class democracy when he opined that the *"actual level of democracy, as well as centralism, [during a revolution] depends on three basic factors: 1. the strength of the proletariat; 2. the material and cultural legacy left to it by the old regime; and 3. the strength of capitalist resistance. The level of democracy feasible must be indirect proportion to the first two factors, and in inverse proportion to the third. The captain of an ocean liner can allow football to be played on his vessel; on a tiny raft in a stormy sea the level of tolerance is far lower."* [Lenin, vol. 3, p. 179] That Cliff compares working class democracy to "football" says it all. Rather than seeing it as the core gain of a revolution, he relegates it to the level of a **game**, which may or may not be "tolerated"!

And need we speculate who the paternalistic "captain" in charge of the ship of the state would be would be? Replacing Cliff's revealing analogies we get the following: *"The party in charge of a workers' state can allow democracy when the capitalist class is not resisting; when it is resisting strongly, the level of tolerance is far lower."* So, democracy will be "tolerated" in the extremely unlikely situation that the capitalist class will not resist a revolution! That the party has no right to "tolerate" democracy or not is not even entertained by Cliff, its right to negate the basic rights of the working class is taken as a given. Clearly the key factor is that the party is in power. It **may** "tolerate" democracy, but ultimately his analogy shows that Bolshevism considers it as an added extra whose (lack of) existence in no way determines the nature of the "workers' state." Perhaps, therefore, we may add another "basic factor" to Cliff's three; namely *"4. the strength of working class support for the party."* The level of democracy feasible must be in direct proportion to this factor, as the Bolsheviks made clear. As long as the workers vote the party, then democracy is wonderful. If they do not, then their "wavering" and "passing moods" cannot be "tolerated" and democracy is replaced by the dictatorship of the party. Which is no democracy at all.

Obviously, then, if, as Engels argued, *"an essential feature of the state is a public power distinct from the mass of the people"* then the regime advocated by Bolshevism is not a "semi-state" but, in fact, a normal state. Trotsky and Lenin are equally clear that said state exists to ensure that the "mass of the people" do not participate in public power, which is exercised by a minority, the party (or, more correctly, the rulers of the party). One of the key aims of this new state is to repress the "backward" or "wavering" sections of the working class (although, by definition, all sections of the working class are "backward" in relation to the "vanguard"). Hence the need for a *"public power distinct from the people"* (as the suppression of the strike wave and Kronstadt in 1921 shows, elite troops are always needed to stop the army siding with their fellow workers). And as proven by Trotsky's comments after he was squeezed out of power, this perspective was **not** considered as a product of "exceptional circumstances." Rather it was considered a basic lesson of the revolution, a position which was applicable to all future revolutions. In this, Lenin and other leading Bolsheviks concurred.

The irony (and tragedy) of all this should not be lost. In his 1905 diatribe against anarchism, Stalin had denied that Marxists aimed for party dictatorship. He stressed that there was *"a dictatorship of the minority, the dictatorship of a small group . . . which is directed against the people . . . Marxists are the enemies of such a dictatorship, and they fight such a dictatorship far more stubbornly and self-*



*sacrificingly than do our noisy Anarchists.*" The practice of Bolshevism and the ideological revisions it generated easily refutes Stalin's claims. The practice of Bolshevism shows that his claims that "[a]t the head" of the "dictatorship of the proletarian majority . . . stand the masses" stand in sharp contradiction with Bolshevik support for "revolutionary" governments. Either you have (to use Stalin's expression) "the dictatorship of the streets, of the masses, a dictatorship directed against all oppressors" or you have party power **in the name of the street, of the masses**. The fundamental flaw in Leninism is that it confuses the two and so lays the group for the very result anarchists predicted and Stalin denied.

[**Collected Works**, vol. 1, p. 371-2]

While anarchists are well aware of the need to defend a revolution (see [section H.2.1](#)), we do not make the mistake of equating this with a state. Ultimately, the state cannot be used as an instrument of liberation -- it is not designed for it. Which, incidentally, is why we have not discussed the impact of the Russian Civil War on the development of Bolshevik ideology. Simply put, the "workers' state" is proposed, by Leninists, as the means to defend a revolution. As such, you cannot blame what it is meant to be designed to withstand (counter-revolution and civil war) for its "degeneration." If the "workers' state" cannot handle what its advocates claim it exists for, then its time to look for an alternative and dump the concept in the dustbin of history. We discuss this in the appendix on "[The Russian Revolution](#)".

In summary, Bolshevism is based on a substantial revision of the Marxist theory of the state. While Marx and Engels were at pains to stress the accountability of their new state to the population under it, Leninism has made a virtue of the fact that the state has evolved to exclude that mass participation in order to ensure minority rule. Leninism has done so explicitly to allow the party to overcome the "wavering" of the working class, the very class it claims is the "ruling class" under socialism! In doing this, the Leninist tradition exploited the confused nature of the state theory of traditional Marxism (see [last section](#)). The Leninist theory of the state is flawed simply because it is based on creating a "state in the proper sense of the word," with a public power distinct from the mass of the people. This was the major lesson gained by the leading Bolsheviks (including Lenin and Trotsky) and has its roots in the common Marxist error of confusing party power with working class power. So when Leninists point to Lenin's **State and Revolution** as the definitive Leninist theory of the state, anarchists simply point to the lessons Lenin himself gained from actually conducting a revolution. Once we do, the slippery slope to the Leninist solution to the contradictions inherent in the Marxist theory of the state can be seen, understood and combated.

### H.3.9 Is the state simply an agent of economic power?

As we discussed in [section H.3.7](#), the Marxist theory of the state confuses an empirical analysis of the state with a metaphysical one. While Engels is aware that the state developed to ensure minority class rule and, as befits its task, evolved specific characteristics to execute that role, he also raised the idea that the state ("as a rule") is "the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class" and "through the medium of the state, becomes also the politically dominant class." Thus the state can be considered,

in essence, as *"nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another."* [**Marx-Engels Selected Works**, pp. 577-8 and p. 258]

The clear implication is that the state is simply an instrument, without special interests of its own. If this is the case, the use of a state by the proletariat is, therefore, unproblematic (and so the confusion between working class self-organisation and the state we have discussed in various sections above is irrelevant). This argument can lead to simplistic conclusions, such as once a "revolutionary" government is in power in a "workers state" we need not worry about abuses of power or even civil liberties (this position was commonplace in Bolshevik ranks during the Russian Civil War, for example). It also is at the heart of Trotsky's contortions with regards to Stalinism, refusing to see the state bureaucracy as a new ruling class simply because the state, by definition, could not play such a role.

For anarchists, this position is a fundamental weakness of Marxism, a sign that the mainstream Marxist position significantly misunderstands the nature of society and the needs of social revolution. However, we must stress that anarchists would agree that state generally does serve the interests of the economically dominant classes. Bakunin, for example, argued that the State *"is authority, domination, and forced, organised by the property-owning and so-called enlightened classes against the masses."* He saw the social revolution as destroying capitalism and the state at the same time, that is *"to overturn the State's domination, and that of the privileged classes whom it solely represents."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 140]

However, anarchists do not reduce our analysis and understanding of the state to this simplistic Marxist level. While being well aware that the state is the means of ensuring the domination of an economic elite, anarchists recognise that the state machine also has interests of its own. The state, for anarchists, is the delegation of power into the hands of a few. This creates, by its very nature, a privileged position for those at the top of the hierarchy:

*"A government [or state], that is a group of people entrusted with making the laws and empowered to use the collective force to oblige each individual to obey them, is already a privileged class and cut off from the people. As any constituted body would do, it will instinctively seek to extend its powers, to be beyond public control, to impose its own policies and to give priority to its special interests. Having been put in a privileged position, the government is already at odds with the people whose strength it disposes of."* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 34]

Thus, while Malatesta was under no doubts that under capitalism the state was essentially *"the bourgeoisie's servant and gendarme,"* it did not mean that it did not have interests of its own. As he put it, *"the government, though springing from the bourgeoisie and its servant and protector, tends, as with every servant and protector, to achieve its own emancipation and to dominate whoever it protects."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 20 and p. 22]

Why this would happen is not hard to discover. Given that the state is a highly centralised, top-down

structure it is unsurprising that it develops around itself a privileged class, a bureaucracy, around it. The inequality in power implied by the state is a source of privilege and oppression independent of property and economic class. Those in charge of the state's institutions would aim to protect (and expand) their area of operation, ensuring that they select individuals who share their perspectives and who they can pass on their positions. By controlling the flow of information, of personnel and resources, the members of the state's higher circles can ensure its, and their own, survival and prosperity. As such, politicians who are elected are at a disadvantage. The state is the permanent collection of institutions that have entrenched power structures and interests. The politicians come and go while the power in the state lies in its institutions due to their permanence. It is to be expected that such institutions would have their own interests and would pursue them whenever they can.

This would not fundamentally change in a new "workers' state" if it is, like all states, based on the delegation and centralisation of power into a few hands. Any "workers' government" would need a new apparatus to enforce its laws and decrees. It would need effective means of gathering and collating information. It would thus create *"an entirely new ladder of administration to extend its rule and make itself obeyed."* While a social revolution needs mass participation, the state limits initiative to the few who are in power and *"it will be impossible for one or even a number of individuals to elaborate the social forms"* required, which *"can only be the collective work of the masses . . . Any kind of external authority will merely be an obstacle, a hindrance to the organic work that has to be accomplished; it will be no better than a source of discord and of hatreds."* [Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 169 and pp. 176-7]

Rather than "withering away," any "workers' state" would tend to grow in terms of administration and so the government creates around itself a class of bureaucrats whose position is different from the rest of society. This would apply to production as well. Being unable to manage everything, the state would have to re-introduce hierarchical management in order to ensure its orders are met and that a suitable surplus is extracted from the workers to feed the needs of the state machine. By creating an economically powerful class which it can rely on to discipline the workforce, it would simply recreate capitalism anew in the form of *"state capitalism"* (this is precisely what happened during the Russian Revolution). To enforce its will onto the people it claims to represent, specialised bodies of armed people (police, army) would be required and soon created. All of which is to be expected, as state socialism *"entrusts to a few the management of social life and [so] leads to the exploitation and oppression of the masses by the few."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 46]

This process does not happen instantly, it takes time. However, the tendency for government to escape from popular control and to generate privileged and powerful institutions around it can be seen in all revolutions, including the Paris Commune and the Russian Revolution. In the former, the Communal Council was *"largely ignored . . . after it was installed. The insurrection, the actual management of the city's affairs and finally the fighting against the Versailles, were undertaken mainly by popular clubs, the neighbourhood vigilance committees, and the battalions of the National Guard. Had the Paris Commune (the Municipal Council) survived, it is extremely doubtful that it could have avoided conflict with these loosely formed street and militia formations. Indeed, by the end of April, some six weeks after the insurrection, the Commune constituted an 'all-powerful' Committee of Public Safety, a body redolent*

with memories of the Jacobin dictatorship and the Terror , which suppressed not only the right in the Great [French] Revolution of a century earlier, but also the left." [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 148-9] A minority of council members (essentially those active in the International) stated that "*the Paris Commune has surrendered its authority to a dictatorship*" and it was "*hiding behind a dictatorship that the electorate have not authorised us to accept or to recognise.*" [**The Paris Commune of 1871: The View from the Left**, Eugene Schulkind (ed.), p. 187] The Commune was crushed before this process could fully unfold, but the omens were there (although it would have undoubtedly been hindered by small-scale of the institutions involved). As we discuss in the appendix on "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)", a similar process of a "revolutionary" government escaping from popular control occurred right from the start of the Russian Revolution. The fact the Bolshevik regime lasted longer and was more centralised (and covered a larger area) ensured that this process developed fully, with the "revolutionary" government creating around itself the institutions (the bureaucracy) which finally subjected the politicians and party leaders to its influence and then domination.

Simply put, the vision of the state as merely an instrument of class rule blinds its supporters to the dangers of **political** inequality in terms of power, the dangers inherent in giving a small group of people power over everyone else. The state has certain properties **because it is a state** and one of these is that it creates a bureaucratic class around it due to its centralised, hierarchical nature. Within capitalism, the state bureaucracy is (generally) under the control of the capitalist class. However, to generalise from this specific case is wrong as the state bureaucracy is a class in itself -- and so trying to abolish classes without abolishing the state is doomed to failure:

*"The State has always been the patrimony of some privileged class: the sacerdotal class, the nobility, the bourgeoisie -- and finally, when all the other classes have exhausted themselves, the class of the bureaucracy enters upon the stage and then the State falls, or rises, if you please to the position of a machine."* [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 208]

Thus the state cannot simply be considered as an instrument of rule by economic classes. It can be quite an effective parasitical force in its own right, as both anthropological and historical evidence suggest. The former raises the possibility that the state arose before the classes and that its roots are in inequalities in power (i.e. hierarchy) within society, not inequalities of wealth. The latter points to examples of societies in which the state was not, in fact, an instrument of (economic) class rule but rather pursued an interest of its own.

As regards anthropology, Michael Taylor summarises that the "*evidence does not give [the Marxist] proposition [that the rise in classes caused the creation of the state] a great deal of support. Much of the evidence which has been offered in support of it shows only that the primary states, not long after their emergence, were economically stratified. But this is of course consistent also with the simultaneous rise . . . of political and economic stratification, or with the **prior** development of the state -- i.e. of **political** stratification -- and the creation of economic stratification by the ruling class.*" [**Community**,

**Anarchy and Liberty**, p. 132] He quotes Elman Service on this:

*"In all of the archaic civilisations and historically known chiefdoms and primitive states the 'stratification' was . . . mainly of two classes, the governors and the governed -- political strata, not strata of ownership groups."* [quoted by Taylor, **Op. Cit.**, p. 133]

Talyor argues that it the *"weakening of community and the development of gross inequalities are the concomitants and consequences of state formation."* He points to the *"germ of state formation"* being in the informal social hierarchies which exist in tribal societies. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 133 and p. 134] Thus the state is not, initially, a product of economic classes but rather an independent development based on inequalities of social power. Harold Barclay, an anarchist who has studied anthropological evidence on this matter, concurs:

*"In Marxist theory power derives primarily, if not exclusively, from control of the means of production and distribution of wealth, that is, from economic factors. Yet, it is evident that power derived from knowledge -- and usually 'religious' style knowledge -- is often highly significant, at least in the social dynamics of small societies. . . Economic factors are hardly the only source of power. Indeed, we see this in modern society as well, where the capitalist owner does not wield total power. Rather technicians and other specialists command it as well, not because of their economic wealth, but because of their knowledge."* [quoted by Alan Carter, **Marx: A Radical Critique**, p. 191]

If, as Bookchin summarises, *"hierarchies precede classes"* then trying to use a hierarchical structure like the state to abolish them is simply wishful thinking.

As regards more recent human history, there have been numerous examples of the state existing without being an instrument of class rule. Rather, the state **was** the *"ruling class."* While the most obvious example is the Stalinist regimes where the state bureaucracy ruled over a state capitalist regime, there have been plenty of others, as Murray Bookchin points out:

*"Each State is not necessarily an institutionalised system of violence in the interests of a specific ruling class, as Marxism would have us believe. There are many examples of States that **were** the 'ruling class' and whose own interests existed quite apart from -- even in antagonism to -- privileged, presumably 'ruling' classes in a given society. The ancient world bears witness to distinctly capitalistic classes, often highly privileged and exploitative, that were bilked by the State, circumscribed by it, and ultimately devoured by it -- which is in part why a capitalist society never emerged out of the ancient world. Nor did the State 'represent' other class interests, such as landed nobles, merchants, craftsmen, and the like. The Ptolemaic State in Hellenistic Egypt was an interest in its own right and 'represented' no other interest than its own. The same is true of the Aztec and the Inca States until they were replaced by Spanish invaders. Under the Emperor Domitian, the Roman State became the principal 'interest' in the empire, superseding the interests of*

*even the landed aristocracy which held such primacy in Mediterranean society. . .*

*"Near-Eastern State, like the Egyptian, Babylonian, and Persian, were virtually extended households of individual monarchs . . . Pharaohs, kings, and emperors nominally held the land (often co-jointly with the priesthood) in the trust of the deities, who were either embodied in the monarch or were represented by him. The empires of Asian and North African kings were 'households' and the population was seen as 'servants of the palace' . . .*

*"These 'states,' in effect, were not simply engines of exploitation or control in the interests of a privileged 'class.' . . . The Egyptian State was very real but it 'represented' nothing other than itself." [Remaking Society, pp. 67-8]*

Bakunin pointed to Turkish Serbia, where economically dominant classes *"do not even exist -- there is only a bureaucratic class. Thus, the Serbian state will crush the Serbian people for the sole purpose of enabling Serbian bureaucrats to live a fatter life."* [Statism and Anarchy, p. 54] Leninist Tony Cliff, in his attempt to prove that Stalinist Russia was state capitalist and its bureaucracy a ruling class, pointed to various societies in which *"had deep class differentiation, based not on private property but on state property. Such systems existed in Pharaonic Egypt, Moslem Egypt, Iraq, Persia and India."* He discusses the example of Arab feudalism in more detail, where *"the feudal lord had no permanent domain of his own, but a member of a class which collectively controlled the land and had the right to appropriate rent."* This was *"ownership of the land by the state"* rather than by individuals. [State Capitalism in Russia, pp. 316-8] As such, the idea that the state is simply an instrument of class rule seems unsupported. As Gaston Leval argued, *"the State, by its nature, tends to have a life of its own."* [quoted by Sam Dolgoff, A Critique of Marxism, p. 10]

Alan Carter summarises the obvious conclusion:

*"By focusing too much attention on the economic structure of society and insufficient attention on the problems of political power, Marx has left a legacy we would do better not to inherit. The perceived need for authoritarian and centralised revolutionary organisation is sanctioned by Marx's theory because his theoretical subordination of political power to economic classes apparently renders post-revolutionary political power unproblematic." [Marx: A Radical Critique, p. 231]*

Given this blindness of orthodox Marxism to this issue, it seems ironic that one of the people responsible for it also provides anarchists with evidence to back up our argument that the state is not simply an instrument of class rule but rather has interests of its own. Thus we find Engels arguing that proletariat, *"in order not to lose again its only just conquered supremacy,"* would have *"to safeguard itself against its own deputies and officials, by declaring them all, without exception, subject to recall at any moment."* [Marx-Engels Selected Works, p. 257] Yet, if the state was simply an instrument of class rule such precautions would not be necessary. As such, this shows an awareness that the state can have

interests of its own, that it is not simply an machine of class rule.

Aware of the obvious contradiction, he argues that the state *"is, as a rule, the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class which, through the medium of the state, becomes the politically dominant class . . . By way of exception, however, periods occur in which the warring classes balance each other, so nearly that the state power, as ostensible mediator, acquires, for the moment, a certain degree of independence of both."* And points to *"the Bonapartism of the First, and still more of the Second French Empire."* [Op. Cit., pp. 577-8] But if the state can become *"independent"* of economic classes, then that implies that it is no mere machine, no mere *"instrument"* of class rule. It implies the anarchist argument that the state has interests of its own, generated by its essential features and so, therefore, cannot be used by a majority class as part of its struggle for liberation is correct. Simply put, Anarchists have long *"realised -- feared -- that any State structure, whether or not socialist or based on universal suffrage, has a certain independence from society, and so may serve the interests of those within State institutions rather than the people as a whole or the proletariat."* [Brian Morris, **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 134]

Ironically, arguments and warnings about the *"independence"* of the state by Marxists imply that the state has interests of its own and cannot be considered simply as an instrument of class rule. Rather, it suggests that the anarchist analysis of the state is correct, namely that any structure based on delegated power, centralisation and hierarchy must, inevitably, have a privileged class in charge of it, a class whose position enables it to not only exploit and oppress the rest of society but also to effectively escape from popular control and accountability. This is no accident. The state is structured to enforce minority rule and exclude the majority.

## H.3.10 Has Marxism always supported the idea of workers' councils?

One of the most widespread myths associated with Marxism is the idea that Marxism has consistently aimed to smash the current (bourgeois) state and replace it by a *"workers' state"* based on working class organisations created during a revolution.

This myth is sometimes expressed by those who should know better (i.e. Marxists). According to John Rees (of the British Socialist Workers Party) it has been a *"cornerstone of revolutionary theory"* that *"the soviet is a superior form of democracy because it unifies political and economic power."* This *"cornerstone"* has, apparently, existed *"since Marx's writings on the Paris Commune."* [*"In Defence of October,"* International Socialism, no. 52, p. 25] In fact, nothing could be further from the truth, as Marx's writings on the Paris Commune prove beyond doubt.

The Paris Commune, as Marx himself noted, was *"formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town."* [*"The Civil War in France,"* **Selected Works**, p. 287] As Marx made clear, it was definitely **not** based on delegates from workplaces and so could **not** unify political and economic power. Indeed, to state that the Paris Commune was a soviet is simply a

joke, as is the claim that Marxists supported soviets as revolutionary organs to smash and replace the state from 1871. In fact Marxists did not subscribe to this "*cornerstone of revolutionary theory*" until 1917 when Lenin argued that the Soviets would be the best means of ensuring a Bolshevik government. Which explains why Lenin's use of the slogan "*All Power to the Soviets*" and call for the destruction of the bourgeois state came as such a shock to his fellow Marxists. Unsurprisingly, given the long legacy of anarchist calls to smash the state and their vision of a socialist society built from below by workers councils, many Marxists called Lenin an anarchist! Therefore, the idea that Marxists have always supported workers councils' is untrue and any attempt to push this support back to 1871 simply a farcical.

Before 1917, when Lenin claimed to have discovered what had eluded all the previous followers of Marx and Engels (including himself!), it was only anarchists (or those close to them such as the Russian SR-Maximalists) who argued that the future socialist society would be structurally based around the organs working class people themselves created in the process of the class struggle and revolution (see sections [H.1.4](#) and [I.2.3](#)). To re-quote Bakunin:

*"The future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 170-2]

So, ironically, the idea of the superiority of workers' councils has existed from around the time of the Paris Commune, but in only in Bakunin's writings and others in the libertarian wing of the First International!

Not all Marxists are as ignorant of their political tradition as Rees. As his fellow party member Chris Harman recognised, "*[e]ven the 1905 [Russian] revolution gave only the most embryonic expression of how a workers' state would in fact be organised. The fundamental forms of workers' power -- the soviets (workers' councils) -- were not recognised.*" It was "*[n]ot until the February revolution [of 1917 that] soviets became central in Lenin's writings and thought.*" [**Party and Class**, p. 18 and p. 19]

Before continuing it should be noted that Harman's summary is correct only if we are talking about the Marxist movement. Looking at the wider revolutionary movement, two groups definitely "*recognised*" the importance of the soviets as a form of working class power. These were the anarchists and the Social-Revolutionary Maximalists, both of whom "*espoused views that corresponded almost word for word with Lenin's April 1917 program of 'All power to the soviets.'*" The "*aims of the revolutionary far left in 1905 . . . Lenin combined in his call for soviet power [in 1917], when he apparently assimilated the anarchist program to secure the support of the masses for the Bolsheviks.*" [Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, p. 94 and p. 96] Unsurprisingly, both the anarchists and Maximalists were extremely influential in that paradigm of soviet power and democracy, the Kronstadt commune (see "[What was the Kronstadt Uprising](#)" for more details).



Thus, in anarchist circles, the soviets were must definitely "*recognised*" as the practical confirmation of anarchist ideas of working class self-organisation as being the framework of a socialist society. For example, the syndicalists "*regarded the soviets . . . as admirable versions of the **bourses du travail**, but with a revolutionary function added to suit Russian conditions. Open to all leftist workers regardless of specific political affiliation, the soviets were to act as nonpartisan labour councils improvised 'from below' . . . with the aim of bringing down the old regime.*" The anarchists of **Khleb i Volia** "*also likened the 1905 Petersburg Soviet -- as a nonparty mass organisation -- to the central committee of the Paris Commune of 1871.*" [Paul Avrich, **The Russian Anarchists**, pp. 80-1] Kropotkin argued that anarchists should take part in the soviets as long as they "*are organs of the struggle against the bourgeoisie and the state, and not organs of authority.*" [quoted by Graham Purchase, **Evolution and Revolution**, p. 30]

So, if Marxists did not support workers' councils until 1917, what **did** Marxists argue should be the framework of a socialist society before this date? To discover this, we must look to Marx and Engels. Once we do, we discover that their works suggest that their vision of socialist transformation was fundamentally based on the bourgeois state, suitably modified and democratised to achieve this task. As such, rather than present the true account of the Marxist theory of the state Lenin interpreted various inexact and ambiguous statements by Marx and Engels (particularly from Marx's defence of the Paris Commune) to justify his own actions in 1917. Whether his 1917 revision of Marxism in favour of workers' councils as the framework of socialism is in keeping with the **spirit** of Marx is another matter of course. Given that libertarian Marxists (like the council communists) embraced the idea of workers' councils and broke with the Bolsheviki over the issue of whether the councils or the party had power, we can say that perhaps it is not. In this, they express the best in Marx. When faced with the Paris Commune and its libertarian influences he embraced it, distancing himself (for a while at least) with many of his previous ideas.

So what was the original (orthodox) Marxist position? It can be seen from Lenin who, as late December 1916 argued that "*Socialists are in favour of utilising the present state and its institutions in the struggle for the emancipation of the working class, maintaining also that the state should be used for a specific form of transition from capitalism to socialism.*" Lenin attacked Bukharin for "*erroneously ascribing this [the anarchist] view to the socialist*" when he had stated socialists wanted to "*abolish*" the state or "*blow it up.*" He called this "*transitional form*" the dictatorship of the proletariat, "*which is **also** a state.*" [**Collected Works**, vol. 23, p. 165] In other words, the socialist party would aim to seize power within the existing state and, after making suitable modifications to it, use it to create socialism. This conquest of state power would be achieved either by insurrection or by the ballot box, the latter being used for political education and struggle under capitalism.

That this position was the orthodox one is hardly surprising, given the actual comments of both Marx and Engels. For example, Engels argued in 1886 while he and Marx saw "*the gradual dissolution and ultimate disappearance of that political organisation called **the State***" as "***one** of the final results of the future revolution,*" they "*at the same time . . . have always held that . . . the proletarian class will first have to possess itself of the organised political force of the State and with its aid stamp out the resistance of the Capitalist class and re-organise society.*" The idea that the proletariat needs to "*possess*" the existing state is made clear when he argues while the anarchists "*reverse the matter*" by

arguing that the revolution "*has to **begin** by abolishing the political organisation of the State,*" for Marxists "*the only organisation the victorious working class finds ready-made for use, is that of the State. It may require adaptation to the new functions. But to destroy that at such a moment, would be to destroy the only organism by means of which the working class can exert its newly conquered power.*" [**Collected Works**, vol. 47, p. 10]

Obviously the only institution which the working class "*finds ready-made for use*" is the bourgeois state, although, as Engels stresses, it "*may require adaptation.*" This schema is repeated five years later, in Engels introduction to Marx's "*The Civil War in France.*" Arguing that the state "*is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another*" he notes that it is "*at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy, whose worst sides the victorious proletariat, just like the Commune, cannot avoid having to lop off at once as much as possible.*" [**Marx-Engels Selected Works**, p. 258] Simply put, if the proletariat creates a **new** state system to replace the bourgeois one, then how can it be "*an evil inherited*" by it? If, as Lenin argued, Marx and Engels thought that the working class had to smash the bourgeois state and replace it with a new one, why would it have "*to lop off at once as much as possible*" from the state it had just "*inherited*"?

In the same year, Engels repeats this argument in his critique of the draft of the Erfurt program of the German Social Democrats:

*"If one thing is certain it is that our Party and the working class can only come to power under the form of a democratic republic. This is even the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the Great French Revolution has already shown."* [quoted by David W. Lovell, **From Marx to Lenin**, p. 81]

Clearly Engels does not speak of a "commune-republic" or anything close to a soviet republic, as expressed in Bakunin's work or the libertarian wing of the First International with their ideas of a "trade-union republic" or a free federation of workers' associations. Clearly and explicitly he speaks of the democratic republic, the current state ("*an evil inherited by the proletariat*") which is to be seized and transformed as in the Paris Commune. Unsurprisingly, when Lenin comes to quote this passage in **State and Revolution** he immediately tries to obscure its meaning. "*Engels,*" he says, "*repeats here in a particularly striking manner the fundamental idea which runs like a red thread through all of Marx's work, namely, that the democratic republic is the nearest approach to the dictatorship of the proletariat.*" [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 324] However, clearly Engels does not speak of the political form which "*is the nearest approach*" to the dictatorship, rather he speaks only of "*the specific form*" of the dictatorship, the "*only*" form in which "*our Party*" can come to power.

This explains Engels 1887 comments that in the USA the workers "*next step towards their deliverance*" was "*the formation of a political workingmen's party, with a platform of its own, and the conquest of the Capitol and the White House for its goal.*" This new party "*like all political parties everywhere . . . aspires to the conquest of political power.*" Engels then discusses the "*electoral battle*" going on in America. [Marx & Engels, **Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy**, pp. 527-8 and p. 529] Six years

previously he had argued along the same lines as regards England, "*where the industrial and agricultural working class forms the immense majority of the people, democracy means the dominion of the working class, neither more nor less. Let, then, that working class prepare itself for the task in store for it -- the ruling of this great Empire . . . And the best way to do this is to use the power already in their hands, the actual majority they possess . . . to send to Parliament men of their own order.*" In case this was not clear enough, he lamented that "[e]verywhere the labourer struggles for political power, for direct representation of his class in the legislature -- everywhere but in Great Britain." [**Collected Works**, vol. 24, p. 405]

All of which, of course, fits into Marx's account of the Paris Commune. In that work he stresses that the Commune was formed by elections, by universal suffrage in a democratic republic. Once voted into office, the Commune then smashes the state machine inherited by it from the old state, recognising that "*the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.*" The "*first decree of the Commune . . . was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people.*" Thus the Commune lops off one of the "*ubiquitous organs*" associated with the "*centralised State power*" once it had inherited the state via elections. [**Marx-Engels Selected Works**, p. 285, p. 287 and p. 285]

It is, of course true, that Marx expresses in his defence of the Commune the opinion that new "*Communal Constitution*" was to become a "*reality by the destruction of the State power*" yet he immediately argues that "*the merely repressive organs of the old government power were to be amputated*" and "*its legitimate functions were to be wrestles from*" it and "*restored to the responsible agents of society.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 288-9] This corresponds to Engels arguments about removing aspects from the state inherited by the proletariat and signifies the "*destruction*" of the state machinery (its bureaucratic-military aspects) rather than the state itself.

The source of Lenin's restatement of the Marxist theory of the state which came as such a shock to so many Marxists can be found in the nature of the Paris Commune. After all, the major influence in terms of "*political vision*" of the Commune was anarchism. The "*rough sketch of national organisation which the Commune had no time to develop*" which Marx praises but does not quote was written by a follower of Proudhon. [**Marx, Op. Cit.**, p. 288] It expounded a clearly **federalist** and "bottom-up" organisational structure. It clearly implied "*the destruction of the State power*" rather than seeking to "*inherit*" it. Based on this libertarian revolt, it is unsurprising that Marx's defence of it took on a libertarian twist. As noted by Bakunin, who argues that its "*general effect was so striking that the Marxists themselves, who saw their ideas upset by the uprising, found themselves compelled to take their hats off to it. They went further, and proclaimed that its programme and purpose were their own, in face of the simplest logic . . . This was a truly farcical change of costume, but they were bound to make it, for fear of being overtaken and left behind in the wave of feeling which the rising produced throughout the world.*" [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 261]

This opinion was shared by almost all Marxists before 1917 (including Lenin). As Franz Mehring (considered by many as the best student and commentator of Marx in pre-world war social democracy and a extreme left-winger) argued, the "*opinions of **The Communist Manifesto** could not be reconciled*

*with the praise lavished . . . on the Paris Commune for the vigorous fashion in which it had begun to exterminate the parasitic State." He notes that "both Marx and Engels were well aware of the contradiction" and in the June 1872 preface to their work "they revised their opinions . . . declaring that the workers could not simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery and wield it for their own purposes. At a later date, and after the death of Marx, Engels was compelled to engage in a struggle against the anarchist tendencies in the working-class movement, and he let this proviso drop and once again took his stand on the basis of the Manifesto." [Karl Marx, p. 453]*

The fact that Marx did not mention anything about abolishing the existing state and replacing it with a new one in his contribution to the *"Program of the French Workers Party"* in 1880 is significant. It said that the that *"collective appropriation"* of the means of production *"can only proceed from a revolutionary action of the class of producers -- the proletariat -- organised in an independent political party."* This would be *"pursued by all the means the proletariat has at its disposal including universal suffrage which will thus be transformed from the instrument of deception that it has been until now into an instrument of emancipation."* [Collected Works, vol. 24, p. 340] There is nothing about overthrowing the existing state and replacing it with a new state, rather the obvious conclusion which is to be drawn is that universal suffrage was the tool by which the workers would achieve socialism. It does fit in, however, with Marx's comments in 1852 that *"Universal Suffrage is the equivalent of political power for the working class of England, where the proletariat forms the large majority of the population . . . Its inevitable result, here, is the political supremacy of the working class."* [Op. Cit., vol. 11, pp. 335-6] Or, indeed, Engels similar comments from 1881 quoted above.

It is for this reason that orthodox Marxism up until 1917 held the position that the socialist revolution would be commenced by seizing the existing state (usually by the ballot box, or by insurrection if that was impossible). Martov, the leading left-Menshevik, in his discussion of Lenin's "discovery" of the "real" Marxist theory on the state (in **State and Revolution**) stresses that the idea that the state should be smashed by the workers who would then *"transplant into the structure of society the forms of their own combat organisations"* was a libertarian idea, alien to Marx and Engels. While acknowledging that *"in our time, working people take to 'the idea of the soviets' after knowing them as combat organisations formed in the process of the class struggle at a sharp revolutionary stage,"* he distances Marx and Engels quite successfully from such a position. As such, he makes a valid contribution to Marxism and presents a necessary counter-argument to Lenin's claims in **State and Revolution** (at which point, we are sure, nine out of ten Leninists will dismiss our argument!). [The State and Socialist Revolution, p. 42]

All this may seem a bit academic to many. Does it matter? After all, most Marxists today subscribe to some variation of Lenin's position and so, in some aspects, what Marx and Engels really thought is irrelevant. Indeed, it is likely that Marx, faced with workers' councils as he was with the Commune, would have embraced them (perhaps not, as he was dismissive of similar ideas expressed in the libertarian wing of the First International). What is important is that the idea that Marxists have always subscribed to the idea that a social revolution would be based on the workers' own combat organisations (be they unions, soviets or whatever) is a relatively new one to the ideology. While Bakunin and other anarchists argued for such a revolution, Marx and Engels did not. Given this, the shock which met

Lenin's arguments in 1917 can be easily understood.

Rather than being rooted in the Marxist vision of revolution, as it has been in anarchism since the 1860s, workers councils have played, rhetoric aside, the role of fig-leaf for party power (libertarian Marxism being a notable exception). They have been embraced by its Leninist wing purely as a means of ensuring party power. Rather than being seen as the most important gain of a revolution as they allow mass participation, workers' councils have been seen, and used, simply as a means by which the party can seize power. Once this is achieved, the soviets can be marginalised and ignored without affecting the "proletarian" nature of the revolution in the eyes of the party:

*"while it is true that Lenin recognised the different functions and democratic raison d'etre for both the soviets and his party, in the last analysis it was the party that was more important than the soviets. In other words, the party was the final repository of working-class sovereignty. Thus, Lenin did not seem to have been reflected on or have been particularly perturbed by the decline of the soviets after 1918."* [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 212]

This perspective can be traced back to the lack of interest Marx and Engels expressed in the forms which a proletarian revolution would take, as exemplified by Engels comments on having to "lop off" aspects of the state "inherited" by the working class. The idea that the organisations people create in their struggle for freedom may help determine the outcome of the revolution is missing. Rather, the idea that any structure can be appropriated and (after suitable modification) used to rebuild society is clear. This perspective cannot help take emphasis away from the mass working class organisations required to rebuild society in a socialist manner and place it on the group who will "inherit" the state and "lop off" its negative aspects, namely the party and the leaders in charge of both it and the new "workers' state."

This focus towards the party became, under Lenin (and the Bolsheviks in general) a purely instrumental perspective on workers' councils and other organisations. They were of use purely in so far as they allowed the Bolshevik party to take power (indeed Lenin constantly identified workers' power and soviet power with Bolshevik power and as Martin Buber noted, for Lenin "**All power to the Soviets!**" meant, at bottom, "**All power to the Party through the Soviets!**"). It can, therefore, be argued that his book **State and Revolution** was a means to use Marx and Engels to support his new found idea of the soviets as being the basis of creating a Bolshevik government rather than a principled defence of workers' councils as the framework of a socialist revolution. We discuss this issue in the [next section](#).

### **H.3.11 Does Marxism aim to place power into the hands of workers organisations?**

The short answer depends on which branch of Marxism you mean.

If you are talking about libertarian Marxists such as council communists, Situationists and so on, then

the answer is a resounding "yes." Like anarchists, these Marxists see a social revolution as being based on working class self-management and, indeed, criticised (and broke with) Bolshevism precisely on this question (as can be seen from Lenin's comments in *Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* on the question of class or party dictatorship). However, if we look at the mainstream Marxist tradition (namely Bolshevism), the answer has to be an empathic "no."

As we noted in [section H.1.4](#), anarchists have long argued that the organisations created by the working class in struggle would be the initial framework of a free society. These organs, created to resist capitalism and the state, would be the means to overthrow both as well as extending and defending the revolution (such bodies have included the "soviets" and "factory committees" of the Russian Revolution, the collectives in the Spanish revolution, popular assemblies as in the current Argentine revolt and the French Revolution, revolutionary unions and so on). Thus working class self-management is at the core of the anarchist vision and so we stress the importance (and autonomy) of working class organisations in the revolutionary movement and the revolution itself. Anarchists work within such bodies at the base, in the mass assemblies, and do not seek to replace their power with that of their own organisation (see [section J.3.6](#)).

Leninists, in contrast, have a different perspective on such bodies. Rather than placing them at the heart of the revolution, Leninism views them purely in instrumental terms -- namely, as a means of achieving party power. Writing in 1907, Lenin argued that *"Social-Democratic Party organisations may, in case of necessity, participate in inter-party Soviets of Workers' Delegates . . . and in congresses . . . of these organisations, and may organise such institutions, provided this is done on strict Party lines for the purpose of developing and strengthening the Social-Democratic Labour Party."* The party would *"utilise"* such organs *"for the purpose of developing the Social-Democratic movement."* Significantly, given the fate of the soviets post-1917, Lenin notes that the party *"must bear in mind that if Social-Democratic activities among the proletarian masses are properly, effectively and widely organised, such institutions may actually become superfluous."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 210] Thus the means by which working class can manage their own affairs would become *"superfluous"* once the party was in power. How the working class could be considered the "ruling class" in such a society is hard to understand.

As Oscar Anweiler summarises in his account of the soviets during the two Russian Revolutions:

*"The drawback of the new 'soviet democracy' hailed by Lenin in 1906 is that he could envisage the soviets only as **controlled** organisations; for him they were instruments by which the party controlled the working masses, rather than true forms of a workers democracy. The basic contradiction of the Bolshevik soviet system -- which purports to be a democracy of all working people but in reality recognises only the rule of one party -- is already contained in Lenin's interpretation of the soviets during the first Russian revolution."* [**The Soviets**, p. 85]

Thirteen years later, Lenin repeated this same vision of party power as the goal of revolution. In his

infamous diatribe against "Left-wing" Communism (i.e. those Marxists close to anarchism), Lenin argued that *"the correct understanding of a Communist of his tasks" lies in "correctly gauging the conditions and the moment when the vanguard of the proletariat can successfully seize power, when it will be able during and after this seizure of power to obtain support from sufficiently broad strata of the working class and of the non-proletarian toiling masses, and when, thereafter, it will be able to maintain, consolidate, and extend its rule, educating, training and attracting ever broader masses of the toilers."* He stressed that *"to go so far . . . as to draw a contrast in general between the dictatorship of the masses and the dictatorship of the leaders, is ridiculously absurd and stupid."* [**Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder**, p. 35 and p. 27] As we noted in [section H.1.2](#), the Bolsheviks had this stage explicitly argued for party dictatorship and considered it a truism that (to re-quote Lenin) *"an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard . . . the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 21]

Therefore, rather than seeing revolution being based upon the empowerment of working class organisation and the socialist society being based on this, Leninists see workers organisations in purely instrumental terms as the means of achieving a Leninist government:

*"With all the idealised glorification of the soviets as a new, higher, and more democratic type of state, Lenin's principal aim was revolutionary-strategic rather than social-structural . . . The slogan of the soviets was primarily tactical in nature; the soviets were in theory organs of mass democracy, but in practice tools for the Bolshevik Party. In 1917 Lenin outlined his transitional utopia without naming the definitive factor: the party. To understand the soviets' true place in Bolshevism, it is not enough, therefore, to accept the idealised picture in Lenin's state theory. Only an examination of the actual give-and-take between Bolsheviks and soviets during the revolution allows a correct understanding of their relationship."* [Oscar Anweiler, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 160-1]

Simply put, Leninism confuses the party power and workers' power. An example of this "confusion" can be found in most Leninist works. For example, John Rees argues that *"the essence of the Bolsheviks' strategy . . . was to take power from the Provisional government and put it in the hands of popular organs of working class power -- a point later made explicit by Trotsky in his **Lessons of October**."* [*"In Defence of October," International Socialism*, no. 52, p. 73] However, in reality, as noted in [section H.3.3](#), Lenin had always been clear that the essence of the Bolsheviks' strategy was the taking of power by the Bolshevik party **itself**. He explicitly argued for Bolshevik power during 1917, considering the soviets as the best means of achieving this. He constantly equated Bolshevik rule with working class rule. Once in power, this identification did not change. As such, rather than argue for power to be placed into *"the hands of popular organs of working class power"* Lenin argued this only insofar as he was sure that these organs would then **immediately** pass that power into the hands of a Bolshevik government.

This explains his turn against the soviets after July 1917 when he considered it impossible for the Bolsheviks to gain a majority in them. It can be seen when the Bolshevik party's Central Committee

opposed the idea of a coalition government immediately after the overthrow of the Provisional Government in October 1917. As it explained, "*a purely Bolshevik government*" was "*impossible to refuse*" since "*a majority at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets . . . handed power over to this government.*" [quoted by Robert V. Daniels, **A Documentary History of Communism**, pp. 127-8] A mere ten days after the October Revolution the Left Social Revolutionaries charged that the Bolshevik government was ignoring the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets, established by the second Congress of Soviets as the supreme organ in society. Lenin dismissed their charges, stating that "*the new power could not take into account, in its activity, all the rigmarole which would set it on the road of the meticulous observation of all the formalities.*" [quoted by Frederick I. Kaplan, **Bolshevik Ideology and the Ethics of Soviet Labour**, p. 124] Clearly, the soviets did not have "*All Power*," they promptly handed it over to a Bolshevik government (and Lenin implies that he was not bound in any way to the supreme organ of the soviets in whose name he ruled). All of which places Rees' assertions into the proper context and shows that the slogan "*All Power to the Soviets*" is used by Leninists in a radically different way than most people would understand by it! It also explains why soviets were disbanded if the opposition won majorities in them in early 1918:

*"Menshevik newspapers and activists in the trade unions, the Soviets, and the factories had made a considerable impact on a working class which was becoming increasingly disillusioned with the Bolshevik regime, so much so that in many places the Bolsheviks felt constrained to dissolve Soviets or prevent re-elections where Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries had gained majorities."* [Israel Getzler, **Martov**, p. 179]

Thus the Bolsheviks expelled the Mensheviks in the context of political losses **before** the Civil War. The Civil War gave the Bolsheviks an excuse and they "*drove them underground, just on the eve of the elections to the Fifth Congress of Soviets in which the Mensheviks were expected to make significant gains*" and while the Bolsheviks "*offered some formidable fictions to justify the expulsions*" there was "*of course no substance in the charge that the Mensheviks had been mixed in counter-revolutionary activities on the Don, in the Urals, in Siberia, with the Czechoslovaks, or that they had joined the worst Black Hundreds.*" [Getzler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 181]

While we will discuss this in more detail in [section 6](#) of the appendix on "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)", we can state here that the facts are that the Bolsheviks only supported "*Soviet power*" when the soviets were Bolshevik. As recognised by Martov, who argued that the Bolsheviks loved Soviets only when they were "*in the hands of the Bolshevik party.*" [quoted by Getzler, **Op. Cit.**, p. 174] Which, perhaps, explains Lenin's comment that "*[o]nly the development of this war [Kornilov's counter-revolutionary rebellion in August 1917] can bring us to power but we must **speak** of this as little as possible in our agitation (remembering very well that even tomorrow events may put us in power and then we will not let it go).*" [quoted by Neil Harding, **Leninism**, p. 253]

All this can be confirmed, unsurprisingly enough, by looking at the essay Rees references. When studying Trotsky's **Lessons of October** we find the same instrumentalist approach to the question of the "*popular organs of working class power.*" This is stated quite clearly by Trotsky in his essay when he



argued that the *"essential aspect"* of Bolshevism was the *"training, tempering, and organisation of the proletarian vanguard as enables the latter to seize power, arms in hand."* As such, the vanguard seizes power, **not** *"popular organs of working class power."* Indeed, the idea that the working class can seize power itself is raised and dismissed:

*"But the events have proved that without a party capable of directing the proletarian revolution, the revolution itself is rendered impossible. The proletariat cannot seize power by a spontaneous uprising . . . there is nothing else that can serve the proletariat as a substitute for its own party."*

Hence *"popular organs of working class power"* are not considered as the *"essence"* of Bolshevism, rather the *"fundamental instrument of proletarian revolution is the party."* Popular organs are seen purely in instrumental terms, always discussing such organs of *"workers' power"* in terms of the strategy and program of the party, not in terms of the value that such organs have as forms of working class self-management of society.

This can be clearly seen from Trotsky's discussion of the "October Revolution" of 1917 in **Lessons of October**. Commenting on the Bolshevik Party conference of April 1917, he states that the *"whole of . . . [the] Conference was devoted to the following fundamental question: Are we heading toward the conquest of power in the name of the socialist revolution or are we helping (anybody and everybody) to complete the democratic revolution? . . . Lenin's position was this: . . . the capture of the soviet majority; the overthrow of the Provisional Government; the seizure of power through the soviets."* Note, **through** the soviets not **by** the soviets, thus indicating the fact the Party would hold the real power, not the soviets of workers' delegates. This is confirmed when Trotsky states that *"to prepare the insurrection and to carry it out under cover of preparing for the Second Soviet Congress and under the slogan of defending it, was of inestimable advantage to us"* and that it was *"one thing to prepare an armed insurrection under the naked slogan of the seizure of power by the party, and quite another thing to prepare and then carry out an insurrection under the slogan of defending the rights of the Congress of Soviets."* The Soviet Congress just provided *"the legal cover"* for the Bolshevik plans rather than a desire to see the Soviets actually start managing society. [**The Lessons of October**]

Thus we have the *"seizure of power through the soviets"* with *"an armed insurrection under the naked slogan of the seizure of power by the party"* being hidden by *"the slogan"* (*"the legal cover"*) of defending the Soviets! Hardly a case of placing power in the hands of working class organisations. Trotsky **does** note that in 1917 the *"soviets had to either disappear entirely or take real power into their hands."* However, he immediately adds that *"they could take power . . . only as the dictatorship of the proletariat directed by a single party."* Clearly, the *"single party"* has the real power, **not** the soviets. Unsurprisingly, in practice, the rule of *"a single party"* also amounted to the soviets effectively disappearing as they quickly became mere ciphers for party rule. Soon the *"direction"* by *"a single party"* became the dictatorship of that party **over** the soviets, which (it should be noted) Trotsky defended wholeheartedly until his death (see [section H.3.8](#)).

This cannot be considered as a one-off. Trotsky repeated this analysis in his **History of the Russian Revolution**, when he stated that the *"question, what mass organisations were to serve the party for leadership in the insurrection, did not permit an a priori, much less a categorical, answer."* Thus the *"mass organisations"* serve the party, not vice versa. This instrumentalist perspective can be seen when Trotsky notes that when *"the Bolsheviks got a majority in the Petrograd Soviet, and afterward a number of others,"* the *"phrase 'Power to the Soviets' was not, therefore, again removed from the order of the day, but received a new meaning: All power to the Bolshevik soviets."* This meant that the *"party was launched on the road of armed insurrection through the soviets and in the name of the soviets."* As he put it in his discussion of the July days in 1917, the army *"was far from ready to raise an insurrection in order to give power to the Bolshevik Party."* Ultimately, *"the state of popular consciousness . . . made impossible the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in July."* [vol. 2, p. 303, p. 307, p. 78 and p. 81] So much for *"all power to the Soviets"!* He even quotes Lenin: *"The Bolsheviks have no right to await the Congress of Soviets. They ought to seize the power right now."* Ultimately, the *"Central Committee adopted the motion of Lenin as the only thinkable one: to form a government of the Bolsheviks only."* [vol. 3, pp. 131-2 and p. 299]

In case anyone is in doubt what Trotsky meant, he clarified it in the book he was writing when he was assassinated: *"After eight months of inertia and of democratic chaos, came the dictatorship of the Bolsheviks."* [Stalin, vol. 2, p. 242] This is confirmed by other sources:

*"Within six weeks of the October revolution, Gorky's newspaper Novaya Zhizn lamented the rapidity with which life had run out of the Soviet movement: 'The slogan "All power to the Soviets," it concluded, 'had actually been transformed into the slogan "All power to the few Bolsheviks" . . . The Soviets decay, become enervated, and from day to day lose more of their prestige in the ranks of democracy.' The initial heroic stage -- the stage of mass involvement and unsullied dreams -- was already over."* [Neil Harding,, **Leninism**, p. 253]

So where does this leave Rees' assertion that the Bolsheviks aimed to put power into the hands of working class organisations? Clearly, Rees' summary of both Trotsky's essay and the *"essence"* of Bolshevism leave a lot to be desired. As can be seen, the *"essence"* of Trotsky's essay and of Bolshevism is the importance of party power, not workers' power (as recognised by other members of the SWP: *"The masses needed to be profoundly convinced that there was no alternative to Bolshevik power."* [Tony Cliff, **Lenin**, vol. 2, p. 265]). Trotsky even provides us with an analogy which effectively and simply refutes Rees' claims. *"Just as the blacksmith cannot seize the red hot iron in his naked hand,"* Trotsky asserts, *"so the proletariat cannot directly seize power; it has to have an organisation accommodated to this task."* While paying lip service to the soviets as the organisation *"by means of which the proletariat can both overthrow the old power and replace it,"* he adds that *"the soviets by themselves do not settle the question"* as they may *"serve different goals according to the programme and leadership. The soviets receive their programme from the party . . . the revolutionary party represents the brain of the class. The problem of conquering the power can be solved only by a definite combination of party with soviets."* [**The History of the Russian Revolution**, vol. 3, pp. 160-1 and p. 163]

Thus the key organisation was the party, **not** the mass organisations of the working class. Indeed, as we discussed in [section H.3.8](#), Trotsky was quite explicit that such organisations could only become the state form of the proletariat under the party dictatorship. Significantly, Trotsky fails to indicate what would happen when these two powers clash. Certainly Trotsky's role in the Russian revolution tells us that the power of the party was more important to him than democratic control by workers through mass bodies (see the appendices on "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)" and "[What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?](#)"). Indeed, as we have shown in [section H.3.8](#), Trotsky explicitly argued that a state was required to overcome the "wavering" in the working class which could be expressed by democratic decision making.

Given this legacy of viewing workers' organisations in purely instrumental terms, the opinion of Martov (the leading left-Menshevik during the Russian Revolution) seems appropriate. He argued that "*[a]t the moment when the revolutionary masses expressed their emancipation from the centuries old yoke of the old State by forming 'autonomous republics of Kronstadt' and trying Anarchist experiments such as 'workers' control,' etc. -- at that moment, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat and the poorest peasantry' (said to be incarnated in the real dictatorship of the opposed 'true' interpreters of the proletariat and the poorest peasantry: the chosen of Bolshevist Communism) could only consolidate itself by first dressing itself in such Anarchist and anti-State ideology.*" [**The State and Socialist Revolution**, p. 47] As can be seen, Martov has a point. As the text used as evidence that the Bolsheviks aimed to give power to workers organisations shows, this was **not** an aim of the Bolshevik party. Rather, such workers organs were seen purely as a means to the end of party power.

It is for this reason that anarchists argue for direct working class self-management of society. When we argue that working class organisations must be the framework of a free society they mean it. We do not equate party power with working class power or think that "*All power to the Soviets*" is possible if they immediately delegate that power to the leaders of the party. This is for obvious reasons:

*"If the revolutionary means are out of their hands, if they are in the hands of a techno-bureaucratic elite, then such an elite will be in a position to direct to their own benefit not only the course of the revolution, but the future society as well. If the proletariat are to **ensure** that an elite will not control the future society, they must prevent them from controlling the course of the revolution."* [Alan Carter, **Marx: A Radical Critique**, p. 165]

Thus the slogan "*All power to the Soviets*" for anarchists means exactly that -- organs for the working class to run society directly, based on mandated, recallable delegates. As such, this slogan fitted perfectly with our ideas, as anarchists had been arguing since the 1860's that such workers' councils were both a weapon of class struggle against capitalism and the framework of the future libertarian society. For the Bolshevik tradition, that slogan simply means that a Bolshevik government will be formed over and above the soviets. The difference is important, "*for the Anarchists declared, if 'power' really should belong to the soviets, it could not belong to the Bolshevik party, and if it should belong to that Party, as the Bolsheviks envisaged, it could not belong to the soviets.*" [Voline, **The Unknown**

**Revolution**, p. 213] Reducing the soviets to simply executing the decrees of the central (Bolshevik) government and having their All-Russian Congress be able to recall the government (i.e. those with **real** power) does not equal "*all power*," quite the reverse -- the soviets will simply be a fig-leaf for party power.

In summary, rather than aim to place power into the hands of workers' organisations, most Marxists do not. Their aim is to place power into the hands of the party. Workers' organisations are simply means to this end and, as the Bolshevik regime showed, if they clash with that goal, they will be simply be disbanded. However, we must stress that not all Marxist tendencies subscribe to this. The council communists, for example, broke with the Bolsheviks precisely over this issue, the difference between party and class power.

## H.3.12 Is big business the precondition for socialism?

A key idea in most forms of Marxism is that the evolution of capitalism itself will create the preconditions for socialism. This is because capitalism tends to result in big business and, correspondingly, increased numbers of workers subject to the "*socialised*" production process within the workplace. The conflict between the socialised means of production and their private ownership is at the heart of the Marxist case for socialism. Engels writes:

*"Then came the concentration of the means of production and of the producers in large workshops and manufacturies, their transformation into actual socialised means of production and socialised producers. But the socialised producers and means of production and their products were still treated, after this change, just as they had been before . . . the owner of the instruments of labour . . . appropriated to himself . . . exclusively the product of the **labour of others**. Thus, the product now produced socially were not appropriated by those who actually set in motion the means of production and actually produced the commodities, but by the **capitalists**. . . The mode of production is subjected to this [individual or private] form of appropriation, although it abolishes the conditions upon which the latter rests.*

*"This contradiction, which gives to the new mode of production its capitalistic character, contains the germ of the whole of the social antagonisms of today."* [Marx-Engels Reader, p. 704]

It is the economic crises of capitalism which show this contradiction between socialised production and capitalist appropriation the best. Indeed, the "*fact that the socialised organisation of production within the factory has developed so far that it has become incompatible with the anarchy of production in society, which exists side by side with and dominates it, is brought home to the capitalists themselves by the violent concentration of capital that occurs during crises.*" The pressures of socialised production results in capitalists merging their properties "*in a particular branch of industry in a particular country*" into "*a trust, a union for the purpose of regulating production.*" In this way, "*the production of*

*capitalistic society capitulates to the production upon a definite plan of the invading socialistic society." This "transformation" can take the form of "joint-stock companies and trusts, or into state ownership." Even state ownership does not change the "capitalist relation" although this does have "concealed within it" the "technical conditions that form the elements of that solution." This "shows itself the way to accomplishing this revolution. **The proletariat seizes political power and turns the means of production into state property.**" [Op. Cit., p. 709, p. 710, p. 711, p. 712 and p. 713]*

Thus the centralisation and concentration of production into bigger and bigger units, into big business, is seen as the evidence of the need for socialism. It provides the objective grounding for socialism, and, in fact, this analysis is what makes Marxism "*scientific socialism*." This process explains how human society develops through time:

*"In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. . . At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces come in conflict with the existing relations of production or -- what is but a legal expression for the same thing -- with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed."* [Marx, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 4-5]

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this is that socialism will come about due to tendencies inherent within the development of capitalism. The "*socialisation*" of labour implied by collective labour within a firm grows steadily as capitalist companies grow larger and larger. The objective need for socialism is therefore created and so, for most Marxists, "**big is beautiful**." Indeed, some Leninists have invented terminology to describe these aspects of the "*invading socialistic society*" associated with the rise of big business. They contrast the "*law of planning*" associated with the conscious planning of economic activity on a wider and wider scale by large companies to the "*law of value*" which operates in the market. In other words, that the increased size of capital means that more and more of the economy is subject to the despotism of the owners and managers of capital and so the "*anarchy*" of the market is slowly replaced with the conscious planning of resources. Marxists sometimes call this the "*objective socialisation of labour*" (to use Mandel's term).

Therefore, there is a tendency for Marxists to see the increased size and power of big business as providing objective evidence for socialism, which will bring these socialistic tendencies within capitalism to full light and full development. Needless to say, most will argue that socialism, while developing planning fully, will replace the autocratic and hierarchical planning of big business with democratic, society-wide planning.

This position, for anarchists, has certain problems associated with it. One key drawback, as we discuss in the [next section](#), is it focuses attention away from the internal organisation within the workplace and industry onto ownership and links between economic units. It ends up confusing capitalism with the market relations between firms rather than identifying it with its essence, the labour market and the wage slavery this generates. This meant that many Marxists considered that the basis of a socialist economy was guaranteed once property was nationalised. The anarchist critique that this simply replaced a multitude of bosses with one, the state, was (and is) ignored.

The other key problem is that such a perspective tends to dismiss as irrelevant the way production is managed. Rather than seeing socialism as being dependent on workers' management of production, this position ends up seeing socialism as being dependent on organisational links between workplaces, as exemplified by big business under capitalism. Thus the "*relations of production*" which matter are **not** those associated with wage labour but rather those associated with the market. This can be seen from the famous comment in **The Manifesto of the Communist Party**. The bourgeoisie, it argues "*cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society.*" [Marx-Engels Reader, p. 476] But the one relation of production it **cannot** revolutionise is the one generated by the wage labour at the heart of capitalism, the hierarchical relations at the point of production. As such, it is clear that by "*relations of production*" Marx and Engels meant something else than wage slavery, the internal organisation of what they term "*socialised production.*"

Capitalism is, in general, as dynamic as Marx and Engels stressed. It transforms the means of production, the structure of industry and the links between workplaces constantly. Yet it only modifies the form of the organisation of labour, not its content. No matter how it transforms machinery and the internal structure of companies, the workers are still wage slaves. At best, it simply transforms much of the hierarchy which governs the workforce into hired managers. This does not transform the fundamental social relationship of capitalism, however. Thus the "*relations of production*" which prefigure socialism is, precisely, those associated with the "*socialisation of the labour process*" which occurs **within** capitalism and are no way antagonistic to it.

This is confirmed when Marx, in his polemic against Proudhon, argues that social relations "*are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist.*" [Collected Works, vol. 6, p. 166] On the face of it, this had better **not** be true. After all, the aim of socialism is to expropriate the property of the industrial capitalist. If the social relationships **are** dependent on the productive forces then, clearly, socialism is impossible as it will have to be based, initially, on the legacy of capitalism. Fortunately, the way a workplace is managed is not predetermined by the technological base of society. As is obvious, a steam-mill can be operated by a co-operative, so making the industrial capitalist redundant. The claim that a given technological-level implies a specific social structure is, therefore, wrong. However, it does suggest that our comments that, for Marx and Engels, the new "*social relationships*" which develop under capitalism which imply

socialism are relations between workplaces, **not** those between individuals and classes are correct. The implications of this position became clear during the Russian revolution.

Later Marxists built upon this "scientific" groundwork. Lenin, for example, argued that *"the difference between a socialist revolution and a bourgeois revolution is that in the latter case there are ready made forms of capitalist relationships; Soviet power [in Russia] does not inherit such ready made relationships, if we leave out of account the most developed forms of capitalism, which, strictly speaking, extended to a small top layer of industry and hardly touched agriculture."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 27, p. 90] Thus, for Lenin, "socialist" relationships are generated within big business, relationships "socialism" would "inherit" and universalise. As such, his comments fit in with the analysis of Marx and Engels we have presented above. However, his comments also reveal that Lenin had no idea that socialism meant the transformation of the relations of production, i.e. workers managing their own activity. This, undoubtedly, explains the systematic undermining of the factory committee movement by the Bolsheviks in favour of state control we discuss in [section 10](#) of the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#).

The idea that socialism involved simply taking over the state and nationalising the *"objectively socialised"* means of production can be seen in both mainstream social-democracy and its Leninist child. Hilferding, for example, wrote **Finance Capital** which argued that capitalism was evolving into a highly centralised economy, run by big banks and big firms. All that was required to turn this into socialism would be its nationalisation:

*"Once finance capital has brought the most important branches of production under its control, it is enough for society, through its conscious executive organ -- the state conquered by the working class -- to seize finance capital in order to gain immediate control of these branches of production. . . taking possession of six large Berlin banks would . . . greatly facilitate the initial phases of socialist policy during the transition period, when capitalist accounting might still prove useful."* [pp. 367-8]

Lenin basically disagreed with this only in-so-far as the party of the proletariat would take power via revolution rather than by election (*"the state conquered by the working class"* equals the election of a socialist party). Lenin took it for granted that the difference between Marxists and anarchists is that *"the former stand for centralised, large-scale communist production, while the latter stand for disconnected small production."* The obvious implication of this is that anarchist views *"express, not the future of bourgeois society, which is striving with irresistible force towards the socialisation of labour, but the present and even the past of that society, the domination of blind chance over the scattered and isolated small producer."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 261 and p. 205]

As we discuss in more detail in [section 8](#) of the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#), Lenin applied this perspective during the Russian Revolution. For example, he argued in 1917 that his immediate aim was for a *"state capitalist"* economy, this being a necessary stage to socialism. As he put it, *"socialism is merely the next step forward from state-capitalist monopoly . . ."*

*socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people and has to that extent **ceased** to be capitalist monopoly.*" [Selected Works, vol. 2, p. 211]

The Bolshevik road to "socialism" ran through the terrain of state capitalism and, in fact, simply built upon its institutionalised means of allocating resources and structuring industry. As Lenin put it, *"the modern state possesses an apparatus which has extremely close connections with the banks and syndicates, an apparatus which performs an enormous amount of accounting and registration work . . . This apparatus must not, and should not, be smashed. It must be wrestled from the control of the capitalists,"* it *"must be subordinated to the proletarian Soviets"* and *"it must be expanded, made more comprehensive, and nation-wide."* This meant that the Bolsheviks would *"not invent the organisational form of work, but take it ready-made from capitalism"* and *"borrow the best models furnished by the advanced countries."* [Op. Cit., p. 365 and p. 369]

The institutional framework of capitalism would be utilised as the principal (almost exclusive) instruments of "socialist" transformation. *"Without big banks Socialism would be impossible,"* argued Lenin, as they *"are the 'state apparatus' which we need to bring about socialism, and which we **take ready-made** from capitalism; our task here is merely to **lop off** what capitalistically mutilates this excellent apparatus, to make it **even bigger**, even more democratic, even more comprehensive. A single State Bank, the biggest of the big . . . will constitute as much as nine-tenths of the **socialist** apparatus. This will be country-wide book-keeping, country-wide accounting of the production and distribution of goods."* While this is *"not fully a state apparatus under capitalism,"* it *"will be so with us, under socialism."* For Lenin, building socialism was easy. This *"nine-tenths of the socialist apparatus"* would be created *"at one stroke, by a single decree."* [Op. Cit., p. 365]

Once in power, the Bolsheviks implemented this vision of socialism being built upon the institutions created by monopoly capitalism. Moreover, Lenin quickly started to advocate and implement the most sophisticated capitalist methods of organising labour, including *"one-man management"* of production, piece-rates and Taylorism (*"scientific management"*). This was not done accidentally or because no alternative existed (as we discuss in [section 12](#) of the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#)). As Gustav Landauer commented, when mainstream Marxists *"call the capitalist factory system a social production . . . we know the real implications of their socialist forms of labour."* [For **Socialism**, p. 70] As can be seen, this glorification of large-scale, state-capitalist structures can be traced back to Marx and Engels, while Lenin's support for capitalist production techniques can be explained by mainstream Marxism's lack of focus on the social relationships at the point of production.

For anarchists, the idea that socialism can be built on the framework provided to us by capitalism is simply ridiculous. Capitalism has developed industry and technology to further the ends of those with power, namely capitalists and managers. Why should they use that power to develop technology and industrial structures which leads to workers' self-management and power rather than technologies and structures which enhance their own position vis-à-vis their workers and society as a whole? As such, technological and industrial development is not *"neutral"* or just the *"application of science."* They are shaped by class struggle and class interest and cannot be used for different ends. Simply put, socialism



will need to develop **new** forms of economic organisation based on socialist principles. As such, the concept that monopoly capitalism paves the way for socialist society is rooted in the false assumption that the forms of social organisation accompanying capital concentration are identical with the socialisation of production, that the structures associated with collective labour under capitalism are the same as those required under socialism to achieve **genuine** socialisation. This false assumption, as can be seen, goes back to Engels and was shared by both Social-Democracy and Leninism despite their other differences.

While anarchists are inspired by a vision of a non-capitalist, decentralised, diverse society based on appropriate technology and appropriate scale, mainstream Marxism is not. Rather, it sees the problem with capitalism is that its institutions are not centralised and big enough. As Alexander Berkman correctly argues:

*"The role of industrial decentralisation in the revolution is unfortunately too little appreciated. . . Most people are still in the thrall of the Marxian dogma that centralisation is 'more efficient and economical.' They close their eyes to the fact that the alleged 'economy' is achieved at the cost of the workers' limb and life, that the 'efficiency' degrades him to a mere industrial cog, deadens his soul, kills his body. Furthermore, in a system of centralisation the administration of industry becomes constantly merged in fewer hands, producing a powerful bureaucracy of industrial overlords. It would indeed be the sheerest irony if the revolution were to aim at such a result. It would mean the creation of a new master class."* [The ABC of Anarchism, pp. 80-1]

That mainstream Marxism is soaked in capitalist ideology can be seen from Lenin's comments that when *"the separate establishments are amalgamated into a single syndicate, this economy [of production] can attain tremendous proportions, as economic science teaches us."* [Op. Cit., p. 200] Yes, **capitalist** economic science, based on **capitalist** definitions of efficiency and economy and on **capitalist** criteria! That Bolshevism bases itself on centralised, large scale industry because it is more "efficient" and "economic" suggests nothing less than that its "socialism" will be based on the same priorities of capitalism. This can be seen from Lenin's idea that Russia had to learn from the advanced capitalist countries, that there was only one way to develop production and that was by adopting capitalist methods of "rationalisation" and management. In the words of Luigi Fabbri:

*"Marxist communists, especially Russian ones, are beguiled by the distant mirage of big industry in the West or America and mistake for a system of production what is only a typically capitalist means of speculation, a means of exercising oppression all the more securely; and they do not appreciate that that sort of centralisation, far from fulfilling the real needs of production, is, on the contrary, precisely what restricts it, obstructs it and applies a brake to it in the interests of capital."*

*"Whenever [they] talk about 'necessity of production' they make no distinction between those necessities upon which hinge the procurement of a greater quantity and higher*

*quality of products -- this being all that matters from the social and communist point of view -- and the necessities inherent in the bourgeois regime, the capitalists' necessity to make more profit even should it mean producing less to do so. If capitalism tends to centralise its operations, it does so not for the sake of production, but only for the sake of making and accumulating more money.*" ["Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism", in **The Poverty of Statism**, pp. 13-49, Albert Meltzer (ed.), pp. 21-22]

Efficiency, in other words, does not exist independently of a given society or economy. What is considered "efficient" under capitalism may be the worse form of inefficiency in a free society. The idea that socialism may have **different** priorities, need **different** methods of organising production, have **different** visions of how an economy was structured than capitalism, is absent in mainstream Marxism. Lenin thought that the institutions of bourgeois economic power, industrial structure and capitalist technology and techniques could be "captured" and used for other ends. Ultimately, though, capitalist means and organisations can only generate capitalist ends. It is significant that the "*one-man management*," piece-work, Taylorism, etc. advocated and implemented under Lenin are usually listed by his followers as evils of Stalinism and as proof of its anti-socialist nature.

Equally, it can be argued that part of the reason why large capitalist firms can "plan" production on a large scale is because they reduce the decision making criteria to a few variables, the most significant being profit and loss. That such simplification of input data may result in decisions which harm people and the environment goes without a saying. "*The lack of context and particularity*," James C. Scott correctly notes, "*is not an oversight; it is the necessary first premise of any large-scale planning exercise. To the degree that the subjects can be treated as standardised units, the power of resolution in the planning exercise is enhanced. Questions posed within these strict confines can have definitive, quantitative answers. The same logic applies to the transformation of the natural world. Questions about the volume of commercial wood or the yield of wheat in bushels permit more precise calculations than questions about, say, the quality of the soil, the versatility and taste of the grain, or the well-being of the community. The discipline of economics achieves its formidable resolving power by transforming what might otherwise be considered qualitative matters into quantitative issues with a single metric and, as it were, a bottom line: profit or loss.*" [**Seeing like a State**, p. 346] Whether a socialist society could factor in all the important inputs which capitalism ignores within an even more centralised planning structure is an important question. This does not mean that anarchists argue for "small-scale" production as many Marxists, like Lenin, assert (as we prove in [section I.3.8](#), anarchists have always argued for **appropriate** levels of production and scale). It is simply to raise the possibility of what works under capitalism may be undesirable from a perspective which values people and planet instead of power and profit.

As should be obvious, anarchism is based on critical evaluation of technology and industrial structure, rejecting the whole capitalist notion of "progress" which has always been part of justifying the inhumanities of the status quo. Just because something is rewarded by capitalism it does not mean that it makes sense from a human or ecological perspective. This informs our vision of a free society and the current struggle. We have long argued that that capitalist methods cannot be used for socialist ends. In our battle to democratise and socialise the workplace, in our awareness of the importance of collective

initiatives by the direct producers in transforming their work situation, we show that factories are not merely sites of production, but also of reproduction -- the reproduction of a certain structure of social relations based on the division between those who give orders and those who take them, between those who direct and those who execute.

It goes without saying that anarchists recognise that a social revolution will have to start with the industry and technology which is left to it by capitalism and that this will have to be expropriated by the working class (this expropriation will, of course, involve transforming it and, in all likelihood, rejecting of numerous technologies, techniques and practices considered as "efficient" under capitalism). This is **not** the issue. The issue is who expropriates it and what happens to it next. For anarchists, the means of life are expropriated directly by society, for most Marxists they are expropriated by the state. For anarchists, such expropriation is based workers' self-management and so the fundamental capitalist "*relation of production*" (wage labour) is abolished. For most Marxists, state ownership of production is considered sufficient to ensure the end of capitalism (with, if we are lucky, some form of "*workers' control*" over those state officials who do management production -- see [section H.3.14](#)).

In contrast to the mainstream Marxist vision of socialism being based around the institutions inherited from capitalism, anarchists have raised the idea that the "*free commune*" would be the "*medium in which the ideas of modern Socialism may come to realisation.*" These "*communes would federate*" into wider groupings. Labour unions (or other working class organs created in the class struggle such as factory committees) were "*not only an instrument for the improvement of the conditions of labour, but also of becoming an organisation which might . . . take into its hands the management of production.*" Large labour associations would "*come into existence for the inter-communal service[s].*" Such communes and workers' organisations as the basis of "*Socialist forms of life could find a much easier realisation*" than the "*seizure of all industrial property by the State, and the State organisation of agriculture and industry.*" Thus railway network "*could be much better handled by a Federated Union of railway employees, than by a State organisation.*" Combined with co-operation "*both for production and for distribution, both in industry and agriculture,*" workers' self-management of production would create "*samples of the bricks*" of the future society ("*even samples of some of its rooms*"). [Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, pp. 21-23]

This means that anarchists also root our arguments for socialism in a scientific analysis of tendencies within capitalism. However, in opposition to the analysis of mainstream Marxism which focuses on the objective tendencies within capitalist development, anarchists emphasis the **oppositional** nature of socialism to capitalism. Both the "*law of value*" and the "*law of planning*" are tendencies **within** capitalism, that is aspects of capitalism. Anarchists encourage class struggle, the direct conflict of working class people against the workings of all capitalism's "laws". This struggle produces **mutual aid** and the awareness that we can care best for our own welfare if we **unite** with others -- what we can loosely term the "*law of co-operation*". This law, in contrast to the Marxian "*law of planning*" is based on working class subjectively and develops within society only in **opposition** to capitalism. As such, it provides the necessary understanding of where socialism will come from, from **below**, in the spontaneous self-activity of the oppressed fighting for their freedom.

This means that the basic structures of socialism will be the organs created by working class people in their struggles against exploitation and oppress (see sections [H.1.4](#) and [I.2.3](#) for more details). Gustav Landauer's basic insight is correct (if his means were not totally so) when he wrote that "*Socialism will not grow out of capitalism but away from it*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 140] In other words, tendencies **opposed** to capitalism rather than ones which are part and parcel of it.

Anarchism's recognition of the importance of these tendencies towards mutual aid within capitalism is a key to understanding what anarchists do in the here and now, as will be discussed in [section J](#). In addition, it also laid the foundation of understanding the nature of an anarchist society and what creates the framework of such a society in the here and now. Anarchists do not abstractly place a better society (anarchy) against the current, oppressive one. Instead, we analysis what tendencies exist within current society and encourage those which empower and liberate people. Based on these tendencies, anarchists propose a society which develops them to their logical conclusion. Therefore an anarchist society is created not through the developments within capitalism, but in social activity against it. [Section I](#) indicates what such a society would be like and where its framework comes from.

### H.3.13 Why is state socialism just state capitalism?

For anarchists, the idea that socialism can be achieved via state ownership is simply ridiculous. For reasons which will become abundantly clear, anarchists argue that any such "*socialist*" system would simply be a form of "*state capitalism*." Such a regime would not fundamentally change the position of the working class, whose members would simply be wage slaves to the state bureaucracy rather than to the capitalist class.

However, before beginning our discussion of why anarchists think this we need to clarify our terminology. This is because the expression "*state capitalism*" has three distinct, if related, meanings in socialist (particularly Marxist) thought. Firstly, "*state capitalism*" was/is used to describe the current system of big business subject to extensive state control (particularly if, as in war, the capitalist state accrues **extensive** powers over industry). Secondly, it was used by Lenin to describe his immediate aims after the October Revolution, namely a regime in which the capitalists would remain but would be subject to a system of state control inherited by the new "*proletarian*" state from the old capitalist one (see [section 10](#) of the appendix on "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)" for details). The third use of the term is to signify a regime in which the state **replaces** the capitalist class **totally** via nationalisation of the means of production. In such a regime, the state would own, manage and accumulate capital rather than individual capitalists.

Anarchists are opposed to all three systems described by the term "*state capitalism*." Here we concentrate on the third definition, arguing that state socialism would be better described as "*state capitalism*" as state ownership of the means of life does not get to the heart of capitalism, namely wage labour. Rather it simply replaces private bosses with the state and changes the form of property (from private to state property) rather than getting rid of it.

The idea that socialism simply equals state ownership (nationalisation) is easy to find in the works of Marxism. The **Communist Manifesto**, for example, states that the "*proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production into the hands of the State.*" This meant the "[c]entralisation of credit in the hands of the State, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly," plus the "[c]entralisation of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State," "[e]xtension of factories and instruments of production owned by the State" and the "[e]stablishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture." [**Marx-Engels Selected Works**, pp. 52-3]

Engels repeats this formula thirty-two years later in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* by asserting that capitalism itself "*forces on more and more the transformation of the vast means of production, already socialised, into state property. The proletariat seizes political power and turns the means of production into state property.*" Socialism is **not** equated with state ownership of productive forces by a capitalist state, "*but concealed within it are the technical conditions that form the elements of that solution*" to the social problem. It simply "*shows itself the way to accomplishing this revolution. The proletariat seizes political power and turns the means of production into state property.*" Thus state ownership **after** the proletariat seizes power is the basis of socialism, when by this "*first act*" of the revolution the state "*really constitutes itself as the representative of the whole of society.*" [**Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 713, p. 712 and p. 713]

What is significant from these programmatic statements on the first steps of socialism is the total non-discussion of what is happening at the point of production, the non-discussion of the social relations in the workplace. Rather we are subjected to discussion of "*the contradiction between socialised production and capitalist appropriation*" and claims that while there is "*socialised organisation of production within the factory,*" this has become "*incompatible with the anarchy of production in society.*" The obvious conclusion to be drawn is that "socialism" will inherit, without change, the "*socialised*" workplace of capitalism and that the fundamental change is that of ownership: "*The proletariat seized the public power, and by means of this transforms the socialised means of production . . . into public property. By this act, the proletariat frees the means of production from the character of capital they have thus far borne.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 709 and p. 717]

That the Marxist movement came to see state ownership rather than workers' management of production as the key issue is hardly surprising. Thus we find leading Social-Democrats arguing that socialism basically meant the state, under Social-Democratic control of course, acquiring the means of production and nationalising them. Hilferding presented what was Marxist orthodoxy at the time when he argued that in "*a communist society*" production "*is consciously determined by the social central organ,*" which would decide "*what is to be produced and how much, where and by whom.*" While this information is determined by the market forces under capitalism, in socialism it "*is given to the members of the socialist society by their authorities . . . we must derive the undisturbed progress of the socialist economy from the laws, ordinances and regulations of socialist authorities.*" [quoted by Nikolai Bukharin, **Economy Theory of the Leisure Class**, p. 157] As we discuss in the appendix on "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)", the Bolsheviks inherited this concept of "socialism" and

implemented it.

This vision of society in which the lives of the population are controlled by "authorities" in a "social central organ" which tell the workers what to do, while in line with the **Communist Manifesto**, seems less that appealing. It also shows why state socialism is not socialism at all. Thus George Barrett:

*"If instead of the present capitalist class there were a set of officials appointed by the Government and set in a position to control our factories, it would bring about no revolutionary change. The officials would have to be paid, and we may depend that, in their privileged positions, they would expect good remuneration. The politicians would have to be paid, and we already know their tastes. You would, in fact, have a non-productive class dictating to the producers the conditions upon which they were allowed to use the means of production. As this is exactly what is wrong with the present system of society, we can see that State control would be no remedy, while it would bring with it a host of new troubles . . . under a governmental system of society, whether it is the capitalism of today or a more a perfected Government control of the Socialist State, the essential relationship between the governed and the governing, the worker and the controller, will be the same; and this relationship so long as it lasts can be maintained only by the bloody brutality of the policeman's bludgeon and the soldier's rifle."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, pp. 8-9]

The key to seeing why state socialism is simply state capitalism can be found in the lack of change in the social relationships at the point of production. The workers are still wage slaves, employed by the state and subject to its orders. As Lenin stressed in **State and Revolution**, under Marxist Socialism "[a]ll citizens are transformed into hired employees of the state . . . All citizens become employees and workers of a single country-wide state 'syndicate' . . . The whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory, with equality of labour and pay." [Lenin, **Selected Works**, vol. 2, p. 312] Given that Engels had argued, against anarchism, that a factory required subordination, authority, lack of freedom and "a veritable despotism independent of all social organisation," Lenin's idea of turning the world into one big factory takes on an extremely frightening nature. [**Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 731] A reality which one anarchist described in 1923 as being the case in Lenin's Russia:

*"The nationalisation of industry, removing the workers from the hands of individual capitalists, delivered them to the yet more rapacious hands of a single, ever-present capitalist boss, the State. The relations between the workers and this new boss are the same as earlier relations between labour and capital, with the sole difference that the Communist boss, the State, not only exploits the workers, but also punishes them himself . . . Wage labour has remained what it was before, except that it has taken on the character of an obligation to the State . . . It is clear that in all this we are dealing with a simple substitution of State capitalism for private capitalism."* [Peter Arshinov, **History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 71]

All of which makes Bakunin's comments seem justified (as well as stunningly accurate):

*"Labour financed by the State -- such is the fundamental principle of **authoritarian Communism**, of State Socialism. The State, **having become the sole proprietor . . .** will have become sole capitalist, banker, money-lender, organiser, director of all national work, and the distributor of its profits." [The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 293]*

Such a system, based on those countries "where modern capitalist development has reached its highest point of development" would see "the gradual or violent expropriation of the present landlords and capitalists, or of the appropriation of all land and capital by the State. In order to be able to carry out its great economic and social mission, this State will have to be very far-reaching, very powerful and highly centralised. It will administer and supervise agriculture by means of its appointed managers, who will command armies of rural workers organised and disciplined for that purpose. At the same time, it will set up a single bank on the ruins of all existing banks." Such a system, Bakunin correctly predicted, would be "a barracks regime for the proletariat, in which a standardised mass of men and women workers would wake, sleep, work and live by rote; a regime of privilege for the able and the clever." [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 258 and p. 259]

Proudhon, likewise was well aware that state ownership did not mean the end of private property, rather it meant a change in who ordered the working class about. "We do not want," he stated, "to see the State confiscate the mines, canals and railways; that would be to add to monarchy, and more wage slavery. We want the mines, canals, railways handed over to democratically organised workers' associations" which would be the start of a "vast federation of companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic social Republic." He contrasted workers' associations run by and for their members to those "subsidised, commanded and directed by the State," which would crush "all liberty and all wealth, precisely as the great limited companies are doing." [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 62 and p. 105]

Simply put, if workers did not directly manage their own work then it matters little who formally owns the workplaces in which they toil. As Maurice Brinton argues, libertarian socialists "hold that the 'relations of production' -- the relations which individuals or groups enter into with one another in the process of producing wealth -- are the essential foundations of any society. A certain pattern of relations of production is the common denominator of all class societies. This pattern is one in which the producer does not dominate the means of production but on the contrary both is 'separated from them' and from the products of his [or her] own labour. In all class societies the producer is in a position of subordination to those who manage the productive process. Workers' management of production -- implying as it does the total domination of the producer over the productive process - is not for us a marginal matter. It is the core of our politics. It is the only means whereby authoritarian (order-giving, order-taking) relations in production can be transcended and a free, communist or anarchist, society introduced." He goes on to note that "the means of production may change hands (passing for instance from private hands into those of a bureaucracy, collectively owning them) with out this revolutionising the relations of production. Under such circumstances -- and whatever the formal status of property -- the society is still a class society for production is still managed by an agency other than the producers themselves. Property relations, in other words, do not necessarily reflect the relations of production.

*They may serve to mask them -- and in fact they often have.*" [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, pp. vii-vii]

As such, for anarchists (and libertarian Marxists) the idea that state ownership of the means of life (the land, workplaces, factories, etc.) is the basis of socialism is simply wrong. Therefore, *"Anarchism cannot look upon the coming revolution as a mere substitution . . . of the State as the universal capitalist for the present capitalists."* [Kropotkin, **Evolution and Environment**, p. 106] Given that the *"State organisation having always been . . . the instrument for establishing monopolies in favour of the ruling minorities, [it] cannot be made to work for the destruction of these monopolies. The anarchists consider, therefore, that to hand over to the State all the main sources of economic life -- the land, the mines, the railways, banking, insurance, and so on -- as also the management of all the main branches of industry . . . would mean to create a new instrument of tyranny. State capitalism would only increase the powers of bureaucracy and capitalism."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 286] Needless to say, a society which was not democratic in the workplace would not remain democratic politically either. Either democracy would become as formal as it is within any capitalist republic or it would be replaced by dictatorship. So, without a firm base in the direct management of production, any "socialist" society would see working class social power ("*political power*") and liberty wither and die, just like a flower ripped out of the soil.

Unsurprisingly, given all this, we discover throughout history the co-existence of private and state property. Indeed, the nationalisation of key services and industries has been implemented under all kinds of capitalist governments and within all kinds of capitalist states (which proves the non-socialist nature of state ownership). Moreover, anarchists can point to specific events where the capitalist class has used nationalisation to undermine revolutionary gains by the working class. The best example by far is in the Spanish Revolution, when the Catalan government used nationalisation against the wave of spontaneous, anarchist inspired, collectivisation which had placed most of industry into the hand direct hands of the workers (see [section I.8](#)). The government, under the guise of legalising the gains of the workers, placed them under state ownership to stop their development, ensure hierarchical control and so class society.

A similar process occurred during the Russian Revolution under the Bolsheviks. Significantly, *"many managers, at least those who remained, appear to have preferred nationalisation (state control) to workers' control and co-operated with Bolshevik commissars to introduce it. Their motives are not too difficult to understand . . . The issue of who runs the plants -- who makes decisions -- is, and probably always will be, the crucial question for managers in any industrial relations system."* [Jay B. Sorenson, **The Life and Death of Soviet Trade Unionism**, pp. 67-8] As we discuss in the [next section](#), the managers and capitalists were not the only ones who disliked "*workers' control*," the Bolsheviks did so as well, who ensured that it was marginalised within a centralised system of state control based on nationalisation.

As such, anarchists think that a utterly false dichotomy has been built up in discussions of socialism, one which has served the interests of both capitalists and state bureaucrats. This dichotomy is simply that the economic choices available to humanity are "private" ownership of productive means (capitalism), or



state ownership of productive means (usually defined as "socialism"). In this manner, capitalist nations used the Soviet Union, and continue to use autocracies like North Korea, China, and Cuba as examples of the evils of "public" ownership of productive assets.

Anarchists see little distinction between "private" ownership of the means of life and "state" ownership. This is because the state is a highly centralised structure specifically designed to exclude mass participation and so, therefore, necessarily composed of a ruling administrative body. As such, the "public" cannot actually "own" the property the state claims to hold in its name. The ownership and thus control of the productive means is then in the hands of a ruling elite, the state administration (i.e. bureaucracy). Thus, the means of production and land of a state "socialist" regime are **not** publicly owned -- rather, they are owned by a bureaucratic elite, **in the name of the people**, a subtle but important distinction.

In this fashion, decisions about the allocation and use of the productive assets is not made by the people themselves, but by the administration, by economic planners. Similarly, in "private" capitalist economies, economic decisions are made by a coterie of managers. In both cases the managers make decisions which reflect their own interests and the interests of the owners (be it shareholders or the state bureaucracy) and **not** the workers involved or society as a whole. In both cases, economic decision-making is top-down in nature, made by an elite of administrators -- bureaucrats in the state socialist economy, capitalists or managers in the "private" capitalist economy. The much-lauded distinction of capitalism is that unlike the monolithic, centralised state socialist bureaucracy it has a **choice** of bosses (and choosing a master is not freedom). And given the similarities in the relations of production between capitalism and state "socialism," the obvious inequalities in wealth in so-called "socialist" states are easily explained. The relations of production and the relations of distribution are inter-linked and so inequality in terms of power in production means inequality in control of the social product, which will be reflected in inequality in terms of wealth.

In other words, private property exists if some individuals (or groups) control/own things which are used by other people. This means, unsurprising, that state ownership is just a form of property rather than the negation of it. If you have a highly centralised structure (as the state is) which plans and decides about all things within production, then this central administrative would be the real owner because it has the exclusive right to decide how things are used, **not** those using them. The existence of this central administrative strata excludes the abolition of property, replacing socialism or communism with state owned "property," i.e. **state** capitalism. As such, state ownership does **not** end wage labour and, therefore, social inequalities in terms of wealth and access to resources. Workers are still order-takers under state ownership (whose bureaucrats control the product of their labour and determine who gets what). The only difference between workers under private property and state property is the person telling them what to do. Simply put, the capitalist or company appointed manager is replaced by a state appointed one.

As anarcho-syndicalist Tom Brown stresses, when *"the many control the means whereby they live, they will do so by abolishing private ownership and establishing common ownership of the means of production, with workers' control of industry."* However, this is *"not to be confused with nationalisation*

*and state control" as "ownership is, in theory, said to be vested in the people" but, in fact "control is in the hands of a small class of bureaucrats." Then "common ownership does not exist, but the labour market and wage labour go on, the worker remaining a wage slave to State capitalism." Simply put, common ownership "demands common control. This is possible only in a condition of industrial democracy by workers' control." [Syndicalism, p. 94] In summary:*

*"Nationalisation is not Socialisation, but State Capitalism . . . Socialisation . . . is not State ownership, but the common, social ownership of the means of production, and social ownership implies control by the producers, not by new bosses. It implies Workers' Control of Industry -- and that is Syndicalism." [Op. Cit., p. 111]*

However, many Marxists (in particular Leninists) state they are in favour of both state ownership **and** "workers' control." As we discuss in more depth in [next section](#), while they mean the same thing as anarchists do by the first term, they have a radically different meaning for the second (it is for this reason modern-day anarchists generally use the term "workers' self-management"). To anarchist ears, the combination of nationalisation (state ownership) and "workers' control" (and even more so, self-management) simply expresses political confusion, a mishmash of contradictory ideas which simply hides the reality that state ownership, by its very nature, precludes workers' control. As such, anarchists reject such contradictory rhetoric in favour of "socialisation" and "workers' self-management of production." History shows that nationalisation will always undermine workers' control at the point of production and such rhetoric always paves the way for state capitalism.

Therefore, anarchists are against both nationalisation **and** privatisation, recognising both as forms of capitalism, of wage slavery. We believe in genuine public ownership of productive assets, rather than corporate/private or state/bureaucratic control. Only in this manner can the public address their own economic needs. Thus, we see a third way that is distinct from the popular "either/or" options forwarded by capitalists and state socialists, a way that is entirely more democratic. This is workers' self-management of production, based on social ownership of the means of life by federations of self-managed syndicates and communes.

For further discussion, see Kropotkin's discussion of "*The collectivist Wages System*" in **The Conquest of Bread** and selections from the British Anarchist Journal **Freedom** about the wide-scale nationalisation which took place after the end of the Second World War entitled **Neither Nationalisation Nor Privatisation: An Anarchist Approach**.

## **H.3.14 Don't Marxists believe in workers' control?**

As we discussed in the [last section](#), anarchists consider the usual association of state ownership with socialism to be false. We argue that it is just another form of the wages system, of capitalism, albeit with the state replacing the capitalist. As such, state ownership, for anarchists, is simply state capitalism. Instead we urge socialisation based on workers' self-management of production. Libertarian Marxists concur.

Some mainstream Marxists, however, say they seek to combine state ownership with *"workers' control."* This can be seen from Trotsky, for example, who argued in 1938 for *"workers' control . . . the penetration of the workers' eye into all open and concealed springs of capitalist economy . . . workers' control becomes a school for planned economy. On the basis of the experience of control, the proletariat will prepare itself for direct management of nationalised industry when the hour for that eventuality strikes."* Modern day Leninists are often heard voicing support for what anarchists consider an oxymoron, namely *"nationalisation under worker' control."* This, it will be argued, proves that nationalisation (state control) is not *"state capitalism"* as we argued in the [last section](#), rather *"control is the first step along the road to the socialist guidance of economy."* [**The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International**, p. 73 and p. 74]

Anarchists are not convinced. This is because of two reasons. Firstly, because by *"workers' control"* anarchists and Leninists mean two radically different things. Secondly, when in **power** Trotsky advocated radically different ideas. Based on these reasons, anarchists view Leninist calls for *"workers' control"* simply as a means of gaining popular support, calls which will be ignored once the real aim, party power, has been achieved: it is an example of Trotsky's comment that *"[s]logans as well as organisational forms should be subordinated to the indices of the movement."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 72] In other words, rather than express a commitment to the ideas of worker's control of production, mainstream Marxist use of the term *"workers' control"* is simply an opportunistic technique aiming at securing support for the party's seizure of power and once this is achieved it will be cast aside in favour of the first part of the demands, namely state ownership and so control. In making this claim anarchists feel they have more than enough evidence, evidence which many members of Leninist parties simply know nothing about.

We will look first at the question of terminology. Anarchists traditionally used the term *"workers' control"* to mean workers' full and direct control over their workplaces, and their work. However, after the Russian Revolution a certain ambiguity arose in using that term. This is because specific demands which were raised during that revolution were translated into English as *"workers' control"* when, in fact, the Russian meaning of the word (**kontrolia**) was far closer to *"supervision"* or *"steering."* Thus the term *"workers' control"* is used to describe two radically different concepts.

This can be seen from Trotsky when he argued that the workers should *"demand resumption, as public utilities, of work in private businesses closed as a result of the crisis. Workers' control in such case would be replaced by direct workers' management."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 73] Why workers' employed in open capitalist firms were not considered suitable for *"direct workers' management"* is not explained, but the fact remains Trotsky clearly differentiated between management and control. For him, *"workers' control"* meant *"workers supervision"* over the capitalist who retained power. In other words, a system of *"dual power"* at the point of production (and, like all forms of dual power, essentially and inevitably unstable).

This vision of *"workers' control"* as simply supervision of the capitalist managers can be found in Lenin.

Rather than seeing "*workers' control*" as workers managing production directly, he always saw it in terms of workers' "*controlling*" those who did. It simply meant "*the country-wide, all-embracing, omnipresent, most precise and most conscientious **accounting** of the production and distribution of goods.*" He clarified what he meant, arguing for "*country-wide, all-embracing workers' control over the capitalists*" who would still manage production. Significantly, he considered that "*as much as nine-tenths of the **socialist** apparatus*" required for this "*country-wide **book-keeping**, country-wide **accounting** of the production and distribution of goods*" would be achieved by nationalising the "*big banks,*" which "*are the 'state apparatus' which we **need** to bring about socialism*" (indeed, this was considered "*something in the nature of the **skeleton** of socialist society*"). Over time, this system would move towards full socialism. [**Selected Works**, vol. 2, pp. 364-5, p. 366 and p. 365]

Thus, what Leninists mean by "*workers' control*" is radically different than what anarchists traditionally meant by that term (indeed, it was radically different from the workers' definition, as can be seen from a resolution of the Bolshevik dominated First Trade Union Congress which complained that "*the workers misunderstand and falsely interpret workers' control.*" [quoted by M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 32]). It is for this reason that from the 1960s English speaking anarchists and other libertarian socialists have been explicit and have used the term "*workers' self-management*" rather than "*workers' control*" to describe their aims. Mainstream Marxists, however have continued to use the latter slogan, undoubtedly, as we note in [section H.3.5](#), to gain members from the confusion in meanings.

Secondly, there is the example of the Russian Revolution itself. Indeed, Trotsky is simply repeating the slogans used by the Bolsheviks in 1917. As historian S.A. Smith correctly summarises, the "*factory committees launched the slogan of workers' control of production quite independently of the Bolshevik party. It was not until May that the party began to take it up.*" However, Lenin used "*the term ['workers' control'] in a very different sense from that of the factory committees.*" In fact Lenin's "*proposals . . . [were] thoroughly statist and centralist in character, whereas the practice of the factory committees was essentially local and autonomous.*" [**Red Petrograd**, p. 154]

This is not all, this "*workers' control*" was always placed in a statist context and it would be exercised not by workers' organisations but rather by state capitalist institutions. In May 1917, Lenin was arguing for the "*establishment of state control over all banks, and their amalgamation into a single central bank; also control over the insurance agencies and big capitalist syndicates.*" He reiterated this framework later that year, arguing that "*the new means of control have been created not by us, but by capitalism in its military-imperialist stage*" and so "*the proletariat takes its weapons from capitalism and does not 'invent' or 'create them out of nothing.'*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 112, p. 367 and p. 599] The factory committees were added to this "*state capitalist*" system but they played only a very minor role in it. Indeed, this system of state control was designed to limit the power of the factory committees:

*"One of the first decrees issues by the Bolshevik Government was the Decree on Workers' Control of 27 November 1917. By this decree workers' control was institutionalised . . . Workers' control implied the persistence of private ownership of the means of production,*

*though with a 'diminished' right of disposal. The organs of workers' control, the factory committees, were not supposed to evolve into workers' management organs after the nationalisation of the factories. The hierarchical structure of factory work was not questioned by Lenin . . . To the Bolshevik leadership the transfer of power to the working class meant power to its leadership, i.e. to the party. Central control was the main goal of the Bolshevik leadership. The hasty creation of the VSNKh (the Supreme Council of the National Economy) on 1 December 1917, with precise tasks in the economic field, was a significant indication of fact that decentralised management was not among the projects of the party, and that the Bolsheviks intended to counterpose central direction of the economy to the possible evolution of workers' control toward self-management."* [Silvana Malle, **The Economic Organisation of War Communism, 1918-1921**, p. 47]

Once in power, the Bolsheviks soon turned away from even this limited vision of workers' control and in favour of *"one-man management."* Lenin raised this idea in late April 1918 and it involved granting state appointed *"individual executives dictatorial powers (or 'unlimited' powers)."* Large-scale industry required *"thousands subordinating their will to the will of one,"* and so the revolution *"demands"* that *"the people unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of labour."* Lenin's *"superior forms of labour discipline"* were simply hyper-developed capitalist forms. The role of workers in production was the same, but with a novel twist, namely *"unquestioning obedience to the orders of individual representatives of the Soviet government during the work."* This support for wage slavery was combined with support for capitalist management techniques. *"We must raise the question of piece-work and apply and test it in practice,"* argued Lenin, *"we must raise the question of applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system; we must make wages correspond to the total amount of goods turned out."* [Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 610, p. 611, p. 612 and pp. 602-3]

This vision had already been applied in practice, with the *"first decree on the management of nationalised enterprises in March 1918"* which had *"established two directors at the head of each enterprise . . . Both directors were appointed by the central administrators."* An *"economic and administrative council"* was also created in the workplace, but this *"did not reflect a syndicalist concept of management."* Rather it included representatives of the employees, employers, engineers, trade unions, the local soviets, co-operatives, the local economic councils and peasants. This composition *"weakened the impact of the factory workers on decision-making . . . The workers' control organs [the factory committees] remained in a subordinate position with respect to the council."* Once the Civil War broke out in May 1918, this process was accelerated. By 1920, most workplaces were under one-man management and the Communist Party at its Ninth Congress had *"promoted one-man management as the most suitable form of management."* [Silvana Malle, **Op. Cit.**, p. 111, p. 112, p. 141 and p. 128] In other words, the manner in which Lenin organised industry had handed it over entirely into the hands of the bureaucracy.

Trotsky, as to be expected, did not disagree with all this. In fact, quite the reverse. He wholeheartedly defended the imposing of *"one-man management"* in his justly infamous book **Terrorism and Communism**. As he put it, *"our Party Congress . . . expressed itself in favour of the principle of one-man management in the administration of industry . . . It would be the greatest possible mistake,*

however, to consider this decision as a blow to the independence of the working class. The independence of the workers is determined and measured not by whether three workers or one are placed at the head of a factory." As such, it "would consequently be a most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the head of factories. The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy over the whole Soviet mechanism of the collective will of the workers, and not at all in the form in which individual economic enterprises are administered." [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 162] The term "collective will of the workers" is simply a euphemism for the Party which Trotsky had admitted had "substituted" its dictatorship for that of the Soviets (indeed, "there is nothing accidental" in this "'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class" and "in reality there is no substitution at all." The "dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 109]). The unions "should discipline the workers and teach them to place the interests of production above their own needs and demands." He even argued that "the only solution to economic difficulties from the point of view of both principle and of practice is to treat the population of the whole country as the reservoir of the necessary labour power . . . and to introduce strict order into the work of its registration, mobilisation and utilisation." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 143 and p. 135]

Trotsky did not consider this a result of the Civil War. Again, the opposite was the case: "I consider if the civil war had not plundered our economic organs of all that was strongest, most independent, most endowed with initiative, we should undoubtedly have entered the path of one-man management in the sphere of economic administration much sooner and much less painfully." [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 162-3]

Significantly, discussing developments in Russia since the N.E.P, Trotsky argued that it was "necessary for each state-owned factory, with its technical director and with its commercial director, to be subjected not only to control from the top -- by the state organs -- but also from below, by the market which will remain the regulator of the state economy for a long time to come." Workers' control, as can be seen, was not even mentioned, nor considered as an essential aspect of control "from below." As Trotsky also stated that "[u]nder socialism economic life will be directed in a centralised manner," our discussion of the state capitalist nature of mainstream Marxism we presented in the [last section](#) is confirmed. [**The First Five Years of the Communist International**, vol. 2, p. 237 and p. 229]

The contrast between what Trotsky did when he was in power and what he argued for after he had been expelled is obvious. Indeed, the arguments of 1938 and 1920 are in direct contradiction to each other. Needless to say, Leninists and Trotskyists today are fonder of quoting Trotsky and Lenin when they did not have state power rather than when they did. Rather than compare what they said to what they did, they simply repeat ambiguous slogans which meant radically different things to Lenin and Trotsky than to the workers' who thrust them into power. For obvious reasons, we feel. Given the opportunity for latter day Leninists to exercise power, we wonder if a similar process would occur again? Who would be willing to take that chance?

As such, the claim that Marxists stand for "workers' control" can be refuted on two counts. Firstly, by

that term they simply mean workers' supervision of those who do have real power in production (either the capitalists or state appointed managers). It does **not** mean workers' self-management of production. Secondly, when they had the chance they did not implement it. In fact, they imposed capitalist style hierarchical management and did not consider this as anything to be worried about. And as this policy was advocated **before** the start of the Civil War, it cannot be said to have been forced upon them by necessity. As such, any claim that mainstream Marxism considers "*workers' control*" as an essential feature of its politics is simply nonsense.

For a comprehensive discussion of "*workers' control*" during the Russian Revolution Maurice Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control** cannot be bettered.

The roots of this confusion can be found in Marx and Engels. In the struggle between authentic socialism (i.e. workers' self-management) and state capitalism (i.e. state ownership) there **are** elements of the correct solution to be found in their ideas. This is their support for co-operatives. For example, Marx praised the efforts made within the Paris Commune to create co-operatives, so "*transforming the means of production, land and capital . . . into mere instruments of free and associated labour.*" He argued that "*[i]f co-operative production is not to remain a shame and a snare; if it is to supersede the Capitalist system; if united co-operative societies are to regulate national production upon a common plan, thus taking it under their own control, and putting an end to the constant anarchy and periodical convulsions which are the fatality of Capitalist production -- what else . . . would it be but Communism, 'possible' Communism?*" [Op. Cit., pp. 290-1] Engels, continuing this theme, argued for "*the transfer -- initially on lease -- of large estates to autonomous co-operatives under state management and effected in such a way that the State retains ownership of the land.*" He stated that neither he nor Marx "*ever doubted that, in the course of transition to a wholly communist economy, widespread use would have to be made of co-operative management as an intermediate stage. Only it will mean so organising things that society, i.e. initially the State, retains ownership of the means of production and thus prevents the particular interests of the co-operatives from taking precedence over those of society as a whole.*" [Marx-Engels Collected Works, vol. 47, p. 389]

However, Engels comments simply bring home the impossibilities of trying to reconcile state ownership and workers' self-management. While the advocacy of co-operatives is a positive step forward from the statist arguments of the Communist Manifesto, Engels squeezes these libertarian forms of organising production into typically statist structures. How "*autonomous co-operatives*" can co-exist with (and under!) "*state management*" and "*ownership*" is not explained, plus the fatal confusion of socialisation with nationalisation.

In addition, the differences between the comments of Marx and Engels are obvious. While Marx talks of "*united co-operative societies*," Engels talks of "*the State*." The former implies a free federation of co-operatives, the latter a centralised structure which the co-operatives are squeezed into and under. The former is socialism, the latter is state capitalist. From Engels argument, it is obvious that the stress is on state ownership and management rather than self-management. This confusion became a source of tragedy during the Russian Revolution when the workers, like their comrades during the Commune, started to form a federation of factory committees while the Bolsheviks squeezed these bodies into a

system of state control which was designed to marginalise them (see the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#) for full details).

Moreover, the aims of the Paris workers were at odds with the vision of the **Communist Manifesto** and in line with anarchism. Proudhon, for example, had argued in 1848 against state ownership and for "*democratically organised workers' associations*" which would be "*models for agriculture, industry and trade, the pioneering core of that vast federation of companies and societies*" which would make up "*the democratic social Republic.*" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 62] In his **Principle of Federation** he called this idea an "*agro-industrial federation.*" Thus the idea of co-operative production is a clear expression of what Proudhon explicitly called "*industrial democracy,*" a "*reorganisation of industry, under the jurisdiction of all those who compose it.*" [quoted by K. Steven Vincent, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism, p. 225] Bakunin and later anarchists simply developed these ideas to their logical conclusion (see [section I.3](#) for example).

Marx, to his credit, supported these libertarian visions when applied in practice by the Paris workers during the Commune and promptly revised his ideas. This fact has been obscured somewhat by Engels' historical revisionism in this matter. He argued, for example, that the "*economic measures*" of the Commune were driven not by "*principles*" but by "*simple, practical needs.*" This meant that "*the confiscation of shut-down factories and workshops and handing them over to workers' associations*" were "*not at all in accordance with the spirit of Proudhonism but certainly in accordance with the spirit of German scientific socialism.*" [Marx, Engels, Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 92] This distortion of Proudhon's ideas is also present in Engels' 1891 introduction to Marx's "*The Civil War in France.*" He painted a picture of Proudhon being opposed to association (except for large-scale industry). He stresses that "*to combine all these associations in one great union*" was "*the direct opposite of the Proudhon doctrine*" and so "*the Commune was the grave of the Proudhon doctrine.*" [Marx-Engels Selected Works, p. 256]

However, as noted, this is nonsense. The forming of workers' associations was a key aspect of Proudhon's ideas and so the Communards were obviously acting in his spirit. Given that the **Communist Manifesto** stressed state ownership and failed to mention co-operatives at all, the claim that the Commune acted in its spirit seems a tad optimistic. Particularly since Marx had commented in 1866 that in France the workers ("*particularly those of Paris!*") "*are strongly attached, without knowing it [!], to the old rubbish*" and that the "*Parisian gentlemen had their heads full of the emptiest Proudhonist phrases.*" [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 46 and p. 45]

What did this "*old rubbish*" consist of? Well, in 1869 the delegate of the Parisian Construction Workers' Trade Union argued that "*[a]ssociation of the different corporations [labour unions/associations] on the basis of town or country . . . leads to the commune of the future . . . Government is replaced by the assembled councils of the trade bodies, and by a committee of their respective delegates.*" In addition, "*a local grouping which allows the workers in the same area to liase on a day to day basis*" and "*a linking up of the various localities, fields, regions, etc.*" (i.e. international trade or industrial union federations) would ensure that "*labour organises for present and future by doing away with wage slavery.*" This



*"mode of organisation leads to the labour representation of the future."* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 184]

To state the obvious, this had clear links with both Proudhon's ideas **and** what the Commune did in practice. Rather than being the *"grave"* of Proudhon's ideas on workers' associations, the Commune saw their birth, i.e. their application. Rather than the Parisian workers becoming Marxists *"without knowing it,"* Marx had become a follower of Proudhon! Thus the idea of socialism being based on a federation of workers' associations was not buried with the Paris Commune. It was integrated into all forms of social anarchism (including communist-anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism) and recreated every time there is a social revolution.

In ending when must note that anarchists are well aware that individual workplaces could pursue aims at odds with the rest of society (to use Engels expression, their *"particular interests"*). This is often termed *"localism."* Anarchists, however, argue that the mainstream Marxist solution is worse than the problem. By placing self-managed workplaces under state control (or ownership) they become subject to even worse *"particular interests,"* namely those of the state bureaucracy who will use their power to further their own interests. In contrast, anarchists advocate federations of self-managed workplaces to solve this problem (see [section I.3](#) for more).

In summary, the problem of *"localism"* and any other problems faced by a social revolution will be solved in the interests of the working class only if working class people solve them themselves. For this to happen it requires working class people to manage their own affairs directly and that implies self-managed organising from the bottom up (i.e. anarchism) rather than delegating power to a minority at the top, to a "revolutionary" party or state. This applies economically, socially and politically. As Bakunin argued, the *"revolution should not only be made for the people's sake; it should also be made by the people."* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 141]

## H.3.15 Can objective factors explain the failure of the Russian Revolution?

The greatest myth of Marxism must surely be the idea that the Russian Revolution failed solely due to the impact objective factors. For Leninist, the failure of the revolution was the product of such things as civil war, foreign intervention, economic collapse and the isolation and backwardness of Russia and **not** Bolshevik ideology. Anarchists are not impressed by this argument.

Leninist John Rees recounts the standard argument, namely that the objective conditions in Russia meant that the *"subjective factor"* of Bolshevik ideology *"was reduced to a choice between capitulation to the Whites or defending the revolution with whatever means were at hands. Within these limits Bolshevik policy was decisive. But it could not wish away the limits and start with a clean sheet."* From this perspective, the key factor was the *"vice-like pressure of the civil war"* which *"transformed the state"* as well as the *"Bolshevik Party itself."* For the Bolsheviks had *"survived three years of civil war and wars*

*of intervention, but only at the cost of reducing the working class to an atomised, individualised mass, a fraction of its former size, and unable to exercise the collective power it had done in 1917.*" Industry was "reduced . . . to rubble" and the "bureaucracy of the workers' state was left suspended in mid-air, its class based eroded and demoralised." [*In Defence of October,*" pp. 3-82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 30, p. 70, p. 66 and p. 65] Due to these factors, argue Leninists, the Bolsheviks became dictators **over** the working class and **not** due to their political ideas.

Anarchists are not convinced by this analysis, arguing that is factually and logically flawed. Needless to say, it would be near impossible to discuss these issues in any real depth in just one section. As such, we need to summarise the major facts, issues and points. For those interested in a fuller discussion as well as the necessary documentation, we would recommend reading the appendix on "[The Russian Revolution.](#)" With that caveat, we now turn to summarising the problems with the Leninist approach. These fall into four main categories.

The first problem is factual. Bolshevik authoritarianism started **before** the start of the civil war and major economic collapse. Whether it is soviet democracy, workers' economic self-management, democracy in the armed forces or working class power and freedom generally, the fact is the Bolsheviks had systematically attacked and undermined it from the start. They also repressed working class protests and strikes along with opposition groups and parties. As such, it is difficult to blame something which had not started yet for causing Bolshevik policies.

Although the Bolsheviks had seized power under the slogan "*All Power to the Soviets,*" as we noted in [section H.3.11](#) the facts are the Bolsheviks aimed for party power and only supported soviets when they controlled them. To maintain party power, they had to undermine the soviets and they did. This onslaught on the soviets started quickly, a mere four days after the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks when their Council of People's Commissars unilaterally took for itself legislative power simply by issuing a decree to this effect. "*This was, effectively, a Bolshevik coup d'etat that made clear the government's (and party's) pre-eminence over the soviets and their executive organ.*" [Neil Harding, **Leninism**, p. 253] The highest organ of soviet power, the Central Executive Committee (VTsIK) was turned into little more than a rubber stamp, with its Bolshevik dominated presidium using its power to control the body and maintain Bolshevik power by, for example, awarding representations to groups and factions which supported the Bolsheviks and circumventing general meetings.

At the grassroots, a similar process was at work with power moving increasingly to the Bolshevik dominated soviet executives who used it to maintain a Bolshevik majority by any means possible. One such technique used to postpone new soviet elections, another was to gerrymander the soviets to ensure their majority. For example, when workplace soviet elections were finally held in Petrograd, their results were irrelevant because more than half of the projected 700-plus deputies in the new soviet were selected by Bolshevik dominated organisations. The Bolsheviks had secured themselves a solid majority even before factory voting began. When postponing and gerrymandering failed, the Bolsheviks turned to state repression to remain in power. For all the provincial soviet elections in the spring and summer of 1918 for which data is available, Bolshevik armed force not only overthrew the election results, it also

suppressed the working class protest against such actions. [Vladimir Brovkin, *"The Mensheviks' Political Comeback: The Elections to the Provincial City Soviets in Spring 1918"*, **The Russian Review**, vol. 42, pp. 1-50]

When the opposition parties raised such issues at the VTsIK, it had no impact. In April 1918, one deputy *"protested that non-Bolshevik controlled soviets were being dispersed by armed force, and wanted to discuss the issue."* The chairman *"refus[ed] to include it in the agenda because of lack of supporting material"* and such information be submitted to the presidium of the soviet. The majority (i.e. the Bolsheviks) *"supported their chairman"* and the facts were *"submitted . . . to the presidium, where they apparently remained."* [Charles Duval, *"Yakov M. Sverdlov and the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets (VTsIK)"*, pp. 3-22, **Soviet Studies**, vol. XXXI, no. 1, pp. 13-14] Given that the VTsIK was meant to be the highest soviet body between congresses, the lack of concern for state repression against soviets and opposition groups clearly shows the Bolshevik contempt for soviet democracy.

Unsurprisingly, the same contempt was expressed at the fifth All-Russian Soviet Congress in July 1918 when the Bolshevik gerrymandered it to maintain their majority. With the Mensheviks and Right-SRs banned from the soviets, popular disenchantment with Bolshevik rule was expressed by voting Left-SR. The Bolsheviks ensured their majority in the congress and, therefore, a Bolshevik government, when the Bolshevik credentials committee allowed the Committees of Poor Peasants, which were only supported by the Bolsheviks, to be represented. *"This blatant gerrymandering ensured a Bolshevik majority . . . Deprived of their democratic majority the Left SRs resorted to terror and assassinated the German ambassador Mirbach."* [Geoffrey Swain, **The Origins of the Russian Civil War**, p. 176] The Bolsheviks falsely labelled this an uprising against the soviets and the Left-SRs joined the Mensheviks and Right-SRs in being made illegal. It should also be mentioned that the Bolsheviks had attacked the anarchist movement in April, 1918. So before the start of the civil war all opposition groups had suffered some form of state repression by the hands of the Bolshevik regime (within six weeks of it starting, every opposition group had been effectively excluded from the soviets).

A similar authoritarian agenda was aimed at the armed forces and industry. Trotsky simply abolished the soldier's committees and elected officers, stating that *"the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree."* [**Work, Order, Discipline**] The death penalty for disobedience was restored, along with, more gradually, saluting, special forms of address, separate living quarters and other privileges for officers. In industry, Lenin, as we discussed in [section H.3.14](#), started to champion one-man management armed with *"dictatorial"* powers in April, 1918. This simply replaced private capitalism with state capitalism, taking control of the economy out of the hands of the workers and placing it into the hands of the state bureaucracy.

As well as repressing working class self-management, the Bolsheviks also used state repression against rebel workers. *"By the early summer of 1918,"* records one historian, *"there were widespread anti-Bolshevik protests. Armed clashes occurred in the factory districts of Petrograd and other industrial centres."* [William Rosenberg, **Russian labour and Bolshevik Power**, p. 107] Thus the early months of

Bolshevik rule were marked by *"worker protests, which then precipitated violent repressions against hostile workers. Such treatment further intensified the disenchantment of significant segments of Petrograd labour with Bolshevik-dominated Soviet rule."* [Alexander Rabinowitch, **Early Disenchantment with Bolshevik Rule**, p. 37]

Clearly, whether it is in regards to soviet, workplace or army democracy or the right of workers to strike or organise, the facts are the Bolsheviks had systematically eliminated them **before** the start of the civil war. So when Trotsky asserted that *"[i]n the beginning, the party had wished and hoped to preserve freedom of political struggle within the framework of the Soviets"* but that it was civil war which *"introduced stern amendments into this calculation,"* he was wrong. Rather than being *"regarded not as a principle, but as an episodic act of self-defence"* the opposite is the case. As we note in [section H.3.8](#) from roughly October 1918 onwards, the Bolsheviks **did** raise party dictatorship to a *"principle"* and did not care that this was *"obviously in conflict with the spirit of Soviet democracy."* [**The Revolution Betrayed**] As Samuel Farber notes, *"there is no evidence indicating that Lenin or any of the mainstream Bolshevik leaders lamented the loss of workers' control or of democracy in the soviets, or at least referred to these losses as a retreat, as Lenin declared with the replacement of War Communism by NEP in 1921."* [**Before Stalinism**, p. 44]

For more details see the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#) as well as [section 3](#) of the appendix on ["What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?"](#)

Secondly, it cannot be maintained that the Russian working class was incapable of collective action. Throughout the civil war period, as well as before and after, the Russian workers proved themselves quite capable of taking collective action -- against the Bolshevik state. Simply put, an *"atomised, individualised mass"* does not need extensive state repression to control it. So while the working class **was** *"a fraction of its former size"* it **was** able *"to exercise the collective power it had done in 1917."* Significantly, rather than decrease over the civil war period, the mass protests **grew** in size and militancy. By 1921 these protests and strikes were threatening the very existence of the Bolshevik dictatorship, forcing it to abandon key aspects of its economic policies.

This indicates a key flaw in the standard Leninist account, as Russian workers were more than capable of collective action throughout the Civil War period and after. In the Moscow area, following the lull after the defeat of the workers' conference movement in mid-1918 *"each wave of unrest was more powerful than the last, culminating in the mass movement from late 1920."* [Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power**, p. 94] This collective struggle was not limited to Moscow. *"Strike action remained endemic in the first nine months of 1920."* In Petrograd province, soviet figures indicate that strikes involving more than half the workforce took place in both 1919 and 1920. In early 1921 *"industrial unrest broke out in a nation-wide wave of discontent"* which included general strikes. [J. Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 69, p. 109, and p. 120] As Russian anarchist Ida Mett succinctly put it:

*"And if the proletariat was that exhausted how come it was still capable of waging virtually total general strikes in the largest and most heavily industrialised cities?"* [**The**

**Kronstadt Rebellion, p. 81]**

An "atomised" and powerless working class does not need martial law, lockouts, mass arrests and the purging of the workforce to control it. So, clearly, the Leninist argument can be faulted. Nor is it particularly original, as it dates back to Lenin and was first formulated "to justify a political clamp-down." Indeed, this argument was developed in response to rising working class protest rather than its lack: "As discontent amongst workers became more and more difficult to ignore, Lenin . . . began to argue that the consciousness of the working class had deteriorated . . . workers had become 'declassed.'" However, there "is little evidence to suggest that the demands that workers made at the end of 1920 . . . represented a fundamental change in aspirations since 1917." [J. Aves, **Op. Cit.**, p. 18, p. 90 and p. 91.] So while the "working class had decreased in size and changed in composition,. . . the protest movement from late 1920 made clear that it was not a negligible force and that in an inchoate way it retained a vision of socialism which was not identified entirely with Bolshevik power . . . Lenin's arguments on the declassing of the proletariat was more a way of avoiding this unpleasant truth than a real reflection of what remained, in Moscow at least, a substantial physical and ideological force." [Sakwa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 261]

Then there is the logical problem. Leninists say that they are revolutionaries. As we noted in [section H.2.1](#), they inaccurately mock anarchists for not believing that a revolution needs to defend itself. Yet, ironically, their whole defence of Bolshevism rests on the "exceptional circumstances" produced by the civil war they claim is inevitable. If Leninism cannot handle the problems associated with actually conducting a revolution then, surely, it should be avoided at all costs. This is particularly the case as leading Bolsheviks all argued that the specific problems their latter day followers blame for their authoritarianism were natural results of any revolution and, consequently, unavoidable. Lenin, for example, stressed in 1917 that any revolution would face exceptionally complicated circumstances as well as civil war. Once in power, he continually reiterated this point as well as noting that revolution in an advanced capitalist nations far more devastating and ruinous than in Russia.

Moreover, anarchists had long argued that a revolution would be associated with economic disruption, isolation and civil war and, consequently, had developed their ideas to take these into account. It should also be noted that every revolution has confirmed the anarchist analysis. For example, the German Revolution of 1918 faced an economic collapse which was, relatively, just as bad as that facing Russia the year before. However, no Leninist argues that the German Revolution was impossible or doomed to failure. Similarly, no Leninist denies that a socialist revolution was possible during the depths of the Great Depression of the 1930s. Consequently, it is not hard to conclude that for Leninists difficult objective circumstances place socialism off the agenda only when they are holding power. So even if we ignore the extensive evidence that Bolshevik authoritarianism started before the civil war, the logic of the Leninist argument is hardly convincing.

We discuss these issues in more detail in the appendix on ["What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?"](#)

Finally, there is a counter-example which, anarchists argue, show the impact of Bolshevik ideology on the fate of the revolution. This is the anarchist influenced Makhnovist movement. Defending the revolution in the Ukraine against all groups aiming to impose their will on the masses, the Makhnovists were operating in the same objective conditions facing the Bolsheviks -- civil war, economic disruption, isolation and so forth. However, the policies the Makhnovists implemented were radically different than those of the Bolsheviks. While the Makhnovists called soviet congresses, the Bolsheviks disbanded them. The former encouraged free speech and organisation, the latter crushed both. While the Bolsheviks raised party dictatorship and one-man management to ideological truisms, the Makhnovists they stood for and implemented workplace, army, village and soviet self-management. This shows the failure of Bolshevism cannot be put down to purely objective factors like the civil war, the politics of Marxism played their part.

For more information on the Makhnovists, see the appendix ["Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?"](#)

Therefore, anarchists have good reason to argue that one of the greatest myths of state socialism is the idea that Bolshevik ideology played no role in the fate of the Russian Revolution. Obviously, if the "objective" factors do not explain Bolshevik authoritarianism we are left with the question of which aspects of Bolshevik ideology impacted negatively on the revolution. We turn to this in the [next section](#).

## H.3.16 Did Bolshevik ideology influence the outcome of the Russian Revolution?

As we discussed in the last section, anarchists have good reason to reject the Leninist argument that the failure of Bolshevism in the Russian Revolution can be blamed purely on the difficult objective circumstances they faces. As Noam Chomsky summarises:

*"In the stages leading up to the Bolshevik coup in October 1917, there **were** incipient socialist institutions developing in Russia -- workers' councils, collectives, things like that. And they survived to an extent once the Bolsheviks took over -- but not for very long; Lenin and Trotsky pretty much eliminated them as they consolidated their power. I mean, you can argue about the **justification** for eliminating them, but the fact is that the socialist initiatives were pretty quickly eliminated.*

*"Now, people who want to justify it say, 'The Bolsheviks had to do it' -- that's the standard justification: Lenin and Trotsky had to do it, because of the contingencies of the civil war, for survival, there wouldn't have been food otherwise, this and that. Well, obviously the question is, was that true. To answer that, you've got to look at the historical facts: I don't think it was true. In fact, I think the incipient socialist structures in Russia were dismantles **before** the really dire conditions arose . . . But reading their own writings, my feeling is that Lenin and Trotsky knew what they were doing, it was conscious and*

*understandable.*" [**Understanding Power**, p. 226]

Chomsky is right on both counts. The attack on the basic building blocks of genuine socialism started before the civil war. Moreover, it did not happen by accident. The attacks were rooted in the Bolshevik vision of socialism. As Maurice Brinton notes:

*"there is a clear-cut and incontrovertible link between what happened under Lenin and Trotsky and the later practices of Stalinism . . . The more one unearths about this period the more difficult it becomes to define -- or even to see -- the 'gulf' allegedly separating what happened in Lenin's time from what happened later. Real knowledge of the facts also makes it impossible to accept . . . that the whole course of events was 'historically inevitable' and 'objectively determined'. Bolshevik ideology and practice were themselves important and sometimes decisive factors in the equation, at every critical stage of this critical period."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 84]

A key issue is the Bolsheviks support for centralisation. Long before the revolution, Lenin had argued that within the party it was a case of *"the transformation of the power of ideas into the power of authority, the subordination of lower Party bodies to higher ones."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 7, p. 367] Such visions of centralised organisation were the model for the revolutionary state and, once in power, they did not disappoint.

However, by its very nature centralism places power into a few hands and effectively eliminates the popular participation required for any successful revolution to develop. The power placed into the hands of the nineteen members of the Bolshevik party's central committee was automatically no longer in the hands of the working class. As such, when Leninists argue that "objective" circumstances forced the Bolsheviks to substitute their power for that of the masses, anarchists reply that this substitution had occurred the moment the Bolsheviks centralised power and placed it into their own hands. As a result, popular participation and institutions became to wither and die. Moreover, once in power, the Bolsheviks were shaped by their new position and the social relationships it created and, consequently, implemented policies influenced and constrained by the hierarchical and centralised structures they had created.

This was not the only negative impact of Bolshevik centralism. It also spawned a bureaucracy. The rise of a state bureaucracy started immediately with the seizure of power. Instead of the state starting to wither away *"a new bureaucratic and centralised system emerged with extraordinary rapidity . . . As the functions of the state expanded so did the bureaucracy."* [Richard Sakwa, *"The Commune State in Moscow in 1918,"* pp. 429-449, **Slavic Review**, vol. 46, no. 3/4, pp. 437-8] This was a striking confirmation of the anarchist analysis which argued that a new bureaucratic class develops around the centralised bodies created by the governing party. This body would soon become riddled with personal influences and favours, so ensuring that members could be sheltered from popular control while, at the same time, exploiting its power to feather its own nest.

Another problem was the Bolshevik vision of (centralised) democracy looked like. Trotsky is typical. In April 1918 he argued that the key factor in democracy was that the central power was elected by the masses, meaning that functional democracy from below could be replaced by appointments from above. Once elected the government was to be given total power to make decisions and appoint people as required as it is *"better able to judge in the matter than"* the masses. The sovereign people were expected to simply obey their public servants until such time as they *"dismiss that government and appoint another."* Trotsky raised the question of whether it was possible for the government to act *"against the interests of the labouring and peasant masses?"* And answered no! Yet it is obvious that Trotsky's claim that *"there can be no antagonism between the government and the mass of the workers, just as there is no antagonism between the administration of the union and the general assembly of its members"* is just nonsense. [**Leon Trotsky Speaks**, p. 113] The history of trade unionism is full of examples of committees betraying their membership. Needless to say, the subsequent history Lenin's government shows that there can be *"antagonism"* between rulers and ruled and that appointments are always a key way to further elite interests.

This vision of top-down "democracy" can, of course, be traced back to Marx's arguments of 1850 and Lenin's comments that the *"organisational principle of revolutionary Social-Democracy"* was *"to proceed from the top downward."* (see sections [H.3.2](#) and [H.3.3](#)). By equating centralised, top-down decision making by an elected government with "democracy," the Bolsheviks had the ideological justification to eliminate the functional democracy associated with the soviets, factory committees and soldiers committees. The Bolshevik vision of democracy became the means by which real democracy was eliminated in area after area of Russian working class life. Needless to say, a state which eliminates functional democracy in the grassroots will not stay democratic in any meaningful sense for long.

Nor does it come as too great a surprise to discover that a government which considers itself as *"better able to judge"* things than the people finally decides to annul any election results it dislikes. As we discuss in [section H.5](#), this perspective is at the heart of vanguardism, for in Bolshevik ideology the party, not the class, is in the final analysis the repository of class consciousness. This means that once in power it has a built-in tendency to override the decisions of the masses it claimed to represent and justify this in terms of the advanced position of the party. Combine this with a vision of "democracy" which is highly centralised and which undermines local participation then we have the necessary foundations for the turning of party power into party dictatorship.

Which brings us to the next issue, namely the Bolshevik idea that the party should seize power, not the working class as a whole (see [section H.3.11](#)). Lenin in 1917 continually repeating the basic idea that the Bolsheviks *"can and must take state power into their own hands."* [**Selected Works**, vol. 2, p. 329] He equated party power with popular power and argued that Russia would be governed by the Bolshevik party. The question instantly arises of what happens if the masses turn against the party? The destruction of soviet democracy in the spring and summer of 1918 answers that question (see last section). It is not a great step to party dictatorship **over** the proletariat from the premises of Bolshevism. In a clash between soviet democracy and party power, the Bolsheviks consistently favoured the latter -- as would be expected given their ideology.



Then there is the Bolshevik vision of socialism. As we discussed in [section H.3.12](#), the Bolsheviks saw the socialist economy as being built upon the centralised organisations created by capitalism. They confused state capitalism with socialism. "*State capitalism*," Lenin wrote in May 1917, "*is a complete **material** preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism*" and so socialism "*is nothing but the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly.*" It is "*merely state capitalist monopoly **made to benefit the whole people**; by this token it **ceases** to be capitalist monopoly.*" [**The Threatening Catastrophe and how to avoid it**, p. 38 and p. 37] A few months later, he was talking about how the institutions of state capitalism could be taken over and used to create socialism. Unsurprisingly, when defending the need for state capitalism in the spring of 1918 against the "Left Communists," Lenin stressed that he gave his "*high' appreciation of state capitalism*" "*before the Bolsheviks seized power.*" [**Selected Works**, vol. 2, p. 636] And, as Lenin noted, his praise for state capitalism can be found in his **State and Revolution**.

Given this perspective, it is unsurprising that workers' control was not given a high priority once the Bolsheviks seized power. While in order to gain support the Bolsheviks **had** paid lip-service to the idea of workers' control, as we noted in [section H.3.14](#) the party had always given that slogan a radically different interpretation than the factory committees had. While the factory committees had seen workers' control as being exercised directly by the workers and their class organisations, the Bolshevik leadership saw it in terms of state control in which the factory committees would play, at best, a minor role. It is unsurprising to discover which vision of socialism was actually introduced:

*"On three occasions in the first months of Soviet power, the [factory] committee leaders sought to bring their model into being. At each point the party leadership overruled them. The result was to vest both managerial **and** control powers in organs of the state which were subordinate to the central authorities, and formed by them."* [Thomas F. Remington, **Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia**, p. 38]

Given his vision of socialism, Lenin's rejection of the factory committee's model comes as no surprise. The Bolsheviks, as Lenin had promised, built from the top-down their system of unified administration based on the Tsarist system of central bodies which governed and regulated certain industries during the war (and, moreover, systematically stopped the factory committee organising together). [Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 36 and pp. 18-9] This was very centralised and very inefficient:

*"it seems apparent that many workers themselves . . . had now come to believe . . . that confusion and anarchy [sic!] **at the top** were the major causes of their difficulties, and with some justification. The fact was that Bolshevik administration was chaotic . . . Scores of competitive and conflicting Bolshevik and Soviet authorities issued contradictory orders, often brought to factories by armed Chekists. The Supreme Economic Council. . . issu[ed] dozens of orders and pass[ed] countless directives with virtually no real knowledge of affairs."* [William G. Rosenberg, **Russian Labour and Bolshevik Power**, p. 116]

Faced with the chaos that their own politics, in part, had created, the Bolsheviks turned to one-

management in April, 1918. This was applied first on the railway workers. Like all bosses, the Bolsheviks blamed the workers for the failings of their own policies. The abolishing the workers' committees resulted in *"a terrifying proliferation of competitive and contradictory Bolshevik authorities, each with a claim of life or death importance . . . Railroad journals argued plaintively about the correlation between failing labour productivity and the proliferation of competing Bolshevik authorities."* Rather than improving things, Lenin's one-man management did the opposite, *"leading in many places . . . to a greater degree of confusion and indecision" and "this problem of contradictory authorities clearly intensified, rather than lessened."* Indeed, the *"result of replacing workers' committees with one man rule . . . on the railways . . . was not directiveness, but distance, and increasing inability to make decisions appropriate to local conditions. Despite coercion, orders on the railroads were often ignored as unworkable."* It got so bad that *"a number of local Bolshevik officials . . . began in the fall of 1918 to call for the restoration of workers' control, not for ideological reasons, but because workers themselves knew best how to run the line efficiently, and might obey their own central committee's directives if they were not being constantly countermanded."* [William G. Rosenberg, **Workers' Control on the Railroads**, p. D1208, p. D1207, p. D1213 and pp. D1208-9]

That it was Bolshevik policies and not workers' control which was to blame for the state of the railways can be seen from what happened **after** Lenin's one-man management was imposed. The centralised Bolshevik economic system quickly demonstrated how to **really** mismanage an economy. The Bolshevik onslaught against workers' control in favour of a centralised, top-down economic regime ensured that the economy was handicapped by an unresponsive system which wasted the local knowledge in the grassroots in favour of orders from above which were issued in ignorance of local conditions. This led to unused stock coexisting with acute scarcity and the centre unable to determine the correct proportions required at the base. Unfinished products were transferred to other regions while local factories were shut down, wasted both time and resources (and given the state of the transport network, this was a doubly inefficient). The inefficiency of central financing seriously jeopardised local activity and the centre had displayed a great deal of conservatism and routine thinking. In spite of the complaints from below, the Communist leadership continued on its policy of centralisation (in fact, the ideology of centralisation was reinforced). [Silvana Malle, **The Economic Organisation of War Communism 1918-1921**, p. 232-3 and pp. 269-75]

A clearer example of the impact of Bolshevik ideology on the fate of the revolution would be hard to find. Simply put, while the situation was pretty chaotic in early 1918, this does not prove that the factory committee's socialism was not the most efficient way of running things under the (difficult) circumstances. After all, rates of *"output and productivity began to climb steadily after" January 1918 and "[i]n some factories, production doubled or tripled in the early months of 1918 . . . Many of the reports explicitly credited the factory committees for these increases."* [Carmen Sirianni, **Workers' Control and Socialist Democracy**, p. 109] Unless of course, like the Bolsheviks, you have a dogmatic belief that centralism is always more efficient. Needless to say, Lenin never wavered in his support for one-man management nor in his belief in the efficiency of centralism to solve all problems, particularly the problems it itself created in abundance. Nor did his explicit call to reproduce capitalist social relations in production cause him any concern for, in Lenin's eyes, if the primary issue was property and not who **manages** the means of production, then factory committees are irrelevant in determining the

socialist nature of the economy.

Post-October Bolshevik policy is a striking confirmation of the anarchist argument that a centralised structure would stifle the initiative of the masses and their own organs of self-management. Not only was it disastrous from a revolutionary perspective, it was hopelessly inefficient. The constructive self-activity of the people was replaced by the bureaucratic machinery of the state. The Bolshevik onslaught on workers' control, like their attacks on soviet democracy and workers' protest, undoubtedly engendered apathy and cynicism in the workforce, alienating even more the positive participation required for building socialism which the Bolshevik mania for centralism had already marginalised.

The pre-revolution Bolshevik vision of a socialist system was fundamentally centralised and, consequently, top-down. This was what was implemented post-October, with disastrous results. At each turning point, the Bolsheviks tended to implement policies which reflected their prejudices in favour of centralism, nationalisation and party power. Unsurprisingly, this also undermined the genuine socialist tendencies which existed at the time. Simply put, the Bolshevik vision of socialism and democracy played a key role in the failure of the revolution. Therefore, the Leninist idea that politics of the Bolsheviks had no influence on the outcome of the revolution, that their policies during the revolution were a product purely of objective forces, is unconvincing.

For further discussion of these and other issues, see the appendices on ["How did Bolshevik ideology contribute to the failure of the Revolution?"](#) and ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#)

# Section F - Is "anarcho"-capitalism a type of anarchism?

## Introduction

### F.1 Are "anarcho"-capitalists really anarchists?

F.1.1 Why is the failure to renounce hierarchy the Achilles Heel of right-wing libertarianism and "anarcho"-capitalism?

F.1.2 How libertarian is right-Libertarian theory?

F.1.3 Is right-Libertarian theory scientific in nature?

### F.2 What do "anarcho"-capitalists mean by "freedom?"

F.2.1 What are the implications of defining liberty in terms of (property) rights?

F.2.2 How does private property affect freedom?

F.2.3 Can "anarcho"-capitalist theory justify the state?

F.2.4 But surely transactions on the market are voluntary?

F.2.5 But surely circumstances are the result of liberty and so cannot be objected to?

F.2.6 Do Libertarian-capitalists support slavery?

F.2.7 But surely abolishing capitalism would restrict liberty?

F.2.8 Why should we reject the "anarcho"-capitalist definitions of freedom and justice?

### F.3 Why do "anarcho"-capitalists generally place little or no value on "equality," and what do they mean by that term?

F.3.1 Why is this disregard for equality important?

F.3.2 But what about "anarcho"-capitalist support for charity?

## F.4 What is the right-libertarian position on private property?

F.4.1 What is wrong with a "homesteading" theory of property?

F.4.2 Why is the "Lockean Proviso" important?

F.4.3 How does private property affect individualism?

F.4.4 How does private property affect relationships?

F.4.5 Does private property co-ordinate without hierarchy?

## F.5 Will privatising "the commons" increase liberty?

## F.6 Is "anarcho" capitalism against the state?

F.6.1 What's wrong with this "free market" justice?

F.6.2 What are the social consequences of such a system?

F.6.3 But surely Market Forces will stop abuse by the rich?

F.6.4 Why are these "defence associations" states?

F.6.5 What other effects would "free market" justice have?

## F.7 What is the myth of "Natural Law"?

F.7.1 Why "Natural Law" in the first place?

F.7.2 But "Natural Law" provides protection for individual rights from violation by the State. Those against Natural Law desire total rule by the state.

F.7.3 Why is "Natural Law" authoritarian?

F.7.4 Does "Natural Law" actually provides protection for individual liberty?

F.7.5 But Natural Law was discovered, not invented!

F.7.6 Why is the notion of "discovery" contradictory?

## F.8 What role did the state take in the creation of capitalism?

F.8.1 What social forces lay behind the rise of capitalism?

F.8.2 What was the social context of the statement "laissez-faire"?

**F.8.3 What other forms did state intervention in creating capitalism take?**

**F.8.4 Aren't the enclosures a socialist myth?**

**F.8.5 What about the lack of enclosures in the Americas?**

**F.8.6 How did working people view the rise of capitalism?**

**F.8.7 Why is the history of capitalism important?**

**F.9 Is Medieval Iceland an example of "anarcho"-capitalism working in practice?**

**F.10 Would laissez-faire capitalism be stable?**

**F.10.1 Would privatising banking make capitalism stable?**

**F.10.2 How does the labour market effect capitalism?**

**F.10.3 Was laissez-faire capitalism stable?**

# G.1 Are individualist anarchists anti-capitalist?

Yes, for two reasons.

Firstly, the Individualist Anarchists opposed profits, interest and rent as forms of exploitation (they termed these non-labour incomes "*usury*"). To use the words of Ezra Heywood, the Individualist Anarchists thought "*Interest is theft, Rent Robbery, and Profit Only Another Name for Plunder.*" [quoted by Martin Blatt, **Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, Coughlin, Hamilton and Sullivan (eds.), p. 29] Their vision of the good society was one in which "*the usurer, the receiver of interest, rent and profit*" would not exist and labour would "*secure its natural wage, its entire product.*" [Benjamin Tucker, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 82 and p. 85] As communist-anarchist Alexander Berkman noted, "*[i]f labour owned the wealth it produced, there would be no capitalism.*" [**What is Communist Anarchism?**, p. 37] Thus the Individualist Anarchists, like the social anarchists, opposed the exploitation of labour and desired to see the end of capitalism by ensuring that labour would own what it produced.

Secondly, the individualist anarchists desired a society in which there would no longer be capitalists and workers, only workers. The worker would receive the full product of his/her labour, so ending the exploitation of labour by capital. In Tucker's words, a free society would see "*each man reaping the fruits of his labour and no man able to live in idleness on an income from capital*" and so society would "*become a great hive of Anarchistic workers, prosperous and free individuals*" combining "*to carry on their production and distribution on the cost principle.*" [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 276] Moreover, such an aim logically implies a society based upon artisan, not wage, labour and workers would, therefore, not be separated from the ownership and control of the means of production they used and so sell the product of their labour, not the labour power itself.

For these two, interrelated, reasons, the Individualist Anarchists are clearly anti-capitalist. While an Individualist Anarchy would be a market system, it would not be a capitalist one. As Tucker argued, the anarchists realised "*the fact that one class of men are dependent for their living upon the sale of their labour, while another class of men are relieved of the necessity of labour by being legally privileged to sell something that is not labour. . . . And to such a state of things I am as much opposed as any one. But the minute you remove privilege. . . every man will be a labourer exchanging with fellow-labourers . . . What Anarchistic-Socialism aims to abolish is usury . . . it wants to deprive capital of its reward.*" [Benjamin Tucker, **Instead of a Book**, p. 404] As noted above, the term "*usury*," for Tucker, was a synonym for "*the exploitation of labour*" [**Ibid.**, p. 396] and included capitalist profits as well as interest, rent, and royalties. Little wonder Tucker translated Proudhon's **What is Property?** and subscribed to its conclusion that "*property is robbery*" (or theft).

Such opposition to exploitation of labour was a common thread in Individualist Anarchist thought, as it was in the social anarchist movement. Moreover, as in the writings of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin opposition to wage slavery was also a common thread within the individualist anarchist tradition --

indeed, given its regular appearance, we can say it is almost a **defining** aspect of the tradition (and, as we argue in the [next section](#), it has to be for Individualist Anarchism to be logically consistent). For example, taking Josiah Warren (the "father" of individualist anarchism) we find that "[t]o men like [him] . . . chattel slavery was merely one side of a brutal situation, and although sympathetic with its opponents, refused to take part in the struggle [against slavery] unless it was extended to a wholesale attack on what they termed 'wage slavery' in the states where Negro slavery no longer existed." [James J. Martin, **Men Against the State**, p. 81] Such a view, we may add, was commonplace in radical working class journals and movements of the time. Thus we find George Henry Evans (who heavily influence Individualist Anarchists like Warren and Ingalls with the ideas of land reform based on "occupancy and use") writing:

*"I was formally, like yourself, sir, a very warm advocate of the abolition of (black) slavery. This was before I saw that there was white slavery. Since I saw this, I have materially changed my views as to the means of abolishing Negro slavery. I now see clearly, I think, that to give the landless black the privilege of changing masters now possessed by the landless white, would hardly be a benefit to him in exchange for his surety of support in sickness and old age, although he is in a favourable climate."* [quoted by Kenneth R. Gegg, Jr., **Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, Coughlin, Hamilton and Sullivan (eds.), p. 113]

Similarly, William Greene (whose pamphlet **Mutual Banking** had a great impact on Tucker) pronounced that "[t]here is no device of the political economists so infernal as the one which ranks labour as a commodity, varying in value according to supply and demand." [**Mutual Banking** quoted by Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 130] In the same work he also noted that "[t]o speak of labour as merchandise is treason; for such speech denies the true dignity of man. . . . Where labour is merchandise in fact . . . there man is merchandise also, whether in England or South Carolina." [quoted by Rudolf Rocker, **Pioneers of American Freedom**, p. 112] Here we see a similar opposition to the commodification of labour (and so labourers) within capitalism that also marks social anarchist thought (as Rocker notes, Greene "rejected . . . the designation of labour as a **commodity**." [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 111-2]). Moreover, we discover Greene had a "strong sympathy for the **principle of association**. In fact, the theory of Mutualism is nothing less than co-operative labour based on the cost principle." [Rudolf Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 109] Martin also indicates Greene's support for co-operation and associative labour:

*"Coming at a time when the labour and consumer groups were experimenting with 'associated workshops' and 'protective union stores,' Greene suggested that the mutual bank be incorporated into the movement, forming what he called 'complementary units of production, consumption, and exchange . . . the triple formula of practical mutualism.'" [Op. Cit., pp. 134-5]*

This support for producers' associations alongside mutual banks is identical to Proudhon's ideas -- which is unsurprising as Greene was a declared follower of the French anarchist's ideas.



Looking at Lysander Spooner, we discover a similar opposition to wage labour. Spooner argued that it was state restrictions on credit and money (the "*money monopoly*" based on banks requiring specie to operate) as the reason why people sell themselves to others on the labour market. As he put it, "*a monopoly of money . . . put[s] it wholly out of the power of the great body of wealth-producers to hire the capital needed for their industries; and thus compel them . . . -- by the alternative of starvation -- to sell their labour to the monopolists of money . . . [who] plunder all the producing classes in the prices of their labour.*" [A Letter to Grover Cleveland, p. 20] Spooner was well aware that it was capitalists who ran the state ("*the employers of wage labour . . . are also the monopolists of money.*" [Op. Cit., p. 48]). In his ideal society, the "*amount of money capable of being furnished . . . is so great that every man, woman, and child. . . could get it, and go into business for himself, or herself -- either singly, or in partnerships -- and be under no necessity to act as a servant, or sell his or her labour to others. All the great establishments, of every kind, now in the hands of a few proprietors, but employing a great number of wage labourers, would be broken up; for few, or no persons, who could hire capital, and do business for themselves, would consent to labour for wages for another.*" [Op. Cit., p. 41] In other words, a society without wage labour and, instead, based upon peasant, artisan and associated/co-operative labour (as in Proudhon's vision). In other words, a **non**-capitalist society or, more positively, a (libertarian) socialist one as the workers' own and control the means of production they use.

The individualist anarchists opposed capitalism (like social anarchists) because they saw that profit, rent and interest were all forms of exploitation. They thought that liberty meant that the worker was entitled to "*all the fruits of his own labour*" (Spooner) and recognised that working for a boss makes this impossible as a portion is diverted into the employer's pockets. [Martin, Op. Cit., p. 172] Like social anarchists they opposed usury, to have to pay purely for access/use for a resource (a "*slice of their daily labour us taken from them [the workers] for the privilege of using these factories*" [Alexander Berkman, **What is Communist Anarchism?**, p. 6]).

This opposition to profits, rent and interest as forms of exploitation, wage labour as a form of slavery and property as a form of theft clearly makes individualist anarchism anti-capitalist and a form of (libertarian) socialism. In addition, it also indicates well the common ground between the two threads of anarchism, in particular their common position to capitalism. The social anarchist Rudolf Rocker indicates well this common position when he argues:

*"it is difficult to reconcile personal freedom with the existing economic system. Without doubt the present inequality of economic interests and the ruling class conflicts in society are a continual danger to the freedom of the individual. . . One cannot be free either politically or personally so long as one is in economic servitude of another and cannot escape from this condition. This was recognised by men like Godwin, Warren, Proudhon, Bakunin, [and women like Goldman and de Cleyre, we must add!] and many others who subsequently reached the conviction that the domination of man over man will not disappear until there is an end of the exploitation of man by man."* [Nationalism and Culture, p. 167]

In addition to this opposition to capitalist usury, the individualist anarchists also expressed opposition to

capitalist ideas on property (particularly property in land). J.K. Ingalls, for example, considered that to reduce land to the status of a commodity was an act of "*usurpation*." Indeed, "*the private domination of the land*" originated in "*usurpation only, whether of the camp, the court or the market. Whenever such a domination excludes or deprives a single human being of his equal opportunity, it is a violation, not only of the public right, and of the social duty, but of the very principle of law and morals upon which property itself is based. . .*" [**Social Wealth**, quoted by Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 148f]

These ideas are identical to Proudhon's and Ingalls continues in this Proudhonian "*occupancy and use*" vein when he argues that possession "*remains possession, and can never become property, in the sense of absolute dominion, except by positive statue [i.e. state action]. Labour can only claim occupancy, and can lay no claim to more than the usufruct.*" [**Ibid.**, p. 149] In other words, capitalist property was created by "*forceful and fraudulent taking*" of land, which "*could give no justification to the system*" [**Ibid.**] (as we argued in [section B.3.4](#)) and was protected by the state. And like Warren and Greene he opposed wage labour, and "*considered the only 'intelligent' strike [by workers as] one which would be directed against wage work altogether.*" [**Ibid.**, p. 153]

Therefore we see that the individualist anarchists, like social anarchists, opposed capitalist exploitation, wage slavery and property rights. Instead of capitalism, they maintained that workers should own what they produced or its equivalent (rather than what they were paid in wages). Such a position necessarily implies that they should own and control the means of production they use, thus ensuring the "*abolition of the proletariat*" (to use Proudhon's term) and so the end of capitalism as society would no longer be divided into two classes, those who worked and those who owned. In an individualist anarchy, "*there should be no more proletaires*" as "*everybody*" would be "*proprietor*." This would result in "*The land to the cultivator. The mine to the miner. The tool to the labourer. The product to the producer.*" [Ernest Lesigne quoted approvingly by Tucker at the end of his essay "*State Socialism and Anarchism*" in **Instead of a Book**, p. 17, p. 18] Ernest Lesigne considered "*co-operative production*" as "*a solution to the great problem of social economy, -- the delivery of products to the consumer at cost*" and as a means of producers to "*receive the value of your product, of your effort, without having to deal with a mass of hucksters and exploiters.*" [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 123] As Charles A. Dana put it (in a work published by Tucker and described by him as "*a really intelligent, forceful, and sympathetic exposition of mutual banking*"), "*[b]y introducing mutualism into exchanges and credit we introduce it everywhere, and labour will assume a new aspect and become truly democratic.*" [**Proudhon and His "Bank of the People"**, p. 45] In other words, a classless socialist society of self-employed workers without exploitation and oppression.

As Wm. Gary Kline correctly summarises:

*"Their proposals were designed to establish true equality of opportunity . . . and they expected this to result in a society without great wealth or poverty. In the absence of monopolistic factors which would distort competition, they expected a society of largely self-employed workmen with no significant disparity of wealth between any of them since all would be required to live at their own expense and not at the expense of exploited*

*fellow human beings.*" [**The Individualist Anarchists: A Critique of Liberalism**, pp. 103-4]

Thus Individualist anarchy would "[m]ake capital free by organising credit on a mutual plan, and then these vacant lands will come into use . . . operatives will be able to buy axes and rakes and hoes, and then they will be independent of their employers, and then the labour problem will be solved." This would result in the "emancipation of the workingman from his present slavery to capital." [Tucker, **Instead of a Book**, p. 321 and p. 323]

Moreover, like the social anarchists, the Individualist Anarchists were aware that the state was not some neutral machine or one that exploited society purely for its own ends. They were aware that it was a vehicle of **class rule**, namely the rule of the capitalist class over the working class. As noted above, Spooner thought that that "holders of this monopoly [the money monopoly] now rule and rob this nation; and the government, in all its branches, is simply their tool" and that "the employers of wage labour . . . are also the monopolists of money." [Spooner, **Op. Cit.**, p. 42 and p. 48] Tucker recognised that "capital had so manipulated legislation" that they gained an advantage on the capitalist market which allowed them to exploit labour. [**The Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 82-3] He was quite clear that the state was a **capitalist** state, with "Capitalists hav[ing] placed and kept on the statute books all sorts of prohibitions and taxes" to ensure a "free market" skewed in favour of themselves. [quoted by Don Werkheiser, **Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, Coughlin, Hamilton and Sullivan (eds.), p. 218] A.H. Simpson argued that the Individualist Anarchist "knows very well that the present State . . . is simply the tool of the property-owning class." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 92] Thus both wings of the anarchist movement were united in their opposition to capitalist exploitation and their common recognition that the state was a tool of the capitalist class used to allow them to exploit the working class.

In addition, as a means of social change, the individualists suggested that activists start "inducing the people to steadily refuse the payment of rents and taxes." [**Instead of a Book** pp. 299-300] This non-payment of rent included rented accommodation as "tenants would not be forced to pay [landlords] rent, nor would [landlords] be allowed to seize their [the tenants] property." [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 162] These are hardly statements with which capitalists would agree. Tucker, as noted, also opposed interest, considering it usury (exploitation and a "crime") pure and simple and one of the means by which workers were denied the full fruits of their labour. Indeed, he looked forward to the day when "any person who charges more than cost for any product [will] . . . be regarded very much as we now regard a pickpocket." This "attitude of hostility to usury, in any form" hardly fits into the capitalist mentality or belief system. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 155] Similarly, Ezra Heywood considered profit-taking "an injustice which ranked second only to legalising titles to absolute ownership of land or raw-materials." [James J. Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 111] Opposition to profits, rent or interest is hardly capitalistic -- indeed, the reverse.

As regards equality, we discover that the Individualist Anarchist's saw their ideas as resulting in more equality. Thus we find Tucker arguing that that the "happiness possible in any society that does not improve upon the present in the matter of distribution of wealth, can hardly be described as beatific." He was clearly opposed to "the inequitable distribution of wealth" under capitalism and equally clearly

saw his proposals as a means of reducing it substantially. ["*Why I am an Anarchist*", p. 135, contained in **Man!**, M. Graham (ed.), pp. 132-6] John Beverley Robinson agreed:

*"When privilege is abolished, and the worker retains all that he produces, then will come the powerful trend toward equality of material reward for labour that will produce substantial financial and social equality, instead of the mere political equality that now exists."* [**Patterns of Anarchy**, pp. 278-9]

As did Lysander Spooner, who argued that under his system *"fortunes could hardly be represented by a wheel; for it would present on such height, no such depth, no such irregularity of motion as now. It should rather be represented by an extended surface, varied somewhat by inequalities, but still exhibiting a general level, affording a safe position for all, and creating no necessity, for either force or fraud, on the part of anyone to secure his standing."* Thus Individualist anarchism would create a condition *"neither of poverty, nor riches; but of moderate competency -- such as will neither enervate him by luxury, nor disable him by destitution; but which will at once give him and opportunity to labour, (both mentally and physically) and stimulate him by offering him all the fruits of his labours."* [quoted by Stephan L. Newman, **Liberalism at Wit's End**, p. 72 and p. 73]

Hence, like social anarchists, the Individualist Anarchists saw their ideas as a means towards equality. By eliminating exploitation, inequality would soon decrease as wealth would no longer accumulate in the hands of the few (the owners). Rather, it would flow back into the hands of those who produced it (i. e. the workers). Until this occurred, society would see *"[o]n one side a dependent class of wage-workers and on the other a privileged class of wealth-monopolisers, each become more and more distinct from the other as capitalism advances."* This has *"resulted in a grouping and consolidation of wealth which grows apace by attracting all property, no matter by whom produced, into the hands of the privileged, and hence property becomes a social power, an economic force destructive of rights, a fertile source of injustice, a means of enslaving the dispossessed."* [William Ballie, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 121]

Tucker, like other individualist anarchists, also supported labour unions, and although he opposed violence during strikes, he recognised that it was caused by frustration due to an unjust system. Indeed, like social anarchists, he considered *"the labourer in these days [as] a soldier. . . His employer is . . . a member of an opposing army. The whole industrial and commercial world is in a state of internecine war, in which the proletaires are massed on one side and the proprietors on the other."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 460] The cause of strikes rested in the fact that *"before. . . strikers violated the equal liberty of others, their own right to equality of liberty had been wantonly and continuously violated"* by the capitalists using the state, for the *"capitalists . . . in denying [a free market] to [the workers] are guilty of criminal invasion."* [**Ibid.**, p. 454] He agreed with Ezra Heywood when he *"scoffed at supporters of the status quo, who saw no evidence of the tyranny on the part of capital, and who brought up the matter of free contract with reference to labourers. This argument was no longer valid. Capital controlled land, machinery, steam power, waterfalls, ships, railways, and above all, money and public opinion, and was in a position to wait out recalcitrancy at its leisure."* [James J. Martin, **Men Against the State**, p. 107] Likewise, Tucker advocated and supported many other forms of non-violent direct action such as

boycotts and rent strikes, seeing them as important means of radicalising the working class and creating an anarchist society. However, like social anarchists the Individualist Anarchists did not consider labour struggle as an end in itself -- they considered reforms (and discussion of a "*fair wage*" and "*harmony between capital and labour*") as essentially "*conservative*" and would be satisfied with no less than "*the abolition of the monopoly privileges of capital and interest-taking, and the return to labour of the full value of its production.*" [Victor Yarros, quoted by James J. Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 206f]

However, while Tucker believed in direct action, he opposed the "forceful" expropriation of social capital by the working class, instead favouring the creation of a mutualist system to replace capitalist companies with co-operative ones. Tucker was therefore fundamentally a **reformist**, thinking that anarchy would evolve from capitalism as mutual banks spread across society, increasing the bargaining power of labour. This idea of reforming capitalism over time (and, by implication, tolerating boss's control during that time) was primarily due to the influence of Herbert Spencer and not Max Stirner. Little wonder that Peter Kropotkin termed Tucker's doctrine "*no force*" and considered such a reformist position to be similar to Spencer's and so little more than "*an excuse for supporting landlord and capitalist domination.*" [**Act For Yourselves**, p. 98]

Be that as it may, it is clear that both social and Individualist Anarchists share much in common, including an opposition to capitalism. In other words, Individualist Anarchism is, indeed, opposed to capitalism. As Carole Pateman points out, "*[t]here has always been a strong radical individualist tradition in the USA. Its adherents have been divided between those who drew anarchist, egalitarian conclusions, and those who reduced political life to the capitalist economy writ large, to a series of exchanges between unequally situated individuals.*" [**The Problem of Political Obligation**, p. 205] As can be seen, what right-libertarians do is to confuse these two traditions. The Individualist Anarchists may have been in favour of free exchange but between equally situated individuals. Only given a context of equality can free exchange benefit both parties equally and not generate growing inequalities which benefit the stronger of the parties involved which, in turn, skews the bargaining position of those involved in favour of the stronger (also see [section F.3](#)).

## G.1.1 Why is the social context important in evaluating Individualist Anarchism?

When reading the work of people like Tucker and Warren, we must remember the social context of their ideas, namely the transformation of America from a pre-capitalist to a capitalist society (see Eunice Minette Schuster, **Native American Anarchism**, pp. 135-137). The individualist anarchists viewed with horror the rise of capitalism and its imposition on an unsuspecting American population, supported and encouraged by state action (in the form of protection of private property in land, restricting money issuing to state approved banks using specie, government orders supporting capitalist industry, tariffs and so on).

The non-capitalist nature of the early USA can be seen from the early dominance of self-employment

(artisan production). At the beginning of the 19th century, around 80% of the occupied population were self-employed. The great majority of Americans during this time were farmers working their own land, primarily for their own needs. Most of the rest were self-employed artisans, merchants, traders, and professionals. Other classes -- employees/wage workers and employers/capitalists in the North, slaves and planters in the South -- were relatively small. The great majority of Americans were independent and free from anybody's command. They controlled they owned and controlled their means of production. Thus early America was, essentially, a pre-capitalist society. However, by 1880, the year before Tucker started **Liberty**, the number of self-employed had fallen to approximately 33% of the working population. Now it is less than 10% [Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, **Schooling in Capitalist America**, p. 59]. It is **only** in this context that we can understand individualist anarchism, namely as a revolt against the destruction of working-class independence and the growth of wage-labour, accompanied by the growth of two opposing classes, capitalists and proletarians.

Given the commonplace awareness in the population of artisan production and its advantages, it is hardly surprising that the individualists supported "free market" solutions to social problems. For, given the era, this solution implied workers' control and the selling of the product of labour, not the labourer him/herself. As Tucker argues, individualist anarchism desires "*[n]ot to abolish wages, but to make every man dependent upon wages and to secure every man his whole wages*" [**Instead of a Book**, p. 404] and this, logically, can only occur under workers control (i.e. when the tool belonged to the worker, etc. -- see [section G.2](#)).

Indeed, the Individualist Anarchists were part of a wider movement seeking to stop the transformation of America. As Bowles and Ginitis note, this "*process has been far from placid. Rather, it has involved extended struggles with sections of U.S. labour trying to counter and temper the effects of their reduction to the status of wage labour.*" They continue by noting that "*with the rise of entrepreneurial capital, groups of formerly independent workers were increasingly drawn into the wage-labour system. Working people's organisations advocated alternatives to this system; land reform, thought to allow all to become an independent producer, was a common demand. Worker co-operatives were a widespread and influential part of the labour movement as early as the 1840s . . . but failed because sufficient capital could not be raised. . .*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 59 and p. 62] It is no coincidence that the issues raised by the Individualist Anarchists (land reform via "*occupancy-and-use*", increasing the supply of money via mutual banks and so on) reflect these alternatives raised by working class people and their organisations. Little wonder Tucker argued that:

*"Make capital free by organising credit on a mutual plan, and then these vacant lands will come into use . . . operatives will be able to buy axes and rakes and hoes, and then they will be independent of their employers, and then the labour problem will solved."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 321]

Thus the Individualist Anarchists reflect the aspirations of working people facing the transformation of an society from a pre-capitalist state into a capitalist one. As Morgan Edwards notes:

*"The greatest part [of **Liberty's** readers] proves to be of the professional/intellectual class: the remainder includes independent manufacturers and merchants, artisans and skilled workers . . . The anarchists' hard-core supporters were the socio-economic equivalents of Jefferson's yeoman-farmers and craftworkers: a freeholder-artisan-independent merchant class allied with freethinking professionals and intellectuals. These groups -- in Europe as well as in America -- had socio-economic independence, and through their desire to maintain and improve their relatively free positions, had also the incentive to oppose the growing encroachments of the capitalist State."* [**Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, Coughlin, Hamilton and Sullivan (eds.), p. 85]

This transformation of society by the rise of capitalism explains the development of **both** schools of anarchism, social and individualist. *"American anarchism,"* Frank H. Brooks argues, *"like its European counterpart, is best seen as a nineteenth century development, an ideology that, like socialism generally, responded to the growth of industrial capitalism, republican government, and nationalism. Although this is clearest in the more collectivistic anarchist theories and movements of the late nineteenth century (Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, communist anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism), it also helps to explain anarchists of early- to midcentury such as Proudhon, Stirner and, in America, Warren. For all of these theorists, a primary concern was the 'labour problem' -- the increasing dependence and immiseration of manual workers in industrialising economies."* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 4]

Changing social conditions also explains why Individualist Anarchism must be considered socialistic. As Murray Bookchin notes:

*"Th[e] growing shift from artisanal to an industrial economy gave rise to a gradual but major shift in socialism itself. For the artisan, socialism meant producers' co-operatives composed of men who worked together in small shared collectivist associations, although for master craftsmen it meant mutual aid societies that acknowledged their autonomy as private producers. For the industrial proletarian, by contrast, socialism came to mean the formation of a mass organisation that gave factory workers the collective power to expropriate a plant that no single worker could properly own. These distinctions led to two different interpretations of the 'social question' . . . The more progressive craftsmen of the nineteenth century had tried to form networks of co-operatives, based on individually or collectively owned shops, and a market knitted together by a moral agreement to sell commodities according to a 'just price' or the amount of labour that was necessary to produce them. Presumably such small-scale ownership and shared moral precepts would abolish exploitation and greedy profit-taking. The class-conscious proletarian . . . thought in terms of the complete socialisation of the means of production, including land, and even of abolishing the market **as such**, distributing goods according to needs rather than labour . . . They advocated **public** ownership of the means of production, whether by the state or by the working class organised in trade unions."* [**The Third Revolution**, vol. 2, p. 262]

So, in this evolution of socialism we can place the various brands of anarchism. Individualist anarchism

is clearly a form of artisanal socialism (which reflects its American roots) while communist anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism are forms of industrial (or proletarian) socialism (which reflects its roots in Europe). Proudhon's mutualism bridges these extremes, advocating as it does artisan socialism for small-scale industry and agriculture and co-operative associations for large-scale industry (which reflects the state of the French economy in the 1840s to 1860s). Hence Individualist Anarchist support for "*the cost principle*" (or "*cost the limit of price*") and artisanal production ("*The land to the cultivator. The mine to the miner. The tool to the labourer. The product to the producer*"), complemented by "*the principle of association*" and mutual banking.

In other words, there have been many schools of socialism, all influenced by the changing society around them. In the words of Proudhon "[m]odern Socialism was not founded as a sect or church; it has seen a number of different schools." [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 177] As Frank H. Brooks notes, "*before Marxists monopolised the term, socialism, was a broad concept, as indeed Marx's critique of the 'unscientific' varieties of socialism in the Communist Manifesto indicated. Thus, when Tucker claimed that the individualist anarchism advocated in the pages of Liberty was socialist, he was not engaged in obfuscation or rhetorical bravado.*" [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 75] Looking at the society in which their ideas developed (rather than a-historically projecting modern ideas backward) we can see the socialist core of Individualist Anarchism. It was, in other words, an un-Marxian form of socialism (as was communist-anarchism).

Thus, to look at the Individualist Anarchists from the perspective of "modern socialism" (say, communist-anarchism or Marxism) means to miss the point. The social conditions which produced Individualist Anarchism were substantially different from those existing today and what was a possible solution to the "*social problem*" **then** may not be one suitable **now** (and, indeed, point to a different kind of socialism than that which developed later). Moreover, Europe in the 1870s was distinctly different than America (although, of course, the USA **was** catching up). For example, there was still vast tracks of unclaimed land (once the Native Americans had been removed, of course) available to workers (which explains the various acts the US state to control land access -- see [section F.8.5](#)). In the towns and cities, artisan production "*remained important . . . into the 1880s*" [David Montgomery, **The Fall of the House of Labour**, p. 52] Until the 1880s, the possibility of self-employment was a real one for many workers, a possibility being hindered by state action (for example, by forcing people to buy land via Homestead Acts, restricting banking to those with specie, and so on). Little wonder that Individualist Anarchism was considered a real solution to the problems generated by the creation of capitalism in the USA and that, by the 1880s, Communist Anarchist (and later anarcho-syndicalism) became the dominant forms of anarchism. By the 1880s, the transformation of America was nearing completion and self-employment was no longer a real solution for the majority of workers.

As Peter Sabatini points out:

*"The chronology of anarchism within the United States corresponds to what transpired in Europe and other locations. An organised anarchist movement imbued with a revolutionary collectivist, then communist, orientation came to fruition in the late 1870s.*



*At that time, Chicago was a primary centre of anarchist activity within the USA, due in part to its large immigrant population. . .*

*The Proudhonist anarchy that Tucker represented was largely superseded in Europe by revolutionary collectivism and anarcho-communism. The same changeover occurred in the US, although mainly among subgroups of working class immigrants who were settling in urban areas. For these recent immigrants caught up in tenuous circumstances within the vortex of emerging corporate capitalism, a revolutionary anarchy had greater relevancy than go slow mutualism." [Libertarianism: Bogus Anarchy]*

Murray Bookchin argues that the development of communist-anarchism "*made it possible for anarchists to adapt themselves to the new working class, the industrial proletariat, . . . This adaptation was all the more necessary because capitalism was now transforming not only European [and American] society but the very nature of the European [and American] labour movement itself.*" [Op. Cit., p. 259] With the changing social conditions in the US, the anarchist movement changed to. Hence the rise of communist-anarchism in addition to the more native individualist tradition and the change in Individualist Anarchism itself:

*"Green emphasised more strongly the **principle of association** than did Josiah Warren and more so than Spooner had done. Here too Proudhon's influence asserts itself. . . In principle there is essentially no difference between Warren and Proudhon. The difference between them arises from a dissimilarity of their respective environments. Proudhon lived in a country where the sub-division of labour made co-operation in social production essential, while Warren had to deal with predominantly small individual producers. For this reason Proudhon emphasised the **principle of association** far more than Warren and his followers did, although Warren was by no means opposed to this view." [Rudolf Rocker, **Pioneers of American Freedom**, p. 108]*

This social context is essential for understanding the thought of people like Greene, Spooner and Tucker. For example, as Stephen L. Newman points out, Spooner "*argues that every man ought to be his own employer, and he envisions a world of yeoman farmers and independent entrepreneurs.*" [Liberalism at Wit's End, p. 72] This sort of society was in the process of being destroyed when Spooner was writing. However, the Individualist Anarchists did not think this transformation was unstoppable and proposed, like other sections of US labour, various solutions to problems society faced. Moreover, they adjusted their own ideas to changing social circumstances as well, as can be seen by Greene's support for co-operatives ("*the principle of association*") as the only means of ending exploitation of labour by capital.

Therefore Rocker was correct when he argued that Individualist Anarchism was "*above all . . . rooted in the peculiar social conditions of America which differed fundamentally from those of Europe.*" [Op. Cit., p. 155] As these conditions changed, the viability of Individualist Anarchism's solution to the social problem decreased. Individualist Anarchism, argues Morgan Edwards, "*appears to have dwindled into political insignificance largely because of the erosion of its political-economic base, rather than*

*from a simple failure of strategy. With the impetus of the Civil War, capitalism and the State had too great a head start on the centralisation of economic and political life for the anarchists to catch up. This centralisation reduced the independence of the intellectual/professional and merchant artisan group that were the mainstay of the **Liberty** circle."* [Op. Cit., pp. 85-6]

By not taking into account these conditions, the ideas of the likes of Tucker and Spooner will be distorted beyond recognition. Similarly, by ignoring the changing nature of socialism in the face of a changing society and economy, the obvious socialistic aspects of their ideas will be lost. Ultimately, to analyse the Individualist Anarchists in an a-historic manner means to distort their ideas and ideals. Moreover, to apply those ideas in a non-artisan economy without the intention of radically transforming the socio-economic nature of that society towards one based on artisan production one would mean to create a society distinctly different than one they envisioned (see [section G.3](#)).

## G.2 Why does individualist anarchism imply socialism?

Here we present a short summary of why individualist anarchism implies socialism and not capitalism. While it is true that people like Tucker and Warren placed "property" at the heart of their vision of anarchy, this does not make them supporters of capitalism (see sections [G.2.1](#) and [G.2.2](#)). Unlike capitalists, the individualist anarchists identified "property" with simple "possession," or "*occupancy and use*" and considered profit, rent and interest as exploitation. Indeed, Tucker explicitly stated that "*all property rests on a labour title, and no other property do I favour.*" [**Instead of a Book**, p. 400] Because of this and their explicit opposition to usury (profits, rent and interest) and capitalist property, they could and did consider themselves as part of the wider socialist movement, the libertarian wing as opposed to the statist Marxist wing.

Individualist anarchists like Tucker strongly believed that a truly free (i.e. non-capitalist) market would ensure that the worker would receive the "*full product*" of his or her labour. Nevertheless, in order to claim Tucker as a proto-"anarcho"-capitalist, "anarcho"-capitalists may argue that capitalism pays the "market price" of labour power, and that this price **does** reflect the "*full product*" (or value) of the worker's labour.

As Tucker supported the Labour Theory of Value we doubt that he would have agreed with the "anarcho"-capitalist argument that market price of labour reflected the value it produced (see [Section C](#)). He, like the other individualist anarchists, was well aware that labour produces the "surplus wealth" which was appropriated in the name of interest, rent and profit. In other words, he very forcibly rejected the idea that the market price of labour reflects the value of that labour, considering "*the natural wage of labour is its product*" and "*that this wage, or product, is the only just source of income.*" [**Instead of a Book**, p. 6]

However, assuming that we accept the capitalist economic apologetics at their face value, such an argument fails to place Individualist Anarchism in the capitalist tradition. This is because the argument ignores the need to replace and improve upon existing capital. In the context of a market economy, the replacement and improvement of capital is important, as accumulation allows the reduction of labour costs (either directly or indirectly) by investing in new machinery or processes and so improving market position. In addition, capital investments are required in order to offer new services to the customer (for example, in banking, a network of auto-tellers). Either way, new capital is required. But new capital comes from value created by labour and realised as profits. And this means that in order to ensure that labour receives its due, companies **must** be co-operatives so that workers will have a say in how the profits they create are used, otherwise they do not get their "*natural wage.*" In addition, the ability to influence one's own destiny by having a voice in investment decisions is certainly another "value" that one's labour can produce beyond the exchange value to be invested. We might call it "self-determination value," which individualist anarchists certainly regarded as a benefit of the artisan/co-operative labour

they favoured (and their system implies). But workers will not be able to realise the full self-determination value of their labour nor receive its "*full product*" if investment decisions are not in their hands. Logically, therefore, individualist anarchism **must** tend towards co-operative, not capitalist, labour in order for them to receive the full value of their labour.

In addition, while it is true that in an economy with a very low degree of monopoly within industries prices **do** tend towards the production cost of a commodity, this cannot be said to occur instantaneously. This means that in an economy without oligopolies and without interest or rent, prices would tend, in the long run, towards Tucker's their "*labour cost of production*" this cannot be said to occur in the short run. Given that in the long run "*we are all dead*" (to use Keynes' words) -- i.e. that we may never see it -- any form of wage labour can lead to usury being recreated as workers would not receive their entire product back. That is, due to short term changes in price workers market wage may not equal what they produce. They **only** solution to this problem is workers' ownership and control as this ensures workers remain control of the product of their labour at all times (as well as the labour itself). **If**, as Tucker argued, "*the object of Anarchism . . . [is] to let every man [or woman] 'control self and the results of self-exertion'*" then this is only possible under workers' self-management and ownership. [**Occupancy and Use versus the Single Tax**] This, we must note, was Proudhon's argument and part of the reason he supported workers' co-operatives (we will discuss the problem of natural barriers to competition in [section G.4](#) along with the dangers associated with a lack of workers' control in a free society).

More importantly, wage labour violates two key aspects of Individualist Anarchist thought, namely its support for "*occupancy and use*" and its opposition to the state. We will discuss each in turn.

Obviously wage labour violates the idea that those who use something automatically own it. In the case of land and housing, the Individualist Anarchists argued that the person who lives or works on it (even under lease) would be regarded "*as the occupant and user of the land on which the house stands, and as the owner of the house itself,*" that is they become "*the owner of both land and house as soon as he becomes the occupant.*" [**Ibid.**] Now, to take a concrete example from Tucker's time, the 3 800 workers locked out by Carnegie at Homestead in 1892 definitely occupied and used the works from which they were barred entry by the owners. The owners, obviously, did not use the workplace themselves -- they hired **others** to occupy and use it **for** them. Now, why should "*occupancy and use*" be acceptable for land and housing but not for workplaces? There is no reason and so wage labour, logically, violates "*occupancy and use*" -- for under wage labour, those who occupy and use a workplace do not own or control it. Hence "*occupancy and use*" logically implies workers' control and ownership.

The reason why wage labour violates Individualist Anarchist opposition to the state for a related reason. If the workers who use a workplace do not own it, then someone else will (i.e. the owner). This in turn means that the owner can tell those who use the resource what to do, how to do it and when. That is, they are the sole authority over the workplace and those who use it. However, according to Tucker, the state can be defined (in part) as "*the assumption of sole authority over a given area and all within it.*" Tucker considered this element as "*common to all States.*" [**The Individualist Anarchists.** p. 24] Thus wage labour creates a situation which is similar to the state, namely the assumption of sole authority

over a given area and those who use it. Hence opposition to the state logically implies support for workers' control and ownership for only in this case can people govern themselves during the working day.

Therefore, as far as the employer/employee social relationship goes, it does not fit in well with Tucker's statement that *"if the individual has the right to govern himself, all external government is tyranny."* [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 151] As we have argued in Section B.4 ([How does capitalism affect liberty?](#)), wage labour produces a very specific form of *"external government"* in the workplace, namely hierarchical management structures. Therefore, logically, Individualist Anarchism (like Social Anarchism) must oppose all forms of wage labour in favour of self-government in production (i.e. co-operative, not wage, labour).

That this the case can be seen from Proudhon's argument in **The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century**. There he argues that employees are *"subordinated, exploited"* and their *"permanent condition is one of obedience,"* a *"slave."* [p. 216] Indeed, capitalist companies *"plunder the bodies and souls of wage workers"* and they are *"an outrage upon human dignity and personality."* [p. 218] However, in a co-operative the situation changes and the worker is an *"associate"* and *"forms a part of the producing organisation . . . [and] forms a part of the sovereign power, of which he was before but the subject."* [p. 216] Without co-operation and association, *"the workers . . . would remain related as subordinates and superiors, and there would ensue two industrial castes of masters and wage-workers, which is repugnant to a free and democratic society."* [p. 216] As Robert Graham notes, *"Proudhon's market socialism is indissolubly linked to his notions of industry democracy and workers' self-management."* ["Introduction", **General Idea of the Revolution**, p. xxxii]

And we must add that John Stuart Mill (who agreed with the Warrenite slogan *"Individual Sovereignty"*) faced with the same problem that wage labour made a mockery of individual liberty came to the same conclusion. He thought that if *"mankind is to continue to improve"* (and it can only improve within liberty, we must add) then in the end one form of association will predominate, *"not that which can exist between a capitalist as chief, and workpeople without a voice in management, but the association of the labourers themselves on terms of equality, collectively owning the capital with which they carry on their operations, and working under managers elected and removable by themselves."* [quoted by Carole Pateman, **Participation and Democratic Theory**, p. 34]

Therefore, logically, individualist anarchism must support co-operatives and self-employment in order to ensure the maximum individual self-government and labour's *"natural wage."* That this is the case can be seen from Tucker's quoting Ernest Lesigne that anarchistic socialism aims for *"The land to the cultivator. The mine to the miner. The tool to the labourer. The product to the producer."*

It can also be seen from Tucker's description of what would replace the current system of statism (and note he calls it *"scientific socialism"* thus squarely placing his ideas in the anti-capitalist camp):

*"we have something very tangible to offer , . . We offer non-compulsive organisation. We*

*offer associative combination. We offer every possible method of voluntary social union by which men and women may act together for the furtherance of well-being. In short, we offer voluntary scientific socialism in place of the present compulsory, unscientific organisation which characterises the State and all of its ramifications. . ."* [quoted in Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 218]

Tucker himself pointed out that *"the essence of government is control. . . He who attempts to control another is a governor, an aggressor, an invader."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 23] However, in places in **Instead of a Book** Tucker suggests that (non-exploitative, and so non-capitalist) wage labour could exist in individualist anarchy. Unlike wage labour under capitalism, workers would employ other workers and all workers would receive the full product of their labour. As such, this relationship is **non-capitalist** as it does not involve usury. Be that as it may, such relationships are not libertarian and so contradict Tucker's own theories on individual liberty (as Proudhon and Mill recognised with their own, similar, positions). Wage labour is based on the control of the worker by the employer; hence Tucker's contract theory can lead to a form of "voluntary" and "private" government within the workplace. This means that, while outside of a contract an individual is free, within it he or she is governed. This violates Tucker's concept of *"equality of liberty,"* since the boss has obviously more liberty than the worker during working hours.

This result, as noted in [section A.3](#), could **only** be avoided by workers' control, which is in fact the logical implication of Tucker's and other individualists' proposals (as we have proven above, and can be seen from Tucker's famous essay *"State Socialism and Anarchism"* for example). This is hardly a surprising implication, since as we've seen, artisan production was commonplace in 19th-century America and its benefits were extolled by the individualists. Without workers' control, individualist anarchism would soon become a form of capitalism and so statism -- a highly unlikely intention of individualists like Tucker, who hated both.

Therefore, given the assumptions of individualist anarchism in both their economic and political aspects, it is forced along the path of co-operative, not wage, labour. In other words, individualist anarchism is a form of socialism as workers receive the full product of their labour (i.e. there is no non-labour income) and this, in turn, logically implies a society in which self-managed firms compete against each other on the free market, with workers selling the product of their labour and not the labour itself. As this unites workers with the means of production they use, it is **not** capitalism and instead a form of socialism based upon worker ownership and control of the places they work.

For individualist anarchists not to support co-operatives results in a contradiction, namely that the individualist anarchism which aims to secure the worker's *"natural wage"* cannot in fact do so, while dividing society into a class of order givers and order takers (which violates individual self-government). It is this contradiction within Tucker's thought which the self-styled "anarcho"-capitalists take advantage of in order to maintain that individualist anarchism in fact implies capitalism (and so private-statism), not workers' control. In order to reach this implausible conclusion, a few individualist anarchist ideas are ripped from their social context and applied in a way that makes a mockery of them. That it was never

Tucker's intention to deny workers' control can be inferred from his argument that mutualism would give workers the bargaining power to obtain equality in the workplace, which clearly points to the end of capitalist authority relations, as will be explained further in [section G.5](#).

However, due to problems inherent in the nature of a market economy, even the assumption of workers' control may not be enough to ensure that individualistic anarchism does not become a new form of archy, as will be discussed in section G.4 (["Why do social anarchists reject individualist anarchism ideas?"](#)).

## G.2.1 What about their support of the free market?

Many, particularly on the libertarian right, would dismiss claims that the Individualist Anarchists were socialists. By their support of the "free market" the Individualist Anarchists, they would claim, show them as really supporters of capitalism. Most, if not all, anarchists would reject this claim. Why is this the case?

This because such claims show an amazing ignorance of socialist ideas and history. The socialist movement has had a many schools, many of which, but not all, opposed the market and private property. Given that the right-libertarians who make such claims are not well informed of the ideas they oppose (i. e. of socialism, particularly **libertarian** socialism) it is unsurprising they claim that the Individualist Anarchists are not socialists (of course the fact that many Individualist Anarchists argued they **were** socialists is ignored). Coming from a different tradition, it is unsurprising they are not aware of the fact that socialism is not monolithic. Hence we discover right-libertarian guru von Mises claiming that the *"essence of socialism is the entire elimination of the market."* [**Human Action**, p. 702] This would have come as something of a surprise to, say, Proudhon, who argued that *"[t]o suppress competition is to suppress liberty itself."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 50] Similarly, it would have surprised Tucker, who called himself a socialist while supporting a freer market than von Mises ever dreamt of.

Part of the problem, of course, is that the same word often means different things to different people. Both Kropotkin and Lenin said they were "communists" and aimed for "communism." However, it does not mean that the society Kropotkin aimed for was the same as that desired by Lenin. Kropotkin's communism was decentralised, created and run from the bottom-up while Lenin's was fundamentally centralised. Similarly, both Tucker and the Social-Democrat (and leading Marxist) Karl Kautsky called themselves a "socialist" yet their ideas on what a socialist society would be like were extremely different. As J.W. Baker notes, *"Tucker considered himself a socialist . . . as the result of his struggle against 'usury and capitalism,' but anything that smelled of 'state socialism' was thoroughly rejected."* [*"Native American Anarchism,"* **The Raven**, pp. 43-62, vol. 10, no. 1, p. 60] This, of course, does not stop many "anarcho"-capitalists talking about "socialist" goals as if all socialists were Stalinists (or, at best, social democrats). In fact, "socialist anarchism" has included (and continues to include) advocates of truly free markets as well as advocates of a non-market socialism which has absolutely nothing in common with the state capitalist tyranny of Stalinism. Similarly, they accept a completely ahistorical definition of "capitalism," so ignoring the massive state violence and support by which that

system was created and is maintained.

The same with terms like "property" and the "free market," which by the "anarcho"-capitalist assumes the individualist anarchist means the same thing as they do. We can take land as an example. The individualist anarchists argued for an "*occupancy and use*" system of "property" (see [section G.2.2](#)). Thus in their "free market," land would not be a commodity as it is under capitalism. Thus, under individualist anarchism, absentee landlords would be considered as aggressors (and under capitalism, using state coercion to back up their collection of rent against the actual occupiers of property). Tucker argued that local defence associations should treat the occupier and user as the rightful owner, and defend them against the aggression of an absentee landlord who attempted to collect rent. An "anarcho"-capitalist would consider this as aggression **against** the landlord and a violation of "free market" principles. Similarly, if we apply the mutualist understanding of land to the workplace, we would treat the workers in a factory as the rightful owners, on the basis of occupation and use; at the same time, we could treat the share owners and capitalists as aggressors for attempting to force their representatives as managers on those actually occupying and using the premises. Again, such a system of "occupancy and use" would involve massive violations of what is considered normal in a capitalist "free market."

In other words, an individualist anarchist would consider an "anarcho"-capitalist "free market" as nothing of the kind and vice versa. For the "anarcho"-capitalist, the individualist anarchist position on "property" would be considered as forms of regulation and restrictions on private property and so the "free market." The individualist anarchist would consider the "anarcho"-capitalist "free market" as another system of legally maintained privilege, with the free market distorted in favour of the wealthy.

Therefore it should be remembered that "anarcho"-capitalists at best agree with Tucker, Spooner, et al on fairly vague notions like the "free market." They do not bother to find out what the individualist anarchists meant by that term. Indeed, the "anarcho"-capitalist embrace of different economic theories means that they actually reject the reasoning that leads up to these nominal "agreements." It is the "anarcho"-capitalists who, by rejecting the underlying economics of the mutualists, are forced to take any "agreements" out of context. It also means that when faced with obviously anti-capitalist arguments and conclusions of the individualist anarchists, the "anarcho"-capitalist cannot explain them and are reduced to arguing that the anti-capitalist concepts and opinions expressed by the likes of Tucker are somehow "out of context." In contrast, the anarchist can explain these so-called "out of context" concepts by placing them into the context of the ideas of the individualist anarchists and the society which shaped them.

The "anarcho"-capitalist usually admits that they totally disagree with many of the essential premises of Spooner's and Tucker's analyses. The most basic difference is that the individualist anarchists rooted their ideas in the labour theory of value while the "anarcho"-capitalists favour the subjective theory. It does not take much thought to realise that advocates of labour theories and those of subjective theories of value will naturally develop differing notions of what is and what should be happening within a given economic system. One difference that **has** in fact arisen is that the notion of what constitutes a "free market" has differed according to the theory of value applied. Many things can be attributed to the



workings of a "free" market under a subjective analysis that would be considered symptoms of economic unfreedom under most labour-theory driven analyses.

This can be seen if you look closely at the case of Tucker's comments that anarchism was simply "consistent Manchesterianism." If this is done then a simple example of this potential confusion can be found. Tucker argued that anarchists "*accused*" the Manchester men "*of being inconsistent,*" that while being in favour of laissez faire for "*the labourer in order to reduce his wages*" they did not believe "*in liberty to compete with the capitalist in order to reduce his usury.*" [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 83] To be consistent in this case is to be something other -- and more demanding in terms of what is accepted as "freedom" -- than the average Manchesterian (i.e. a supporter of "free market" capitalism). Partisans of the subjective theory see things differently, of course, feeling justified in calling many things "free" that anarchists would not accept, and seeing "constraint" in what they simply thought of as "consistency."

Therefore it should be pretty clear that a "free market" will look somewhat different depending on your economic presuppositions. Ironically, therefore, "anarcho"-capitalists admit they do not agree with the likes of Spooner and Tucker on key premises, but then claim -- despite all that -- that it is anarchists who "reject" them. Moreover, the "anarcho"-capitalist simply dismisses all the reasoning that got Tucker there -- that is like trying to justify a law citing Leviticus but then saying "but of course all that God stuff is just absurd." You cannot have it both ways. And, of course, the "anarcho"-capitalist support for non-labour based economics allow them to side-step (and so ignore) much of what anarchists -- communists, collectivists, individualists, mutualists and syndicalists alike -- consider authoritarian and coercive about "actually existing" capitalism. But the difference in value theories is critical. No matter what they are called, it is pretty clear that individualist anarchist standards for the freedom of markets are far more demanding than those associated with even the freest capitalist market system.

In summary, the "free market" as sought by (say) Tucker would not be classed as a "free market" by right-wing "libertarians." So the term "free market" (and, of course, "socialism") can mean different things to different people. As such, it would be correct to state that **all** anarchists oppose the "free market" by definition as all anarchists oppose the **capitalist** "free market." And, just as correctly, "anarcho"-capitalists would oppose the mutualist "free market," arguing that it would be no such thing as it would be restrictive of property rights (**capitalist** property rights of course). For example, the question of resource use in a mutualist society is totally different than in a capitalist "free market" as landlordism would not exist. This is a restriction on capitalist property rights and a violation of a capitalist "free market." So a mutualist "free market" would not be considered so by right-wing "libertarians" due to the substantial differences in the rights on which it would be based (with no right to capitalist private property being the most important).

All this means that to go on and on about Tucker's (or Spooner's et al) feelings about a free market simply misses the point. No one denies that Tucker (or Spooner) was in favour of the "free market" but he did not mean the same kind of "free market" desired by "anarcho"-capitalism or that has existed under capitalism. For example, as we note in [section G.4](#), Tucker was well aware of the impact of

inequalities in wealth in the economy. In 1911 he argued that economic inequality was so large that it meant individualist anarchism was impossible. If, as "anarcho"-capitalists claim, Tucker supported the "free market" above all else then he would not have argued this point. Clearly, then, Tucker's support for the "free market" cannot be abstracted from his fundamental principles nor can it be equated with a "free market" based on capitalist property rights and massive inequalities in wealth (and so economic power). Thus individualist anarchist support for the free market does not mean support for a **capitalist** "free market."

Little wonder, then, that the likes of Tucker considered themselves socialists and stated numerous times that they were.

It could be argued that these self-proclaimed socialists did not, in fact, understand what socialism "really meant." For this to be the case, **other**, more obviously socialist, writers and thinkers would dismiss them as socialists. This, however, is not the case. Thus we find Karl Marx, for example, writing of *"the socialism of Proudhon."* [**Capital**, vol. 1, p. 161f] Engels talked about Proudhon being *"the Socialist of the small peasant and master-craftsman"* and of *"the Proudhon school of Socialism."* [Marx and Engels, **Selected Works**, p. 254 and p. 255] Bakunin talked about Proudhon's *"socialism, based on individual and collective liberty and upon the spontaneous action of free associations."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 100] These renown socialists did not consider Proudhon's position to be in any way anti-socialist.

Looking at Tucker and the Individualist anarchists we discover that other socialists considered them socialists. Looking at Rudolf Rocker we discover him arguing that *"it is not difficult to discover certain fundamental principles which are common to all of them and which divide them from all other varieties of socialism. They all agree on the point that man be given the full reward of his labour and recognise in this right the economic basis of all personal liberty. They all regard the free competition of individual and social forces as something inherent in human nature . . . They answered the socialists of other schools who saw in **free competition** one of the destructive elements of capitalist society that the evil lies in the fact we have too little rather than too much competition, since the power of monopoly has made competition impossible."* [**Pioneers of American Freedom**, p. 160]

Adolph Fischer, one of the Haymarket Martyrs and contemporary of Tucker, argued that *"every anarchist is a socialist, but every socialist is not necessarily an anarchist. The anarchists are divided into two factions: the communistic anarchists and the Proudhon or middle-class anarchists . . ."* The former *"advocate the communistic or co-operative method of production"* while the latter *"do not advocate the co-operative system of production [i.e. communism], and the common ownership of the means of production, the products and the land."* [**The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs**, p. 81] However, while not being communists (i.e. aiming to eliminate the market), he obviously recognised the Individualists Anarchists as fellow socialists (we should point out that Proudhon **did** support co-operatives, as did the Individualist Anarchists, but they did not carry this to communism as do most social anarchists -- as is clear, Fischer means communism by the term *"co-operative system of production"* rather than co-operatives as they exist today and Proudhon supported).

Thus claims that the Individualist Anarchists were not "really" socialists because they support competition are false. The simple fact is that those who make this claim are ignorant of the socialist movement, its ideas and its history (or desire, like many Marxists, to write out of history competing socialist theories). As Tucker argued, *"the fact that State Socialism . . . has overshadowed other forms of Socialism gives it no right to a monopoly of the Socialistic idea."* [**Instead of a Book**, pp. 363-4] It is no surprise that the authoritarian left and "libertarian" right have united to define socialism in such a way as to eliminate anarchism from its ranks -- they both have an interest in removing a theory which exposes the inadequacies of their dogmas, which explains how we can have both liberty **and** equality, have freedom in work **and** outside it and have a decent, free and just society.

So why is Individualist Anarchism and Proudhon's mutualism socialist? Simply because they opposed the exploitation of labour by capital and proposed a means of ending it. Therefore, if socialism is, to quote Kropotkin, *"understood in its wide, generic, and true sense"* as *"an effort to abolish the exploitation of labour by capital"* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 169] then the Individualist Anarchists and Proudhon must be considered socialists (of course **libertarian** socialists) due to their opposition to usury. It is for this reason we discover Rudolf Rocker arguing that Stephan P. Andrews was *"one of the most versatile and significant exponents of libertarian socialism"* in the USA in spite of his belief that *"the specific cause of the economic evil [of capitalism] is founded not on the existence of the wage system"* but, rather, on the exploitation of labour, *"on the unjust compensation of the worker"* and the usury that *"deprives him of a part of his labour."* [**Pioneers of American Freedom**, p. 85 and pp. 77-8] His opposition to exploitation meant he was a socialist, an opposition which individualist anarchism was rooted in from its earliest days and the ideas of Josiah Warren:

*"The aim was to circumvent the exploitation inherent in capitalism, which Warren characterised as a sort of 'civilised cannibalism,' by exchanging goods on co-operative rather than supply and demand principles."* [J.W. Baker, *"Native American Anarchism,"* **The Raven**, pp. 43-62, vol. 10, no. 1, p. 51]

The individualist anarchists considered it as a truism that in their society the exploitation of labour could not exist. Thus even if some workers did sell their liberty, they would still receive the full product of their labour. Thus accumulation of capital would be non-existent, so a general equality would prevail and so economic power would not undermine liberty. Remove this underlying assumption, assume that profits could be made and capital accumulated, assume that land can be monopolised by landlords (as the "anarcho"-capitalists do) and a radically different society is produced. One in which economic power means that the vast majority have to sell themselves to get access to the means of life. A condition of "free markets" may exist, but as Tucker argued in 1911, it would not be anarchism. The *deus ex machina* of invisible hands takes a beating in the age of monopolies.

## G.2.2 What about their support of "private property"?

The notion that because the Individualist Anarchists supported "property" they supported capitalism is distinctly wrong. This is for two reasons. Firstly, private property is not the distinctive aspect of

capitalism -- exploitation and wage labour is. Thus support of private property does not indicate a support for capitalism. Even use of John Locke's arguments in favour of private property could be used against capitalism. As Murray Bookchin makes clear regarding early American society:

*"Unknown in the 1640s, the non-bourgeois aspects of Locke's theories were very much in the air a century and a half later . . . [In an artisan/peasant society] a Lockean argument could be used as effectively against the merchants . . . to whom the farmers were indebted, as it could against the King [or the State]. Nor did the small proprietors of America ever quite lose sight of the view that attempts to seize their farmsteads and possessions for unpaid debts were a violation of their 'natural rights,' and from the 1770s until as late as the 1930s they took up arms to keep merchants and bankers from dispossessing them from land they or their ancestors had wrestled from 'nature' by virtue of their own labour. The notion that property was sacred was thus highly elastic: it could be used as effectively by pre-capitalist strata to hold on to their property as it could by capitalists strata to expand their holdings."* [**The Third Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 187-8]

What right-libertarians do is to confuse two very different kinds of "property," one of which rests on the labour of the producer themselves and the other on the exploitation of the labour of others. They do not analyse the social relationships between people which the property generates and, instead, concentrate on **things** (i.e. property). Thus, rather than being interested in people and the relationships they create between themselves, the right-libertarian focuses on property (and, more often than not, just the word rather than what the word describes). This is a strange position for someone seeking liberty to take, as liberty is a product of social interaction (i.e. the relations we have and create with others) and not a product of things (property is not freedom as freedom is a relationship between people, not things). In effect, they confuse property with possession (and vice versa).

And if quoting Karl Marx is not **too** out of place, we discover that he did not consider property as being identical with capitalism. *"The historical conditions of [Capital's] existence are by no means given with the mere circulation of money and commodities. It arises only when the owner of the means of production and subsistence finds the free worker available on the market, as the seller of his own labour-power."* This wage-labour is the necessary pre-condition for capitalism, **not** "private property" as such. Thus artisan/peasant production is not capitalism as *"the means of production and subsistence, while they remain the property of the immediate producer, are not capital. They only become capital under circumstances in which they serve at the same time as means of exploitation of, and domination over, the worker."* [**Capital**, vol. 1, p. 264 and p. 938] We quote Marx simply because as authorities on socialism go, he is one that right-libertarians (or Marxists, for that matter) cannot ignore or dismiss. Needless to say, he is essentially repeating Proudhon's distinction between property and possession. The former is theft and despotism, the latter is liberty. In other words, for anarchists, "property" is a **social relation** and that a key element of anarchist thinking (both social and individualist) was the need to redefine that relation in accord with standards of liberty and justice.

Thus artisan production is not capitalist. It does not generate relationships of exploitation and domination as the worker owns and controls their own means of production. It is, in effect, a form of

socialism (a "*petit bourgeois*" form of socialism, to use the typical Marxist phrase). Thus support for "private property" need not mean support for capitalism (as shown, for example, by the Individualist Anarchists). To claim otherwise is to ignore the essential insight of socialism and totally distort the socialist case against capitalism.

Secondly, and more importantly, what the Individualist Anarchists meant by "private property" (or "property") was distinctly different than what is meant by theorists on the libertarian right. Basically, the libertarian right exploit, for their own ends, the confusion generated by the use of the word "property" by the likes of Tucker to describe a situation of "possession." Proudhon recognised this danger. He argued that "*it is proper to call different things by different names, if we keep the name 'property' for the former [individual possession], we must call the latter [the domain of property] robbery, repine, brigandage. If, on the contrary, we reserve the name 'property' for the latter, we must designate the former by the term **possession** or some other equivalent; otherwise we should be troubled with an unpleasant synonym.*" [**What is Property?**, p. 373] Unfortunately Tucker, who translated this work, did not heed Proudhon's words of wisdom and called possession in an anarchist society by the word "property."

Looking at Tucker's arguments, it is clear that the last thing Tucker supported was capitalist property rights. For example, he argued that "*property, in the sense of individual possession, is liberty*" and contrasted this with capitalist property. [**Instead of a Book**, p. 394] That his ideas on "property" were somewhat different than that associated with right-libertarian thinkers is most clearly seen with regards to land. Here we discover him advocating "*occupancy and use*" and rejecting the "right" of land owners to bar the landless from any land they owned but did not **personally** use. Rent was "*due to that denial of liberty which takes the shape of land monopoly, vesting titles to land in individuals and associations which do not use it, and thereby compelling the non-owning users to pay tribute to the non-using owners as a condition of admission to the competitive market.*" Anarchist opposition of rent did "*not mean simply the freeing of unoccupied land. It means the freeing of all land not occupied by the owner. In other words, it means land ownership limited by occupancy and use.*" [Tucker, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 130 and p. 155] This would result in a "*system of occupying ownership . . . accompanied by no legal power to collect rent.*" [**Instead of a Book**, p. 325]

A similar position was held by John Beverley Robinson. He argued that there "*are two kinds of land ownership, proprietorship or property, by which the owner is absolute lord of the land, to use it or to hold it out of use, as it may please him; and possession, by which he is secure in the tenure of land which he uses and occupies, but has no claim upon it at all of he ceases to use it.*" Moreover, "*[a]ll that is necessary to do away with Rent is to away with absolute property in land.*" [**Patterns of Anarchy**, p. 272]

Thus the Individualist Anarchists definition of "property" differed considerably from that of the capitalist definition. As they themselves acknowledge. Robinson argued that "*the only real remedy is a change of heart, through which land using will be recognised as proper and legitimate, but land holding will be regarded as robbery and piracy.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 273] Tucker, likewise, indicated that his ideas on "property" were not the same as existing ones when he argued that "*the present system of land tenure should be changed to one of occupancy and use*" and that "*no advocate of occupancy-and-use tenure of*

*land believes that it can be put in force, until as a theory it has been as generally . . . seen and accepted as is the prevailing theory of ordinary private property.*" [**Occupancy and Use verses the Single Tax**]

Hence to claim that the Individualist Anarchists supported capitalist property rights is false. As can be seen, they advocated a system which differed significantly to the current system, indeed they urged the restriction of property rights to a form of possession. Unfortunately, by generally using the term "property" to describe this new system of possession they generated exactly the confusion that Proudhon foretold. Sadly, right-libertarians use this confusion to promote the idea that the likes of Tucker supported capitalist property rights and so capitalism.

For these two reasons it is clear that just because the Individualist Anarchists supported (a form of) "property" does not mean they are capitalists. Indeed, Kropotkin argued that a communist-anarchist revolution would **not** expropriate the tools of self-employed workers who exploited no-one (see his **Act for Yourselves** pp. 104-5). Malatesta argued that in a free society *"the peasant [is free] to cultivate his piece of land, alone if he wishes; free is the shoe maker to remain at his last or the blacksmith in his small forge."* Thus these two very famous communist-anarchists also "supported" "property" but they are recognised as obviously socialists. This apparent contradiction is resolved when it is understood that for communist-anarchists (like all anarchists) the abolition of property does not mean the end of possession and so *"would not harm the independent worker whose real title is possession and the work done"* unlike capitalist property. [Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 103] In other words, **all** anarchists (as we argue in [section B.3](#)) oppose private property but support possession.

That many of the Individualist Anarchists used the term "property" to describe a system of possession (or *"occupancy-and-use"*) should not blind us to the anti-capitalist nature of that "property." Once we move beyond looking at the words they used to what they meant by those words we clearly see that their ideas are distinctly different from those of supporters of capitalism.

# Section C - What are the myths of capitalist economics?

## Introduction

### C.1 What determines prices within capitalism?

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C.1.3 What else affects price levels?

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**C.10 Will "free market" capitalism benefit everyone, especially the poor?**



## C.11 Doesn't Chile prove that the free market benefits everyone?

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## C.12 Doesn't Hong Kong show the potentials of "free market" capitalism?

# Section C - What are the myths of capitalist economics?

Within capitalism, economics plays an important ideological role. Economics has been used to construct a theory from which exploitation and oppression are excluded, by definition. We will attempt here to explain why capitalism is deeply exploitative. Elsewhere, in [section B](#), we have indicated why capitalism is oppressive and will not repeat ourselves here.

In many ways economics plays the role within capitalism that religion played in the Middle Ages, namely to provide justification for the dominant social system and hierarchies (indeed, one neo-classical economist said that "[u]ntil the econometricians have the answer for us, placing reliance upon neo-classical economic theory is a matter of faith," which, of course, he had [C.E. Ferguson, **The Neo-classical Theory of Production and Distribution**, p. xvii]). Like religion, its basis in science is usually lacking and its theories more based upon "leaps of faith" than empirical fact. In the process of our discussion in this section we will often expose the ideological apologetics that capitalist economics create to defend the status quo and the system of oppression and exploitation it produces.

Indeed, the weakness of economics is even acknowledged by a few within the profession itself. According to Paul Ormerod, *"orthodox economics is in many ways an empty box. Its understanding of the world is similar to that of the physical sciences in the Middle Ages. A few insights have been obtained which stand the test of time, but they are very few indeed, and the whole basis of conventional economics is deeply flawed."* Moreover, he notes the *"overwhelming empirical evidence against the validity of its theories."* [**The Death of Economics**, p. ix, p. 67]

It is rare to see an economist be so honest. The majority of economists seem happy to go on with their theories, trying to squeeze life into the Procrustean bed of their models. And, like the priests of old, make it hard for non-academics to question their dogmas. As Ormerod notes, *"economics is often intimidating. Its practitioners. . . have erected around the discipline a barrier of jargon and mathematics which makes the subject difficult to penetrate for the non-initiated."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. ix]

So here we try to get to the heart of modern capitalism, cutting through the ideological myths that supporters of the system have created around it. Here we expose the apologetics for what they are, expose the ideological role of economics as a means to justify, indeed ignore, exploitation and oppression. As an example, let us take a workers wage.

For most capitalist economics, a given wage is supposed to be equal to the "marginal contribution" that an individual makes to a given company. Are we **really** expected to believe this? Common sense (and empirical evidence) suggests otherwise. Consider Mr. Rand Araskog, the CEO of ITT, who in 1990 was paid a salary of \$7 million. Is it conceivable that an ITT accountant calculated that, all else being the same, ITT's \$20.4 billion in revenues that year would have been \$7 million less without Mr. Araskog --

hence determining his marginal contribution to be \$7 million?

In 1979 the average CEO in the US received 29 times more income than the average manufacturing worker; by 1985 the ratio had risen to 40 times more, and by 1988 it had risen to 93 times more. This disturbing trend led even conservative **Business Week** to opine that the excesses of corporate leaders might finally be getting out of hand (Kevin Phillips, **The Politics of Rich and Poor: Wealth and the American Electorate in the Reagan Aftermath**, p. 180). The warning apparently went unheeded, however, because by 1990 the average American CEO was earning about 100 times more than the average factory worker (Tom Athanasiou, "After the Summit," **Socialist Review** 92/4 (October-December, 1992)). Yet during the same period, workers' real wages remained flat. Are we to believe that during the 1980s, the marginal contribution of CEOs more than tripled whereas workers' marginal contributions remained stagnant?

Taking another example, if workers create only the equivalent of what they are paid, how can that explain why, in a recent ACM study of wages in the computer fields, it was found that black workers get paid less (on average) than white ones doing the same job (even in the same workplace)? Does having white skin increase a worker's creative ability when producing the same goods? And it seems a strange coincidence that the people with power in a company, when working out who contributes most to a product, decide it's themselves!

So what is the reason for this extreme wage difference? Simply put, it's due to the totalitarian nature of capitalist firms. Those at the bottom of the company have no say in what happens within it; so as long as the share-owners are happy, wage differentials will rise and rise (particularly when top management own large amounts of shares!). (The totalitarian nature of private property has been discussed earlier -- see [section B.4](#)).

A good manager is one who reduces the power of the company's employees, allowing an increased share of the wealth produced by those employees to go to those on top. Yet without the creativity and energy of the engineers, the shop floor workers, the administrative staff, etc., the company would have literally **nothing** to sell.

It is capitalist property relations that allow this monopolisation of wealth by those who own (or boss) but do not produce. The workers do not get the full value of what they produce, nor do they have a say in how the surplus value produced by their labour gets used (e.g. investment decisions). Others have monopolised both the wealth produced by workers and the decision-making power within the company. This is a private form of taxation without representation, just as the company is a private form of statism.

Of course, it could be argued that the owning class provide the capital without which the worker could not produce. But where does capital come from? From profits, which represent the unpaid labour of past generations. And before that? From the tribute of serfs to their feudal masters. And before that? The right of conquest which imposed feudalism on the peasants. And before that? Well, the point is made.

Every generation of property owners gets a "free lunch" due to the obvious fact that we inherit the ideas and constructions of past generations, such as our current notion of property rights. Capitalism places the dead hand of the past on living generations, strangling the individuality of the many for the privilege of the few. Whether we break free of this burden and take a new direction depends on the individuals who are alive **now**.

In the sections that follow, the exploitative nature of capitalism is explained in greater detail. We would like to point out that for anarchists, exploitation is not more important than domination. Anarchists are opposed to both equally and consider them to be two sides of the same coin. You cannot have domination without exploitation nor exploitation without domination. As Emma Goldman pointed out, under capitalism:

*"Man is being robbed not merely of the products of his labour, but of the power of free initiative, of originality, and the interest in, or desire for, the things he is making."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 53]

## J.6 What methods of child rearing do anarchists advocate?

Anarchists have long been aware of the importance of child rearing and education. As such, we are aware that child rearing should aim to develop "*a well-rounded individuality*" and not "*a patient work slave, professional automaton, tax-paying citizen, or righteous moralist.*" [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, p. 108] In this section of the FAQ we will discuss anarchist approaches to child rearing bearing in mind "*that it is through the channel of the child that the development of the mature man must go, and that the present ideas of. . . educating or training. . . are such as to stifle the natural growth of the child.*" [**Ibid.**, p. 107]

If one accepts the thesis that the authoritarian family is the breeding ground for both individual psychological problems and political reaction, it follows that anarchists should try to develop ways of raising children that will not psychologically cripple them but instead enable them to accept freedom and responsibility while developing natural self-regulation. We will refer to children raised in such a way as "*free children.*"

Work in this field is still in its infancy (no pun intended). Wilhelm Reich is again the main pioneer in this field (an excellent, short introduction to his ideas can be found in Maurice Brinton's **The Irrational in Politics**). In **Children of the Future**, Reich made numerous suggestions, based on his research and clinical experience, for parents, psychologists, and educators striving to develop libertarian methods of child rearing. (He did not use the term "libertarian," but that is what his methods are.)

Hence, in this and the following sections we will summarise Reich's main ideas as well as those of other libertarian psychologists and educators who have been influenced by him, such as A.S. Neill and Alexander Lowen. Section [J.6.1](#) will examine the theoretical principles involved in raising free children, while subsequent sections will illustrate their practical application with concrete examples. Finally, in section [J.6.8](#), we will examine the anarchist approach to the problems of adolescence.

Such an approach to child rearing is based upon the insight that children "*do not constitute anyone's property: they are neither the property of the parents nor even of society. They belong only to their own future freedom.*" [Michael Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 327] As such, what happens to a child when it is growing up **shapes** the person they become and the society they live in. The key question for people interested in freedom is whether "*the child [is] to be considered as an individuality, or as an object to be moulded according to the whims and fancies of those about it?*" [Emma Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 107] Libertarian child rearing is the means by which the individuality of the child is respected and developed.

This is in stark contrast to standard capitalist (and individualist anarchist we should note) claim that

children are the **property** of their parents. If we accept that children **are** the property of their parents then we are implicitly stating that a child's formative years are spent in slavery, hardly a relationship which will promote the individuality and freedom of the child or the wider society. Little wonder that most anarchists reject such assertions. Instead they argue that the *"rights of the parents shall be confined to loving their children and exercising over them . . . authority [that] does not run counter to their morality, their mental development, or their future freedom."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 327] Being someone's property (i.e. slave) runs counter to all these and *"it follows that society, the whole future of which depends upon adequate education and upbringing of children. . . , has not only the right but also the duty to watch over them..."* [**Ibid.**, p. 327]

Hence child rearing is **part** of society, a communal process by which children learn what it means to be an individual by being respected as one by others. In Bakunin's words, *"real freedom - that is, the full awareness and the realisation thereof in every individual, pre-eminently based upon a feeling of one's dignity and upon the genuine respect for someone else's freedom and dignity, i.e. upon justice - such freedom can develop in children only through the rational development of their minds, character and will."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 327]

We wish to point out at the beginning that a great deal of work remains to be done in this field. Therefore our comments should be regarded merely as tentative bases for further reflection and research by those involved with raising and educating children. There is, and cannot be, any "rule book" for raising free children, because to follow an inflexible rule book is to ignore the fact that each child and its environment is unique and therefore demands unique responses from its parents. Hence the "principles" of libertarian child rearing to which we will refer should not be thought of as rules, but rather, as experimental hypotheses to be tested by parents within their own situation by applying their intelligence and deriving their own individual conclusions.

Bringing up children must be like education, and based on similar principles, namely *"upon the free growth and development of the innate forces and tendencies of the child. In this way alone can we hope for the free individual and eventually also for a free community, which shall make interference and coercion of human growth impossible."* [Goldman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 115] Indeed, child rearing and education **cannot** be separated as life itself is an education and so must share the same principles and viewed as a process of *"development and exploration, rather than as one of repressing a child's instincts and inculcating obedience and discipline."* [Martha A. Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, p. 132]

Moreover, the role of parental example is very important to raising free children. Children often learn by mimicking their parents - children do what their parents do, not as they say. If their mother and father lie to each other, scream, fight and so on, then the child will probably do so as well. Children's behaviour does not come out thin air, they are a product of the environment they are brought up in (partly by, initially at least, copying the parent). Children can only be encouraged by example, not by threats and commands. How parents act can be an obstacle to the development of a free child. Parents must, therefore, be aware that they must do more than just **say** the right things, but also act as anarchists in order to produce free children.

The sad fact is that most modern people have lost the ability to raise free children, and regaining this ability will be a long process of trial and error and parent education in which it is to be hoped that each succeeding generation will learn from the failures and successes of their predecessors, and so improve. In the best-case scenario, over the course of a few generations the number of progressive parents will continue to grow and raise ever freer children, who in turn will become even more progressive parents themselves, thus gradually changing mass psychology in a libertarian direction. Such changes **can** come about very fast, as can be seen from various communes all over the world and especially in the Israel-Palestine kibbutz where society is organised according to libertarian principles, and children are mainly growing in their collective homes. As Reich puts it:

*"We have learned that instead of a jump into the realm of the Children of the Future, we can hope for no more than a steady advance, in which the healthy new overlaps the sick old structure, with the new slowly outgrowing the old."* [**Children of the Future**, pp. 38-39]

By means of freedom-based child rearing and education, along with other methods of consciousness raising, as well as encouraging resistance to the existing social order anarchists hope to prepare the psychological foundation for a social paradigm shift, from authoritarian to libertarian institutions and values. And indeed, a gradual cultural evolution toward increasing freedom does seem to exist. For example, as A.S. Neill writes in **Summerhill**, *"There is a slow trend to freedom, sexual and otherwise. In my boyhood, a woman went bathing wearing stockings and a long dress. Today, women show legs and bodies. Children are getting more freedom with every generation. Today, only a few lunatics put cayenne pepper on a baby's thumb to stop sucking. Today, only a few countries beat their children in school."* [p. 115]

Most anarchists believe that, just as charity begins at home, so does the anarchist revolution. As some anarchists raise their own children in capitalist society and/or are involved in the raising and education of the children of other parents, they can practice in part libertarian principles even before the revolution. Hence we think it is important to discuss libertarian child rearing in some detail.

## **J.6.1 What are the main principles of raising free children and the main obstacles to implementing those principles?**

Let's consider the obstacles first. As Reich points out, the biggest one is the training and character of most parents, physicians, and educators. Based on his clinical experience, Reich maintained that virtually all adults in our society have some degree of psychological problems, which is manifested somatically as a rigid muscular *"armour"*: chronic muscular tensions and spasms in various regions of the body. One of the main functions of this armour is to inhibit the pleasurable sensations of life-energy that naturally *"stream"* or flow through an unarmoured body. Reich postulated that there is one basic bioenergy (*"orgone"*) in the body, identical with what Freud called *"libido,"* which, besides animating the tissues and organs is also the energy of sex and the emotions (we should note that most anarchists do

not subscribe to Reich's idea of "orgone" - the existence of which, we may note, has not been proved. However, the idea of character armour, by which individuals within a hierarchical society create psychological walls/defences around themselves is one most anarchists accept. Such walls will obviously have an effect both on the mental and physical state of the individual, and their capacity for living a free life and experiencing pleasure). This means that the pleasurable "streamings" of this bioenergy, which can be felt when the muscular armour is relaxed, have an erotic or "libidinous" quality. Thus an unarmoured organism (such as a new-born infant) automatically experiences pleasure with every breath, a pleasure derived from perception of the natural bioenergetic processes within its body. Such a mode of being in the world makes life intrinsically worth living and renders superfluous all questions about its "meaning" or "purpose" -- questions that occur only to armoured people, who have lost contact with their bioenergetic core of bodily sensations (or it is distorted, and so is changed from a source of pleasures to a source of suffering) and thus restricts their capacity to fully enjoy life.

It is important for those involved in child rearing and education to understand how armouring develops in the new-born child. Reich points out that under the influence of a compulsive, pleasure-denying morality, children are taught to inhibit the spontaneous flow of life-energy in the body. Similarly, they are taught to disregard most bodily sensations. Due to Oedipal conflicts in the patriarchal family (see below), parents usually take the most severely repressive disciplinary measures against sexual expressions of life-energy in children. Thus, all erotic feelings, including the erotically-tinged "streaming" sensations, come to be regarded as "bad," "animalistic," etc., and so their perception begins to arouse anxiety, which leads, among other bad results, to chronic muscular tensions as a way of cutting off or defending against such perceptions and their attendant anxiety. Shallow breathing, for example, reduces the amount of life-energy available to flow into excitation and emotion; tightening the muscles of the pelvic floor and abdomen reduces sexual feelings, and so on. As these tensions become chronic and unconscious, piling up in layer after layer of muscular armour, the person is eventually left with a feeling of inner emptiness or "deadness" and -- not surprisingly -- a lack of joy in life.

For those who fail to build a stable physical and psychological armour around themselves to suppress these feelings and sensation, they just twist them and are flooded again and again with intense unpleasant feelings and sensations.

Muscular armouring has its most profound effect on back pains and various respiration problems. Reich found that the "normal" man or woman in our society **cannot** spontaneously take full, deep, natural breaths, which involves both the chest and abdomen. Instead, most people (except when making a conscious effort) restrict their breathing through unconscious tensing of various muscles. Since the natural response to any restriction in the ability to breathe is anxiety, people growing up in repressive cultures such as ours are plagued by a tendency toward chronic anxiety. As a defence against this anxiety, they develop further layers of muscular armouring, which further restricts their ability to breathe, and so on, in a vicious circle. In other words, it is **literally** true that, as Max Stirner said, one cannot "*take breath*" in our authoritarian society with its life-denying atmosphere based on punishments, threats, and fear.

Of course sex is not the only expression of life-energy that parents try to stifle in children. There are



also, for example, the child's natural vocal expressions (shouting, screaming, bellowing, crying, etc.) and natural body motility. As Reich notes,

*"Small children go through a phase of development characterised by vigorous activity of the voice musculature. The joy the infant derives from loud noises (crying, shrieking, and forming a variety of sounds) is regarded by many parents as pathological aggressiveness. The children are accordingly admonished not to scream, to be 'still,' etc. The impulses of the voice apparatus are inhibited, its musculature becomes chronically contracted, and the child becomes quiet, 'well-brought-up,' and withdrawn. The effect of such mistreatment is soon manifested in eating disturbances, general apathy, pallor of the face, etc. Speech disturbances and retardation of speech development are presumably caused in this manner. In the adult we see the effects of such mistreatment in the form of spasms of the throat. The automatic constrictions of the glottis and the deep throat musculature, with subsequent inhibition of the aggressive impulses of the head and neck, seems to be particularly characteristic."* [Op. Cit., p. 128]

(And we must add, that the suppression of the urge to move all children have is most destructive to the 15% or so of "Hyper-active" children, whose urge to move is hard to suppress.)

*"Clinical experience has taught us,"* Reich concludes, *"that small children must be allowed to 'shout themselves out' when the shouting is inspired by pleasure. This might be disagreeable to some parents, but questions of education must be decided **exclusively in the interests of the child**, not in those of the adults."* [Ibid.]

Besides deadening the pleasurable streamings of life energy in the body, muscular armouring also functions to inhibit the anxiety generated by the presence of anti-social, cruel, and perverse impulses within the psyche (impulses referred to by Reich as "*secondary*" drives) -- for example, destructiveness, sadism, greed, power hunger, brutality, rape fantasies, etc. Ironically, these secondary drives result from the **suppression of the primary drives** (e.g. for sex, physical activity, vocal expression, etc.) and the sensations of pleasure associated with them. The secondary drives develop because, when muscular armouring sets in and a person loses touch with his or her bioenergetic core and other emotional urges, the only emotional expressions that can get through the thick, hard wall of armour are distorted, harsh, and/or mechanical. Thus, for example, a heavily armoured person who tries to express love may find that the emotion is shredded by the wall of armour and comes out in distorted form as an impulse to hurt the person loved (sadism) -- an impulse that causes anxiety and then has to be repressed. In other words, compulsive morality (i.e. acting according to externally imposed rules) becomes necessary to control the secondary drives **which compulsion itself creates**. By such processes, authoritarian child-rearing becomes self-justifying. Thus:

*"Psychoanalysts have failed to distinguish between primary natural and secondary perverse, cruel drives, and they are continuously killing nature in the new-born while they try to extinguish the 'brutish little animal.' They are completely ignorant of the fact that it*

*is exactly this killing of the natural principle which creates the secondary perverse and cruel nature, human nature so called, and that these artificial cultural creations in turn make compulsive moralism and brutal laws necessary" [Ibid., p. 17-18].*

Moralism, however, can never get at the root of the problem of secondary drives, but in fact only increases the pressure of crime and guilt. The real solution is to let children develop what Reich calls **natural self-regulation**. This can be done only by not subjecting them to punishment, coercion, threats, moralistic lectures and admonitions, withdrawal of love, etc. in an attempt to inhibit their spontaneous expression of natural life-impulses. The systematic development of the emphatic tendencies of the young infant is the best way to "socialise" and restrict activities that are harmful to the others. As A.S. Neill points out, "*self-regulation implies a belief in the goodness of human nature; a belief that there is not, and never was, original sin.*" [Op. Cit., p. 103]

According to Neill, children who are given freedom from birth and not forced to conform to parental expectations spontaneously learn how to keep themselves clean and develop social qualities like courtesy, common sense, an interest in learning, respect for the rights of others, and so forth (see [next section](#)). However, once the child has been armoured through authoritarian methods intended to **force** it to develop such qualities, it becomes what Reich calls "*biopathic*" -- out of touch with its living core and therefore no longer able to develop self-regulation. In this stage it becomes harder and harder for the pro-social emotions to shape the developing mode of life of the new member of society. At that point, when the secondary drives develop, parental authoritarianism becomes a **necessity**. As Reich puts it:

*"This close interrelation between biopathic behaviour and authoritarian countermeasures seems to be automatic. Self-regulation appears to have no place in and no influence upon emotions which do not come from the living core directly but only as if through a thick hard wall. Moreover, one has the impression that secondary drives cannot stand self-regulatory conditions of existence. They force sharp discipline on the part of the educator or parent. It is as if a child with an essentially secondary-drive structure feels that it cannot function or exist without disciplinary guidance. This is paralleled by the interlacing of self-regulation in the healthy child with self-regulation in the environment. Here the child cannot function unless it has freedom of decision and movement. It cannot tolerate discipline any more than the armoured child can tolerate freedom."*

This inability to tolerate freedom, which the vast majority of people develop **automatically** from the way they are raised, is what makes the whole subject of armouring and its prevention of crucial importance to anarchists. Reich concludes that if parents do not suppress nature in the first place, then no anti-social drives will be created and no authoritarianism will be required to suppress them: "*What you so desperately and vainly try to achieve by way of compulsion and admonition is there in the new-born infant ready to live and function. Let it grow as nature requires, and change our institutions accordingly*" [Ibid., p. 47, emphasis in original].

As Alexander Lowen points out in **Fear of Life**, parents are particularly anxious to suppress the sexual

expressions of life energy in their children because of unresolved Oedipal conflicts within themselves.

Hence, in order to raise psychologically healthy children, parents need to acquire self-knowledge, particularly of how Oedipal conflicts, sibling rivalry, and other internal conflicts develop in family relationships, and to free themselves as much as possible from neurotic forms of armouring. The difficulty of parents acquiring such self-knowledge and sufficiently de-conditioning themselves is obviously another obstacle to raising self-regulated children.

However, the greatest obstacle is the fact that armouring and other twisting mechanisms set in so very early in life, i.e. soon after birth. Reich emphasises that **with the first armour blockings, the infant's self-regulatory powers begin to wane.** *"They become steadily weaker as the armouring spreads over the whole organism, and they **must** be replaced by compulsive, moral principles if the child is to exist and survive in its given environment."* [Ibid., pp. 44-45] Hence it is important for parents to obtain a thorough knowledge of what armouring and other rigid suppressions are and how they function, so that from the beginning they can prevent (or at least decrease) them from forming in their children. Some practical examples of how this can be done will be discussed in the [next section](#).

Finally, Reich cautions that it is crucial to avoid any mixing of concepts. *"One cannot mix a bit of self-regulation with a bit of moral demand. Either we trust nature as basically decent and self-regulatory or we do not, and then there is only one way, that of training by compulsion. It is essential to grasp the fact that the two ways of upbringing do not go together."* [Ibid., p. 46]

## **J.6.2. What are some examples of libertarian child-rearing methods applied to the care of new-born infants?**

According to Reich, the problems of parenting a free child actually begin before conception, with the need for a prospective mother to free herself as much as possible from chronic muscular tensions, especially in the pelvic area, which may inhibit the optimal development of a foetus. As Reich points out, the mother's body provides the environment for the child from the moment the embryo is formed until the moment of birth, and strong muscular armouring in her pelvis as a result of sexual repression or other emotional problems is very detrimental. Such a mother will have a bioenergetically "dead" and possibly spastic uterus, which can traumatise an infant even before it is born by reducing the circulation of blood and body fluids and making the energy metabolism inefficient, thus damaging the child's vitality.

Moreover, it has been found in many studies that not only the physical health of the mother can influence the foetus. Various psychological stresses influence the chemical and hormonal environment, affecting the foetus. Even short ones, when acute, can have significant effects on it.

Immediately after birth, it is important for the mother to establish contact with her child. This means, basically, constant loving attention to the baby, expressed by plenty of holding, cuddling, playing, etc.,

and especially by breast feeding. By such "*orgonotic*" contact (to use Reich's term), the mother is able to establish the initial emotional bonding with the new born, and a non-verbal understanding of the child's needs. This is only possible, however, if she is in touch with her own internal processes - emotional and cognitive - and bioenergetic core, i.e. is not too neurotically armoured (in Reich's terminology). Thus:

*"The orgonotic sense of contact, a function of the . . . energy field of both the mother and the child, is unknown to most specialists; however, the old country doctor knew it well. . . . **Orgonotic contact is the most essential experiential and emotional element in the interrelationship between mother and child, particularly prenatally and during the first days and weeks of life. The future fate of the child depends on it. It seems to be the core of the new-born infant's emotional development.**" [Ibid. p. 99]*

It is less crucial but still important for the father to establish orgonotic contact as well, although since fathers lack the primary means of establishing it -- namely the ability to breast feed -- their contact can never be as close as the mother's (see below).

A new-born child has only one way of expressing its needs: through crying. Crying has many nuances and can convey much more than the level of distress of the child. If a mother is unable to establish contact at the most basic emotional ("*bioenergetic*," according to Reich) level, she will be unable to understand intuitively what needs the child is expressing through its crying. Any unmet needs will in turn be felt by the child as a deprivation, to which it will respond with a wide array of negative emotions and deleterious physiological processes and emotional tension. If continued for long, such tensions can become chronic and thus the beginning of "*armouring*" and adaptation to a "cruel" reality.

The most important factor in the establishment of bonding is the tender physical contact between mother and infant is undoubtedly breast feeding. Thus:

*"The most salient place of contact in the infant's body is the bioenergetically highly charged mouth and throat. This body organ reaches out immediately for gratification. **If the nipple of the mother reacts to the infant's sucking movements in a biophysically normal manner with sensations of pleasure, it will become strongly erect and the orgonotic excitation of the nipple will become one with that of the infant's mouth, just as in the orastically gratifying sexual act, in which the male and female genitals luminate and fuse orgonotically.** There is nothing 'abnormal' or 'disgusting' in this. Every healthy mother experiences the sucking as pleasure and yields to it. . . . However, about 80 percent of all women suffer from vaginal anaesthesia and frigidity. Their nipples are correspondingly anorgonotic, i.e. 'dead.' The mother may develop anxiety or loathing in response to what would naturally be a sensation of pleasure aroused in the breast by the infant's sucking. This is why so many mothers do not want to nurse their babies." [pp. 115-116]*

Reich and other libertarian psychologists therefore maintain that the practice of bottle feeding is

harmful, particularly if it completely replaces breast feeding from the day of birth, because it eliminates one of the most important forms of establishing bioenergetic contact between mother and child. This lack of contact can then contribute in later life to "oral" forms of neurotic character structure or traits. (For more on these, see Alexander Lowen, **Physical Dynamics of Character Structure**, Chapter 9, *"The Oral Character"*). Lowen believes that the practice of breast feeding should be continued for about three years, as it usually is among "primitive" peoples, and that weaning before this time is experienced as a major trauma. *"[I]f the breast is available to a child for about three years, which I believe to be the time required to fulfil a child's oral needs, weaning causes very little trauma, since the loss of this pleasure is offset by the many other pleasures the child can then have."* [**Depression and the Body**, p. 133]

Another harmful practice in infant care is the compulsive-neurotic method of feeding children on schedule, invented by Pirquet in Vienna, which *"was devastatingly wrong and harmful to countless children."* Frustration of oral needs through this practice (which is fortunately less in vogue now than it was fifty years ago), is guaranteed to produce neurotic armouring in infants.

As Reich puts it, *"As long as parents, doctors, and educators approach infants with false, unbending behaviour, inflexible opinions, condescension, and officiousness, instead of with orgonotic contact, infants will continue to be quiet, withdrawn, apathetic, 'autistic,' 'peculiar,' and, later, 'little wild animals,' whom the cultivated feel they have to 'tame.'"* [**Op. Cit.** p. 124]

Another harmful practice is allowing the baby to "cry itself out." Thus: *"Parking a baby in a baby carriage in the garden, perhaps for hours at a time, is a dangerous practice. No one can know what agonising feelings of fear and loneliness a baby can experience on waking up suddenly to find himself alone in a strange place. Those who have heard a baby's screams on such occasions have some idea of the cruelty of this stupid custom."* [Neill, **Summerhill**, p. 336] Indeed, in **The Physical Dynamics of Character Structure**, Lowen has traced specific neuroses, particularly depression, to this practice. Hospitals also have been guilty of psychologically damaging sick infants by isolating them from their mothers, a practice that has undoubtedly produced untold numbers of neurotics and psychopaths.

Also, as Reich notes, *"the sadistic habit of circumcision will soon be recognised as the senseless, fanatical cruelty it truly is."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 68] He remarks that he has observed infants who took over two weeks to "recover" from the trauma of circumcision, a "recovery" that left permanent psychological scars in the form of chronic muscular tensions in the pelvic floor. These tensions form the first layer of pelvic armouring, to which sexual repression and other inhibitions (especially those acquired during toilet training) later add.

The diaphragm, however, is perhaps the most important area to protect from early armouring. After observing infants for several years in a research setting, Reich concluded that armouring in babies usually appears first as a blocking of free respiration, expressed as harsh, rough, uneven, or laboured breathing, which may lead to colds, coughs, bronchitis, etc.

*"The early blocking of respiration seemed to gain importance rapidly as more children were observed. Somehow the diaphragmatic region appeared to respond first and most severely to emotional, bioenergetic discomfort."* [Ibid., p. 110] Hence the infant's breathing is a key indicator of its emotional health, and any disturbance is a signal that something is wrong. Or, as Neill puts it, *"The sign of a well-reared child is his free, uninhibited breathing. It shows that he is not afraid of life."* [Op. Cit., p. 131]

Neill sums up the libertarian attitude toward the care of infants as follows: *"Self-regulation means the right of a baby to live freely without outside authority in things psychic and somatic. It means that the baby feeds when it is hungry; that it becomes clean in habits only when it wants to; that it is never stormed at nor spanked; that it is always loved and protected."* [Op. Cit. p. 105]

Obviously self-regulation doesn't mean leaving the baby alone when it heads toward a cliff or starts playing with an electrical socket. Anarchists do not advocate a lack of common sense. We recognise that adults must override an infant's will when it is a question of protecting its physical safety. As Neill writes, *"Only a fool in charge of young children would allow unbarred bedroom windows or an unprotected fire in the nursery. Yet, too often, young enthusiasts for self-regulation come to my school as visitors, and exclaim at our lack of freedom in locking poison in a lab closet, or our prohibition about playing on the fire escape. The whole freedom movement is marred and despised because so many advocates of freedom have not got their feet on the ground."* [Ibid., p. 106]

Nevertheless, the libertarian position does not imply that a child should be **punished** for getting into a dangerous situation. Nor is the best thing to do in such a case to shout in alarm (unless that is the only way to warn the child before it is too late), but simply to remove the danger without any fuss. As Neill says, *"Unless a child is mentally defective, he will soon discover what interests him. Left free from excited cries and angry voices, he will be unbelievably sensible in his dealing with material of all kinds."* [Ibid., p. 108] Provided, of course, that he or she has been allowed self-regulation from the beginning, and thus has not developed any irrational, secondary drives.

### **J.6.3 What are some examples of libertarian child-rearing methods applied to the care of young children?**

The way to raise a free child becomes clear when one considers how an **unfree** child is raised. Thus imagine the typical infant, John Smith, whose upbringing A.S. Neill describes:

*"His natural functions were left alone during the diaper period. But when he began to crawl and perform on the floor, words like **naughty** and **dirty** began to float about the house, and a grim beginning was made in teaching him to be clean.*

*"Before this, his hand had been taken away every time it touched his genitals; and he soon came to associate the genital prohibition with the acquired disgust about faeces. Thus, years later, when he became a travelling salesman, his story repertoire consisted of a*

*balanced number of sex and toilet jokes.*

*"Much of his training was conditioned by relatives and neighbours. Mother and father were most anxious to be correct -- to do the proper thing -- so that when relatives or next-door neighbours came, John had to show himself as a well-trained child. He had to say **Thank you** when Auntie gave him a piece of chocolate; and he had to be most careful about his table manners; and especially, he had to refrain from speaking when adults were speaking." [Summerhill, p. 97]*

When he was little older, things got worse for John. *"All his curiosity about the origins of life were met with clumsy lies, lies so effective that his curiosity about life and birth disappeared. The lies about life became combined with fears when at the age of five his mother found him having genital play with his sister of four and the girl next door. The severe spanking that followed (Father added to it when he came home from work) forever conveyed to John the lesson that sex is filthy and sinful, something one must not even think of." [Ibid.]*

Of course, parents' ways of imparting negative messages about sex are not necessarily this severe, especially in our allegedly enlightened age. However, it is not necessary for a child to be spanked or even scolded or lectured in order to acquire a sex-negative attitude. Children are very intuitive and will receive the message "sex is bad" from subtle parental cues like facial expressions, tone of voice, embarrassed silence, avoidance of certain topics, etc. Mere "toleration" of sexual curiosity and play is far different in its psychological effects from positive affirmation.

Based on the findings of clinical psychiatry, Reich postulated a "*first puberty*" in children, from the ages of about 3 to 6, when the child's attention shifts from the satisfaction of oral needs to an interest in its sexuality -- a stage characterised by genital play of all kinds. The parents' task at this stage is not only to allow children to engage in such play, but to encourage it. *"In the child, before the age of four or five, genitality has not yet fully developed. The task here plainly consists of removing the obstacles in the way of natural development toward full genitality. To fulfil this task, we must agree that a first puberty in children exists; that genital games are the peak of its development; that lack of genital activity is a sign of sickness and not of health, as previously assumed; and that healthy children play genital games of all kinds, which should be encouraged and not hindered." [Children of the Future, p. 66]*

Along the same lines, to prevent the formation of sex-negative attitudes means that nakedness should never be discouraged. *"The baby should see its parents naked from the beginning. However, the child should be told when he is ready to understand that some people don't like to see children naked and that, in the presence of such people, he should wear clothes." [Neill, Summerhill, p. 229]*

Neill maintains that not only should parents never spank or punish a child for genital play, but that spanking and other forms of punishment should never be used in **any** circumstances, because they instil fear, turning children into cowards and often leading to phobias. *"Fear must be entirely eliminated -- fear of adults, fear of punishment, fear of disapproval, fear of God. Only hate can flourish in an*

*atmosphere of fear.*" [**Ibid.**, p. 124]

Punishment also turns children into sadists. *"The cruelty of many children springs from the cruelty that has been practised on them by adults. You cannot be beaten without wishing to beat someone else. . . Every beating makes a child sadistic in desire or practice."* [**Ibid.**, p. 269, 271] This is obviously an important consideration to anarchists, as sadistic drives provide the psychological ground for militarism, war, police brutality, and so on. Such drives are undoubtedly also part of the desire to exercise hierarchical authority, with its possibilities for using negative sanctions against subordinates as an outlet for sadistic impulses.

Child beating is particularly cowardly because it is a way for adults to vent their hatred, frustration, and sadism on those who are unable to defend themselves. Such cruelty is, of course, always rationalised with excuse like "it hurts me more than it does you," etc., or explained in moral terms, like "I don't want my boy to be soft" or "I want him to prepare him for a harsh world" or "I spank my children because my parents spanked me, and it did me a hell of a lot of good." But despite such rationalisations, the fact remains that punishment is always an act of hate. To this hate, the child responds in kind by hating the parents, followed by fantasy, guilt, and repression. For example, the child may fantasise the father's death, which immediately causes guilt, and so is repressed. Often the hatred induced by punishment emerges in fantasies that are seemingly remote from the parents, such as stories of giant killing -- always popular with children because the giant represents the father. Obviously, the sense of guilt produced by such fantasies is very advantageous to organised religions that promise redemption from "sin." It is surely no coincidence that such religions are enthusiastic promoters of the sex-negative morality and disciplinarian child rearing practices that keep supplying them with recruits.

What is worse, however, is that punishment actually **creates** "problem children." This is so because the parent arouses more and more hatred (and diminishing trust in other human beings) in the child with each spanking, which is expressed in still worse behaviour, calling for more spankings, and so on, in a vicious circle. In contrast, *"The self-regulated child does not need any punishment,"* Neill argues, *"and he does not go through this hate cycle. He is never punished and he does not need to behave badly. He has no use for lying and for breaking things. His body has never been called filthy or wicked. He has not needed to rebel against authority or to fear his parents. Tantrums he will usually have, but they will be short-lived and not tend toward neurosis."* [**Ibid.**, p. 166]

We could cite many further examples of how libertarian principles of child-rearing can be applied in practice, but we must limit ourselves to these few. The basic principles can be summed up as follows: Get rid of authority, moralism, and the desire to "improve" and "civilise" children. Allow them to be themselves, without pushing them around, bribing, threatening, admonishing, lecturing, or otherwise forcing them to do anything. Refrain from action unless the child, by expressing their "freedom" restricts the freedom of others and **explain** what is wrong about such actions and never mechanically punish.

This is, of course, a radical philosophy, which few parents are willing to follow. It is quite amazing how people who call themselves libertarians in political and economic matters draw the line when it comes to



their behaviour within the family -- as if such behaviour had no wider social consequences! Hence, the opponents of children's freedom are legion, as are their objections to libertarian child rearing. In the next few sections we will examine some of the most common of these objections.

## J.6.4 If children have nothing to fear, how can they be good?

Obedience that is based on fear of punishment, this-worldly or otherworldly, is not really goodness, it is merely cowardice. True morality (i.e. respect for others and one-self) comes from inner conviction based on experience, it cannot be imposed from without by fear. Nor can it be inspired by hope of reward, such as praise or the promise of heaven, which is simply bribery. As noted in the [previous section](#), if children are given as much freedom as possible from the day of birth and not forced to conform to parental expectations, they will spontaneously learn the basic principles of social behaviour, such as cleanliness, courtesy, and so forth. But they must be allowed to develop them **at their own speed**, at the natural stage of their growth, not when parents think they should develop them. And what is "natural" timing must be discovered by observation, not by defining it a priori based on one's own expectations.

Can a child really be taught to keep itself clean without being punished for getting dirty? According to many psychologists, it is not only possible but **vitaly important** for the child's mental health to do so, since punishment will give the child a fixed and repressed interest in his bodily functions. As Reich and Lowen have shown, for example, various forms of compulsive and obsessive neuroses can be traced back to the punishments used in toilet training. Dogs, cats, horses, and cows have no complexes about excrement. Complexes in human children come from the manner of their instruction.

As Neill observes, *"When the mother says **naughty** or **dirty** or even **tut tut**, the element of right and wrong arises. The question becomes a **moral** one -- when it should remain a **physical** one."* He suggests that the **wrong** way to deal with a child who likes to play with faeces is to tell him he is being dirty. *"The right way is to allow him to live out his interest in excrement by providing him with mud or clay. In this way, he will sublimate his interest without repression. He will live through his interest; and in doing so, kill it."* [Summerhill, p. 174]

Similarly, sceptics will probably question how children can be induced to eat a healthy diet without threats of punishment. The answer can be discovered by a simple experiment: set out on the table all kinds of foods, from candy and ice cream to whole wheat bread, lettuce, sprouts, and so on, and allow the child complete freedom to choose what is desired or to eat nothing at all if he or she is not hungry. Parents will find that the average child will begin choosing a balanced diet after about a week, after the desire for prohibited or restricted foods has been satisfied. This is an example of what can be called "trusting nature." That the question of how to "train" a child to eat properly should even be an issue says volumes about how little the concept of freedom for children is accepted or even understood, in our society. Unfortunately, the concept of "training" still holds the field in this and most other areas.

The disciplinarian argument that that children must be **forced** to respect property is also defective, because it always requires some sacrifice of a child's play life (and childhood should be devoted to play,

not to "preparing for adulthood," because playing is what children spontaneously do). The libertarian view is that a child should arrive at a sense of value out of his or her own free choice. This means not scolding or punishing them for breaking or damaging things. As they grow out of the stage of preadolescent indifference to property, they learn to respect it naturally.

"But shouldn't a child at least be punished for stealing?" it will be asked. Once again, the answer lies in the idea of trusting nature. The concept of "mine" and "yours" is adult, and children naturally develop it as they become mature, but not before. This means that normal children will "steal" -- though that is not how they regard it. They are simply trying to satisfy their acquisitive impulses; or, if they are with friends, their desire for adventure. In a society so thoroughly steeping in the idea of respect for property as ours, it is no doubt difficult for parents to resist societal pressure to punish children for "stealing." The reward for such trust, however, will be a child who grows into a healthy adolescent who respects the possessions of others, not out of a cowardly fear of punishment but from his or her own self-nature.

## **J.6.5 But how can children learn *ethics* if they are not given punishments, prohibitions, and religious instruction?**

Most parents believe that, besides taking care of their child's physical needs, the teaching of ethical/moral values is their main responsibility and that without such teaching the child will grow up to be a "little wild animal" who acts on every whim, with no consideration for others. This idea arises mainly from the fact that most people in our society believe, at least passively, that human beings are naturally bad and that unless they are "trained" to be good they will be lazy, mean, violent, or even murderous. This, of course, is essentially the idea of "original sin." Because of its widespread acceptance, nearly all adults believe that it is their job to "improve" children.

According to libertarian psychologists, however, there is no original sin. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that there is "original virtue." As we have seen, Reich found that externally imposed, compulsive morality actually **causes** immoral behaviour by creating cruel and perverse "*secondary drives*." Neill puts it this way: "*I find that when I smash the moral instruction a bad boy has received, he becomes a good boy.*" [**Summerhill**, p. 250]

Unconscious acceptance of some form of the idea of original sin is, as mentioned previously, the main recruiting tool of organised religions, as people who believe they are born "sinners" feel a strong sense of guilt and need for redemption. Therefore Neill advises parents to "eliminate any need for redemption, by telling the child that he is born good -- not born bad." This will help keep them from falling under the influence of life-denying religions, which are inimical to the growth of a healthy character structure.

As Reich points out, "*The Church, because of its influence on the sexuality of youth, is an institution that exerts an extremely damaging effect on health.*" [**Children of the Future**, p. 217] Citing ethnological studies, he notes the following:

*"Among those primitive peoples who lead satisfactory, unimpaired sexual lives, there is no sexual crime, no sexual perversion, no sexual brutality between man and woman; rape is unthinkable because it is unnecessary in their society. Their sexual activity flows in normal, well-ordered channels which would fill any cleric with indignation and fear, because the pale, ascetic youth and the gossiping, child-beating woman do not exist in these primitive societies. They love the human body and take pleasure in their sexuality. They do not understand why young men and women should not enjoy their sexuality. But when their lives are invaded by the ascetic, hypocritical morass and by the Church, which bring them 'culture' along with exploitation, alcohol, and syphilis, they begin to suffer the same wretchedness as ourselves. They begin to lead 'moral' lives, i.e. to suppress their sexuality, and from then on they decline more and more into a state of sexual distress, which is the result of sexual suppression. At the same time, they become sexually dangerous; murders of spouses, sexual diseases, and crimes of all sorts start to appear."* [Ibid., p. 193]

Such crimes in our society would be greatly reduced if libertarian child rearing practices were widely followed. These are obviously important considerations for anarchists, who are frequently asked to explain how crime can be prevented in an anarchist society. The answer is that if people are not suppressed during childhood there will be far less crime, because the secondary-drive structure that leads to anti-social behaviour of all kinds will not be created in the first place. In other words, the solution to the so-called crime problem is not more police, more laws, or a return to the disciplinarianism of "traditional family values," as conservatives claim, but depends mainly on **getting rid** of such values.

There are other problems as well with the moralism taught by organised religions. One danger is making the child a hater. *"If a child is taught that certain things are sinful, his love of life must be changed to hate. When children are free, they never think of another child as being a sinner."* [Neill, **Op. Cit.**, p. 245] From the idea that certain people are sinners, it is a short step to the idea that certain classes or races of people are more "sinful" than others, leading to prejudice, discrimination, and persecution of minorities as an outlet for repressed anger and sadistic drives -- drives that are created in the first place by moralistic training during early childhood. Once again, the relevance for anarchism is obvious.

A further danger of religious instruction is the development of a fear of life. *"Religion to a child most always means only fear. God is a mighty man with holes in his eyelids: He can see you wherever you are. To a child, this often means that God can see what is being done under the bedclothes. And to introduce fear into a child's life is the worst of all crimes. Forever the child says nay to life; forever he is an inferior; forever a coward."* [Ibid., p. 246] People who have been threatened with fear of an afterlife in hell can never be entirely free of neurotic anxiety about security in **this** life. In turn, such people become easy targets of ruling-class propaganda that plays upon their material insecurity, e.g. the rationalisation of imperialistic wars as necessary to "preserve jobs" (cited, for example, by US Secretary of State James Baker as one rationale for the Gulf War).

## **J.6.6 But how will a free child ever learn unselfishness?**

Another common objection to self-regulation is that children can only be taught to be **unselfish** through punishment and admonition. Again, however, such a view comes from a distrust of nature and is part of the common attitude that nature is mere "raw material" to be shaped by human beings according to their own wishes. The libertarian attitude is that unselfishness develops at the proper time -- which is **not** during childhood. Children are primarily egoists, generally until the beginning of puberty, and until then they usually don't have the ability to identify with others. Thus:

*"To ask a child to be unselfish is wrong. Every child is an egoist and the world belongs to him. When he has an apple, his one wish is to eat that apple. The chief result of mother's encouraging him to share it with his little brother is to make him hate the little brother. Altruism comes later -- comes naturally -- **if the child is not taught to be unselfish**. It probably never comes at all if the child has been forced to be unselfish. By suppressing the child's selfishness, the mother is fixing that selfishness forever."* [Neill, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 250-251]

Unfulfilled wishes (like all "unfinished business") live on in the unconscious. Hence children who are pressured too hard - "taught" - to be unselfish will, while conforming outwardly with parental demands, unconsciously repress part of their real, selfish wishes, and these repressed infantile desires will make the person selfish (and possibly neurotic) throughout life. Moreover, telling children that what they want to do is "wrong" or "bad" is equivalent to teaching them to hate themselves, and it is a well-known principle of psychology that people who do not love themselves cannot love others. Thus moral instruction, although it aims to develop altruism and love for others, is actually self-defeating, having just the opposite result.

Moreover, such attempts to produce "unselfish" children (and so adults) actually works **against** developing the individuality of the child and their abilities to develop their own abilities (in particular their ability of critical thought). As Erich Fromm puts it, "*[n]ot to be selfish implies not to do what one wishes, to give up one's own wishes for the sake of those in authority. . . . Aside from its obvious implication, it means 'don't love yourself,' 'don't be yourself,' but submit yourself to something more important than yourself, to an outside power or its internalisation, 'duty.'* 'Don't be selfish' becomes one of the most powerful ideological tools in suppressing spontaneity and the free development of personality. Under the pressure of this slogan one is asked for every sacrifice and for complete submission: only those acts are 'unselfish' which do not serve the individual but somebody or something outside himself." [Man for Himself, p. 127]

While such "unselfishness" is ideal for creating "model citizens" and willing wage slaves, it is not conducive for creating anarchists or even developing individuality. Little wonder Bakunin celebrated the urge to rebel and saw it as the key to human progress! Fromm goes on to note that selfishness and self-love, "*far from being identical, are actually opposites*" and that "*selfish persons are incapable of loving others. . . . [or] loving themselves...*" [Op. Cit., p. 131] Individuals who do not love themselves, and so others, will be more willing to submit themselves to hierarchy than those who do love themselves and are concerned for their own, and others, welfare. Thus the contradictory nature of capitalism, with its

contradictory appeals to selfish and unselfish behaviour, can be understood as being based upon lack of self-love, a lack which is promoted in childhood and one which libertarians should be aware of and combat.

Indeed, much of the urge to "teach children unselfishness" is actually an expression of adults' will to power. Whenever parents feel the urge to impose directives on their children, they would be wise to ask themselves whether the impulse comes from their own power drive or their own selfishness. For, since our culture strongly conditions us to seek power over others, what could be more convenient than having a small, weak person at hand who cannot resist one's will to power? Instead of issuing directives, libertarians believe in letting social behaviour develop naturally, which it will do after other people's opinions becomes important **to the child**. As Neill points out, *"Everyone seeks the good opinion of his neighbours. Unless other forces push him into unsocial behaviour, a child will naturally want to do that which will cause him to be well-regarded, but this desire to please others develops at a certain stage in his growth. The attempt by parents and teachers to artificially accelerate this stage does the child irreparable damage."* [Neill, **Op. Cit.**, p. 256]

Therefore, parents should allow children to be "selfish" and "ungiving", free to follow their own childish interests throughout their childhood. And when their individual interests clash with social interests (e.g. the opinion of the neighbours), the individual interests should take precedence. Every interpersonal conflict of interest should be grounds for a lesson in dignity on one side and consideration on the other. Only by this process can a child develop their individuality. By so doing they will come to recognise the individuality of others and this is the first step in developing ethical concepts (which rest upon mutual respect for others and their individuality).

## **J.6.7 Isn't what you call "libertarian child-rearing" just another name for spoiling the child?**

No. This objection confuses the distinction between freedom and license. To raise a child in freedom does not mean letting him or her walk all over you; it does not mean never saying "no." It is true that free children are not subjected to punishment, irrational authority, or moralistic admonitions, but they are not "free" to violate the rights of others. As Neill puts it, *"in the disciplined home, the children have **no** rights. In the spoiled home, they have **all** the rights. The proper home is one in which children and adults have equal rights."* Or again, *"To let a child have his own way, or do what he wants to **at another's expense**, is bad for the child. It creates a spoiled child, and the spoiled child is a bad citizen."* [Summerhill, p. 107, 167]

There will inevitably be conflicts of will between parents and children, and the healthy way to resolve them is to come to some sort of a compromise agreement. The unhealthy ways are either to resort to authoritarian discipline or to spoil the child by allowing it to have all the social rights. Libertarian psychologists argue that no harm is done to children by insisting on one's individual rights, but that the harm comes from moralism, i.e. when one introduces the concepts of right and wrong or words like "naughty," "bad," or "dirty," which produce guilt.

Therefore it should not be thought that free children are free to "do as they please." Freedom means doing what one likes so long as it doesn't infringe on the freedom of others. Thus there is a big difference between compelling a child to stop throwing stones at others and compelling him or her to learn geometry. Throwing stones infringes on others' rights, but learning geometry involves only the child. The same goes for forcing children to eat with a fork instead of their fingers; to say "please" and "thank you;" to tidy up their rooms, and so on. Bad manners and untidiness may be annoying to adults, but they are not a violation of adults' rights. One could, of course, define an adult "right" to be free of annoyance from **anything** one's child does, but this would simply be a license for authoritarianism, emptying the concept of children's rights of all content.

As mentioned, giving children freedom does not mean allowing them to endanger themselves physically. For example, a sick child should not be asked to decide whether he wants to go outdoors or take his prescribed medicine, nor a run-down and overtired child whether she wants to go to bed. But the imposition of such forms of necessary authority is compatible with the idea that children should be given as much responsibility as they can handle at their particular age. For only in this way can they develop self-assurance. And again, it is important for parents to examine their own motives when deciding how much responsibility to give their child. Parents who insist on choosing their children's clothes for them, for example, are generally worried that little Tommy might select clothes that would reflect badly on his parents' social standing.

As for those who equate "discipline" in the home with "obedience," the latter is usually required of a child to satisfy the adults' desire for power. Self-regulation means that there are no power games being played with children, no loud voice saying "You'll do it because I say so, or else!" But, although this irrational, power-seeking kind of authority is absent in the libertarian home, there still remains what can be called a kind of "authority," namely adult protection, care, and responsibility, as well as the insistence on one's own rights. As Neill observes, *"Such authority sometimes demands obedience but at other times gives obedience. Thus I can say to my daughter, 'You can't bring that mud and water into our parlour.' That's no more than her saying to me, 'Get out of my room, Daddy. I don't want you here now,' a wish that I, of course, obey without a word"* [Op. Cit., p. 156]. Therefore there will still be "discipline" in the libertarian home, but it will be of the kind that protects the individual rights of each family member.

Raising children in freedom also does not imply giving them a lot of toys, money, and so on. Reichians have argued that children should not be given everything they ask for and that it is better to give them too little than too much. Under constant bombardment by commercial advertising campaigns, parents today generally tend to give their children far too much, with the result that the children stop appreciating gifts and rarely value any of their possessions. This same applies to money, which, if given in excess, can be detrimental to children's creativity and play life. If children are not given too many toys, they will derive creative joy out of making their own toys out of whatever free materials are at hand -- a joy of which they are robbed by overindulgence. Psychologists point out that parents who give too many presents are often trying to compensate for giving too little love.

There is less danger in rewarding children than there is in punishing them, but rewards can still undermine a child's morale. This is because, firstly, rewards are superfluous and in fact often **decrease** motivation and creativity, as several psychological studies have shown (see section [I.4.10](#)). Creative people work for the pleasure of creating; monetary interests are not central (or necessary) to the creative process. Secondly, rewards send the wrong message, namely, that doing the deed for which the reward is offered is not worth doing for its own sake and the pleasure associated with productive, creative activity. And thirdly, rewards tend to reinforce the worst aspects of the competitive system, leading to the attitude that money is the only thing which can motivate people to do the work that needs doing in society.

These are just a few of the considerations that enter into the distinction between spoiling children and raising them in freedom. In reality, it is the punishment and fear of a disciplinarian home that **spoils** children in the most literal sense, by destroying their childhood happiness and creating warped personalities. As adults, the victims of disciplinarianism will generally be burdened with one or more anti-social secondary drives such as sadism, destructive urges, greed, sexual perversions, etc., as well as repressed rage and fear. The presence of such impulses just below the surface of consciousness causes anxiety, which is automatically defended against by layers of rigid muscular armouring, which leaves the person stiff, frustrated, bitter, and burdened with feelings of inner emptiness. In such a condition, people easily fall victim to the capitalist gospel of super-consumption, which promises that money will enable them to fill the inner void by purchasing commodities -- a promise that, of course, is hollow.

The neurotically armoured person also tends to look for scapegoats on whom to blame his or her frustration and anxiety and against whom repressed rage can be vented. Reactionary politicians know very well how to direct such impulses against minorities or "hostile nations" with propaganda designed to serve the interests of the ruling elite. Most importantly, however, the respect for authority combined with sadistic impulses which is acquired from a disciplinarian upbringing typically produces a submissive/authoritarian personality -- a man or woman who blindly follows the orders of "superiors" while at the same time desiring to exercise authority on "subordinates," whether in the family, the state bureaucracy, or the corporation. In this way, the "traditional" (e.g., authoritarian, disciplinarian, patriarchal) family is the necessary foundation for authoritarian civilisation, reproducing it and its attendant social evils from generation to generation. Irving Staub's **Roots of Evil** includes interviews of imprisoned SS men, who, in the course of extensive interviews (meant to determine how ostensibly "normal" people could perform acts of untold ruthlessness and violence) revealed that they overwhelmingly came from authoritarian, disciplinarian homes.

## **J.6.8 What is the anarchist position on teenage sexual liberation?**

One of the biggest problems of adolescence is sexual suppression by parents and society in general. The teenage years are the time when sexual energy is at its height. Why, then, the absurd demand that teenagers "wait until marriage," or at least until leaving home, before becoming sexually active? Why are there laws on the books in "advanced" countries like the United States that allow a 19-year-old "boy" who makes love with his 17-year-old girlfriend, with her full consent, to be **arrested** by the girl's parents

(!) for "statutory rape?"

To answer such questions, let us recall that the ruling class is not interested in encouraging mass tendencies toward democracy and independence and pleasure not derived from commodities but instead supports whatever contributes to mass submissiveness, docility, dependence, helplessness, and respect for authority -- traits that perpetuate the hierarchies on which ruling-class power and privileges depend.

We have noted earlier that, because sex is the most intense form of pleasure (one of the most prominent contributors for intimacy and bonding people) and involves the bioenergy of the body and emotions, repression of sexuality is the most powerful means of psychologically crippling people and giving them a submissive/authoritarian character structure (as well as alienating people from each other). As Reich observes, such a character is composed of a mixture of *"sexual impotence, helplessness, a need for attachments, a nostalgia for a leader, fear of authority, timidity, and mysticism."* As he also points out, *"people structured in this manner are **incapable of democracy**. All attempts to build up or maintain genuine democratically directed organisations come to grief when they encounter these character structures. They form the psychological soil of the masses in which dictatorial strivings and bureaucratic tendencies of democratically elected leaders can develop. . . . [Sexual suppression] produces the authority-fearing, life-fearing vassal, and thus constantly creates new possibilities whereby a handful of men in power can rule the masses."* [**The Sexual Revolution: Toward a Self-Regulating Character Structure**, p. 82, emphasis added]

No doubt most members of the ruling elite are not fully conscious that their own power and privileges depend on the mass perpetuation of sex-negative attitudes. Nevertheless, they unconsciously sense it. Sexual freedom is the most basic and powerful kind, and every conservative or reactionary instinctively shudders at the thought of the "social chaos" it would unleash -- that is, the rebellious, authority-defying type of character it would nourish. This is why "family values," and "religion" (i.e. discipline and compulsive sexual morality) are the mainstays of the conservative/reactionary agenda. Thus it is crucially important for anarchists to address every aspect of sexual suppression in society. And this means affirming the right of adolescents to an unrestricted sex life.

There are numerous arguments for teenage sexual liberation. For example, many teen suicides could be prevented by removing the restrictions on adolescent sexuality. This becomes clear from ethnological studies of sexually unrepressive "primitive" peoples. Thus:

*"All reports, whether by missionaries or scholars, with or without the proper indignation about the 'moral depravity' of 'savages,' state that the puberty rites of adolescents lead them immediately into a sexual life; that some of these primitive societies lay great emphasis on sexual pleasure; that the puberty rite is an important social event; that some primitive peoples not only do not hinder the sexual life of adolescents but encourage it in every way, as, for instance, by arranging for community houses in which the adolescents settle at the start of puberty in order to be able to enjoy sexual intercourse. Even in those primitive societies in which the institution of strict monogamous marriage exists,*



*adolescents are given complete freedom to enjoy sexual intercourse from the beginning of puberty to marriage. None of these reports contains any indication of sexual misery or suicide by adolescents suffering from unrequited love (although the latter does of course occur). The contradiction between sexual maturity and the absence of genital sexual gratification is non-existent."* [Ibid., p. 85]

Teenage sexual repression is also closely connected with crime. If there are hundreds of teenagers in a neighbourhood who have no place to pursue intimate sexual relationships, they will do it in dark corners, in cars or vans, etc., always on the alert and anxious lest someone discover them. Under such conditions, full gratification is impossible, leading to a build-up of tension, frustration and stagnation of bioenergy (sexual stasis). Thus they feel unsatisfied, disturb each other, become jealous and angry, get into fights, turn to drugs as a substitute for a satisfying sex life, vandalise property to let off "steam" (repressed rage), or even murder someone. As Reich notes, *"juvenile delinquency is the visible expression of the subterranean sexual crisis in the lives of children and adolescents. And it may be predicted that no society will ever succeed in solving this problem, the problem of juvenile psychopathology, unless that society can muster the courage and acquire the knowledge to regulate the sexual life of its children and adolescents in a sex-affirmative manner."* [Ibid., p. 271]

For these reasons, it is clear that a solution to the "gang problem" also depends on adolescent sexual liberation. We are not suggesting, of course, that gangs themselves suppress sexual activity. Indeed, one of their main attractions to teens is undoubtedly the hope of more opportunities for sex as a gang member. However, gangs' typical obsessiveness with the promiscuous, pornographic, sadistic, and other "dark" aspects of sex shows that by the time children reach the gang age they have already developed unhealthy secondary drives due to the generally sex-negative and repressive environment in which they have grown up. The expression of such drives is **not** what anarchists mean by "sexual freedom." Rather, anarchist proposals for teenage liberation are based on the premise that unrestricted sexuality in early childhood is the necessary condition for a **healthy** sexual freedom in adolescence.

Applying these insights to our own society, it is clear that teenagers should not only have ample access to a private room where they can be undisturbed with their sexual partners, but that parents should actively **encourage** such behaviour for the sake of their child's health and happiness (while, of course, encouraging the knowledge and use of contraceptives and safe sex in general as well as respect for the other person involved in the relationship). This last point (of respecting others) is essential. As Maurice Brinton points out, attempts at sexual liberation will encounter two kinds of responses from established society - direct opposition and attempts at recuperation. The second response takes the form of *"first alienating and reifying sexuality, and then of frenetically exploiting this empty shell for commercial ends. As modern youth breaks out of the dual stranglehold of the authoritarian patriarchal family it encounters a projected image of free sexuality which is in fact a manipulatory distortion of it."* This can be seen from the use of sex in advertising to the successful development of sex into a major consumer industry.

However, such a development is the opposite of the healthy sexuality desired by anarchists. This is because *"sex is presented as something to be consumed. But the sexual instinct differs from certain other*

*instincts... [as it can be satisfied only by] another human being, capable of thinking, acting, suffering. The alienation of sexuality under the conditions of modern capitalism is very much part of the general alienating process, in which people are converted into objects (in this case, objects of sexual consumption) and relationships are drained of human content. Undiscriminating, compulsive sexual activity, is not sexual freedom - although it may sometimes be a preparation for it (which repressive morality can never be). The illusion that alienated sex is sexual freedom constitutes yet another obstacle on the road to total emancipation. Sexual freedom implies a realisation and understanding of the autonomy of others."* [The Irrational in Politics, p. 60, p. 61]

Therefore, anarchists see teenage sexual liberation as a means of developing free individuals **as well as** reducing the evil effects of sexual repression (which, we must note, also helps dehumanise individuals by encouraging the objectification of others, and in a patriarchal society, particularly of women).

## **J.6.9 But isn't this concern with teenage sexual liberation just a distraction from issues that should be of more concern to anarchists, like restructuring the economy?**

It would be insulting to teenagers to suggest that sexual freedom is, or should be, their **only** concern. Many teens have a well-developed social conscience and are keenly interested in problems of economic exploitation, poverty, social breakdown, environmental degradation, and the like.

However, it is essential for anarchists to guard against the attitude typically found in Marxist-Leninist parties that spontaneous discussions about the sexual problems of youth are a "diversion from the class struggle." Such an attitude is economistic (not to mention covertly ascetic), because it is based on the premise that the economy must be the focus of all revolutionary efforts toward social change. No doubt restructuring the economy is important, but without mass sexual liberation no working class revolution be complete. In a so called free society, there will not be enough people around with the character structures necessary to create a **lasting** worker-controlled economy -- i.e. people who are capable of accepting freedom with responsibility. Instead, the attempt to force the creation of such an economy without preparing the necessary psychological soil for its growth will lead to a quick reversion to some new form of hierarchy and exploitation.

Moreover, for most teenagers, breaking free from the sexual suppression that threatens to cripple them psychologically is a major issue in their lives. For this reason, not many of them are likely to be attracted to the anarchist "freedom" movement if its exponents limit themselves to dry discussions of surplus value, alienated labour, and so forth. Instead, addressing sexual questions and problems must be integrated into a multi-faceted attack on the total system of domination. Teens should feel confident that anarchists are on the side of sexual pleasure and are not revolutionary ascetics demanding self-denial for the "sake of the revolution." Rather, it should be stressed that the capacity for full sexual enjoyment is the an essential part of the revolution. Indeed, *"incessant questioning and challenge to authority on the subject of sex and of the compulsive family can only complement the questioning and challenge to*

*authority in other areas (for instance on the subject of who is to dominate the work process - or the purpose of work itself). Both challenges stress the autonomy of individuals and their domination of over important aspects of their lives. Both expose the alienated concepts which pass for rationality and which govern so much of our thinking and behaviour. The task of the conscious revolutionary is to make both challenges explicit, to point out their deeply subversive content, and to explain their inter-relation.*" [Maurice Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 62]

We noted previously that in pre-patriarchal society, which rests on the social order of primitive communism, children have complete sexual freedom and that the idea of childhood asceticism develops as matricentric clan societies turn toward patriarchy in the economy and social structure (see section [B.1.5](#)). This sea-change in social attitudes toward childhood sexuality allows the authority-oriented character structure to develop instead of the formerly non-authoritarian ones. Ethnological research has shown that in pre-patriarchal societies, the general nature of work life in the collective corresponds with the free sexuality of children and adolescents -- that is, there are no rules coercing children and adolescents into specific forms of sexual life, and this creates the psychological basis for voluntary integration into the collective and voluntary discipline in work. This historical fact supports the premise that widespread sex-positive attitudes are a necessary condition of a viable libertarian socialism.

Psychology also clearly shows that every impediment to infantile and adolescent sexuality by parents, teachers, or administrative authorities must be stopped. As anarchists, our preferred way of doing so is by direct action. Thus we should encourage teens to feel that they have every chance of building their own lives. This will certainly not be an obstacle to or a distraction from their involvement in the anarchist movement. On the contrary, if they can gradually solve the problem of (e.g.) private rooms themselves, they will work on other social projects with greatly increased pleasure and concentration. For, contrary to Freud, Reichian psychologists argue that beyond a certain point, excess sexual energy cannot be sublimated in work or any other purposeful activity but actually disturbs work by making the person restless and prone to fantasies, thus hindering concentration.

Besides engaging in direct action, anarchists can also support legal protection of infantile and adolescent sexuality (repeal of the insane statutory rape laws would be one example), just as they support legislation that protects workers' right to strike, family leave, and so forth. However, as Reich observes, "*under no circumstances will the new order of sexual life be established by the decree of a central authority.*" [**Ibid.**, p. 279] That was a Leninist illusion. Rather, it will be established from the bottom up, by the gradual process of ever more widespread dissemination of knowledge about the adverse personal and social effects of sexual suppression, which will lead to mass acceptance of libertarian child-rearing and educational methods.

A society in which people are capable of sexual happiness will be one where they prefer to "*make love, not war,*" and so will provide the best guarantee for the general security. Then the anarchist project of restructuring the economic and political systems will proceed spontaneously, based on a spirit of joy rather than hatred and revenge. Only then can it be defended against reactionary threats, because the majority will be on the side of freedom and capable of using it responsibly, rather than unconsciously

longing for an authoritarian father-figure to tell them what to do.

Therefore, concern and action upon teenage sexual liberation (or child rearing in general or libertarian education) is a **key** part of social struggle and change. In no way can it be considered a "distraction" from "important" political and economic issues as some "serious" revolutionaries like to claim. As Martha A. Ackelsberg notes (in relation to the practical work done by the *Mujeres Libres* group during the Spanish Revolution):

*"Respecting children and educating them well was vitally important to the process of revolutionary change. Ignorance made people particularly vulnerable to oppression and suffering. More importantly, education prepared people for social life. Authoritarian schools (or families), based upon fear, prepared people to be submissive to an authoritarian government [or within a capitalist workplace]. Different schools and families would be necessary to prepare people to live in a society without domination."* [**Free Women of Spain**, p. 133]

# I.3 What could the economic structure of anarchy look like?

Here we will examine possible frameworks of a libertarian-socialist economy. We stress that it is **frameworks** rather than framework because it is likely that any anarchist society will see a diverse number of economic systems co-existing in different areas, depending on what people in those areas want. *"In each locality,"* argued Spanish anarchist Diego Abad de Santillan, *"the degree of communism, collectivism or mutualism will depend on the conditions prevailing. Why dictate rules? We who make freedom our banner, cannot deny it in economy. Therefore there must be free experimentation, free show of initiative and suggestions, as well as the freedom of organisation."* [**After the Revolution**, p. 97]

In general we will highlight and discuss the four major schools of anarchist economic thought: Individualist anarchism, mutualism, collectivism and communism. It is up to the reader to evaluate which school best maximises individual liberty and the good life. There may, of course, be other economic practices but these may not be libertarian. In Malatesta's words:

*"Admitted the basic principle of anarchism -- which is that no-one should wish or have the opportunity to reduce others to a state of subjection and oblige them to work for him -- it is clear that all, and only, those ways of life which respect freedom, and recognise that each individual has an equal right to the means of production and to the full enjoyment of the product of his own labour, have anything in common with anarchism."* [**Life and Ideas**, p. 33]

In addition, it should be kept in mind that in practice it is impossible to separate the economic realm from the social and political realms, as there are numerous interconnections between them. Indeed, as we will see, anarchist thinkers like Bakunin argued that the *"political"* institutions of a free society would be based upon workplace associations while Kropotkin placed the commune at the heart of his vision of a communist-anarchist economy and society. Thus the division between social and economic forms is not clear cut in anarchist theory -- as it should be as society is not, and cannot be, considered as separate from or inferior to the economy. An anarchist society will try to integrate the social and economic, embedding the latter in the former in order to stop any harmful externalities associated economic activity being passed onto society. As Karl Polanyi argued, capitalism *"means no less than the running of society as an adjunct to the market. Instead of the economy being being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system."* [**The Great Transformation**, p. 57] Given the negative effects of such an arrangement, little wonder that anarchism seeks to reverse it.

Also, by discussing the economy first we are not implying that dealing with economic domination or exploitation is more important than dealing with other aspects of the total system of domination, e.g. social hierarchies, patriarchal values, racism, etc. We follow this order of exposition because of the need to present one thing at a time, but it would have been equally easy to start with the social and political

structure of anarchy. However, Rudolf Rocker is correct to argue that an economic transformation in the economy is an essential aspect of a social revolution. In his words:

*"[A] social development in this direction [i.e. a stateless society] was not possible without a fundamental revolution in existing economic arrangements; for tyranny and exploitation grow on the same tree and are inseparably bound together. The freedom of the individual is secure only when it rests on the economic and social well-being of all . . . The personality of the individual stands the higher, the more deeply it is rooted in the community, from which arise the richest sources of its moral strength. Only in freedom does there arise in man the consciousness of responsibility for his acts and regard for the rights of others; only in freedom can there unfold in its full strength that most precious of social instinct: man's sympathy for the joys and sorrows of his fellow men and the resultant impulse toward mutual aid and in which are rooted all social ethics, all ideas of social justice."* [Nationalism and Culture, pp. 147-8]

The aim of any anarchist society would be to maximise freedom and so creative work. In the words of Noam Chomsky:

*"If it is correct, as I believe it is, that a fundamental element of human nature is the need for creative work or creative inquiry, for free creation without the arbitrary limiting effects of coercive institutions, then of course it will follow that a decent society should maximise the possibilities for this fundamental human characteristic to be realised. Now, a federated, decentralised system of free associations incorporating economic as well as social institutions would be what I refer to as anarcho-syndicalism. And it seems to me that it is the appropriate form of social organisation for an advanced technological society, in which human beings do not have to be forced into the position of tools, of cogs in a machine."*

So, as one might expect, since the essence of anarchism is opposition to hierarchical authority, anarchists totally oppose the way the current economy is organised. This is because authority in the economic sphere is embodied in centralised, hierarchical workplaces that give an elite class (capitalists) dictatorial control over privately owned means of production, turning the majority of the population into order takers (i.e. wage slaves). In contrast, the libertarian-socialist "economy" will be based on decentralised, egalitarian workplaces ("syndicates") in which workers democratically self-manage **socially** owned means of production. Let us begin with the concept of syndicates.

The key principles of libertarian socialism are decentralisation, self-management by direct democracy, voluntary association, and federation. These principles determine the form and function of both the economic and political systems. In this section we will consider just the economic system. Bakunin gives an excellent overview of such an economy when he writes:

*"The land belongs to only those who cultivate it with their own hands; to the agricultural*

*communes. The capital and all the tools of production belong to the workers; to the workers' associations . . . The future political organisation should be a free federation of workers.*" [Bakunin on Anarchy, p. 247]

The essential economic concept for libertarian socialists is **workers' self-management** (sometimes termed workers' control). This is essential to ensure "*a society of equals, who will not be compelled to sell their hands and their brains to those who choose to employ them . . . but who will be able to apply their knowledge and capacities to production, in an organism so constructed as to combine all the efforts for procuring the greatest possible well-being for all, while full, free scope will be left for every individual initiative.*" [Kropotkin, **Kropotkin: Selections from his Writings**, pp. 113-4]

However, this concept of self-management needs careful explanation, because, like the terms "*anarchist*" and "*libertarian*," "workers' control" is also being co-opted by capitalists to describe schemes in which workers' have more say in how their workplaces are run while maintaining wage slavery (i.e. capitalist ownership, power and ultimate control). Needless to say, such schemes are phoney as they never place **real** power in the hands of workers. In the end, the owners and their managers have the final say (and so hierarchy remains) and, of course, profits are still extracted from the workforce.

As anarchists use the term, workers' self-management/control means collective worker ownership, control and self-management of all aspects of production and distribution. This is achieved through participatory-democratic workers' assemblies, councils and federations, in both agriculture and industry. These bodies would perform all the functions formerly reserved for capitalist owners, managers, executives and financiers where these activities actually related to productive activity rather than the needs to maximise minority profits and power. These workplace assemblies will be complemented by people's financial institutions or federations of syndicates which perform all functions formerly reserved for capitalist owners, executives, and financiers in terms of allocating investment funds or resources.

This means that an anarchist society is based on "**workers' ownership**" of the means of production.

"*Workers' ownership*" in its most limited sense refers merely to the ownership of individual firms by their workers. In such firms, surpluses (profits) would be either equally divided between all full-time members of the co-operative or divided unequally on the basis of the type of work done, with the percentages allotted to each type being decided by democratic vote, on the principle of one worker, one vote. However, such a limited form of workers' ownership is rejected by most anarchists. Social anarchists argue that this is but a step in the right direction and the ultimate aim is **social** ownership of all the means of life. This is because of the limitations of firms being owned solely by their workers (as in a modern co-operative).

Worker co-operatives of this type do have the virtue of preventing the exploitation and oppression of labour by capital, since workers are not hired for wages but, in effect, become partners in the firm. This means that the workers control both the product of their labour (so that the value-added that they produce is not appropriated by a privileged elite) and the work process itself (and so they no longer sell

their liberty to others). However, this does not mean that all forms of economic domination and exploitation would be eliminated if worker ownership were confined merely to individual firms. In fact, most social anarchists believe this type of system would degenerate into a kind of "*petit-bourgeois co-operativism*" in which worker-owned firms would act as collective "*capitalists*" and compete against each other in the market as ferociously as the real capitalists used to. This would also lead to a situation where market forces ensured that the workers involved made irrational decisions (from both a social and individual point of view) in order to survive in the market. As these problems were highlighted in section I.1.3 ("[What's wrong with markets anyway?](#)"), we will not repeat ourselves here.

For individualist anarchists, this "*irrationality of rationality*" is the price to be paid for a free market and any attempt to overcome this problem holds numerous dangers to freedom. Social anarchists disagree. They think co-operation between workplaces can increase, not reduce, freedom. Social anarchists' proposed solution is **society-wide** ownership of the major means of production and distribution, based on the anarchist principle of voluntary federation, with confederal bodies or co-ordinating councils at two levels: first, between all firms in a particular industry; and second, between all industries, agricultural syndicates, and people's financial institutions throughout the society. As Berkman put it:

*"Actual use will be considered the only title [in communist anarchism] -- not to ownership but to possession. The organisation of the coal miners, for example, will be in charge of the coal mines, not as owners but as the operating agency. Similarly will the railroad brotherhoods run the railroads, and so on. Collective possession, co-operatively managed in the interests of the community, will take the place of personal ownership privately conducted for profit."* [ABC of Anarchism, p. 69]

While, for many anarcho-syndicalists, this structure is seen as enough, most communist-anarchists consider that the economic federation should be held accountable to society as a whole (i.e. the economy must be communalised). This is because not everyone in society is a worker (e.g. the young, the old and infirm) nor will everyone belong to a syndicate (e.g. the self-employed), but as they also have to live with the results of economic decisions, they should have a say in what happens. In other words, in communist-anarchism, workers make the day-to-day decisions concerning their work and workplaces, while the social criteria behind these decisions are made by everyone.

In this type of economic system, workers' assemblies and councils would be the focal point, formulating policies for their individual workplaces and deliberating on industry-wide or economy-wide issues through general meetings of the whole workforce in which everyone would participate in decision making. Voting in the councils would be direct, whereas in larger confederal bodies, voting would be carried out by temporary, unpaid, mandated, and instantly recallable delegates, who would resume their status as ordinary workers as soon as their mandate had been carried out.

**"Mandated"** here means that the delegates from workers' assemblies and councils to meetings of higher confederal bodies would be instructed, at every level of confederation, by the workers who elected them on how to deal with any issue. The delegates would be given imperative mandates (binding instructions)



that committed them to a framework of policies within which they would have to act, and they could be recalled and their decisions revoked at any time for failing to carry out the mandates they were given (this support for mandated delegates has existed in anarchist theory since at least 1848, when Proudhon argued that it was *"a consequence of universal suffrage"* to ensure that *"the people . . . do not . . . abjure their sovereignty."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 63]). Because of this right of mandating and recalling their delegates, workers' councils would be the source of and final authority over policy for all higher levels of confederal co-ordination of the economy.

A society-wide economic federation of this sort is clearly not the same thing as a centralised state agency, as in the concept of nationalised or state-owned industry. As Emma Goldman argued, there is a clear difference between socialisation and nationalisation. *"The first requirement of Communism,"* she argued, *"is the socialisation of the land and of the machinery of production and distribution. Socialised land and machinery belong to the people, to be settled upon and used by individuals and groups according to their needs."* Nationalisation, on the other hand, means that a resource *"belongs to the state; that is, the government has control of it and may dispose of it according to its wishes and views."* She stressed that *"when a thing is socialised, every individual has free access to it and may use it without interference from anyone."* When the state owned property, *"[s]uch a state of affairs may be called state capitalism, but it would be fantastic to consider it in any sense communistic."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, pp.360-1]

Clearly, an anarchist society is based on free access and a resource is controlled by those who use it. It is a decentralised, participatory-democratic (i.e. self-managed) organisation whose members can secede at any time and in which all power and initiative arises from and flows back to the grassroots level (see [section I.6](#) for a discussion on how social ownership would work in practice). Anarchists reject the Leninist idea that state property means the end of capitalism as simplistic and confused. Ownership is a juridical relationship. The **real** issue is one of management. Do the users of a resource manage it? If so, then we have a real (i.e. libertarian) socialist society. If not, we have some form of class society (for example, in the Soviet Union the state replaced the capitalist class but workers still had no official control over their labour or the product of that labour).

A social anarchist society combines free association, federalism and self-management with communalised ownership. Free labour is its basis and socialisation exists to complement and protect it.

Regardless of the kind of anarchy desired, anarchists all agree on the importance of decentralisation, free agreement and free association. Kropotkin's summary of what anarchy would look like gives an excellent feel of what sort of society anarchists desire:

*"harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilised being.*

*"In a society developed on these lines . . . voluntary associations . . . would represent an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes and degrees, local, regional, national and international temporary or more or less permanent -- for all possible purposes: production, consumption and exchange, communications, sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection, defence of the territory, and so on; and, on the other side, for the satisfaction of an ever-increasing number of scientific, artistic, literary and sociable needs.*

*"Moreover, such a society would represent nothing immutable. On the contrary -- as is seen in organic life at large - harmony would (it is contended) result from an ever-changing adjustment and readjustment of equilibrium between the multitudes of forces and influences, and this adjustment would be the easier to obtain as none of the forces would enjoy a special protection from the State."* [Kropotkin's **Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 284]

If this type of system sounds *"utopian"* it should be kept in mind that it was actually implemented and worked quite well in the collectivist economy organised during the Spanish Revolution of 1936, despite the enormous obstacles presented by an ongoing civil war as well as the relentless (and eventually successful) efforts of Republicans, Stalinists and Fascists to crush it (see Sam Dolgoff's **The Anarchist Collectives: Workers' Self-management in the Spanish Revolution, 1936-1939** for an excellent introduction).

As well as this (and other) examples of *"anarchy in action"* there have been other libertarian socialist economic systems described in writing. All share the common features of workers' self-management, co-operation and so on we discuss here and in [section I.4](#). These texts include **Syndicalism** by Tom Brown, **The Program of Anarcho-Syndicalism** by G.P. Maximoff, **Guild Socialism Restated** by G.D.H. Cole, **After the Revolution** by Diago Abad de Santillan, **Anarchist Economics and Principles of Libertarian Economy** by Abraham Guillen, **Workers Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society** by Cornelius Castoriadis among others. A short summary of Spanish Anarchist visions of the free society can be found in chapter 3 of Robert Alexander's **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War** (vol. 1). Also worth reading are **The Political Economy of Participatory Economics** and **Looking Forward: Participatory Economics for the Twenty First Century** by Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel which contain some useful ideas.

Fictional accounts include William Morris' **News from Nowhere**, **The Dispossessed** by Ursula Le Guin, **Women on the Edge of Time** by Marge Piercy and **The Last Capitalist** by Steve Cullen.

### I.3.1 What is a *"syndicate"*?

As we will use the term, a *"syndicate"* (often called a *"producer co-operative,"* or *"co-operative"* for short, sometimes *"collective"* or *"producers' commune"* or *"association of producers"* or *"guild factory"* or *"guild workplace"*) is a democratically self-managed productive enterprise whose productive assets

are either owned by its workers or by society as a whole. It is a useful generic term to describe the situation aimed at by anarchists where *"associations of men and women who . . . work on the land, in the factories, in the mines, and so on, [are] themselves the managers of production."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Evolution and Environment**, p. 78]

It is important to note that individuals who do not wish to join syndicates will be able to work for themselves. There is no *"forced collectivisation"* under **any** form of libertarian socialism, because coercing people is incompatible with the basic principles of anarchism. Those who wish to be self-employed will have free access to the productive assets they need, provided that they neither attempt to monopolise more of those assets than they and their families can use by themselves nor attempt to employ others for wages (see [section I.3.7](#)).

In many ways a syndicate is similar to a co-operative under capitalism. Indeed, Bakunin argued that anarchists are *"convinced that the co-operative will be the preponderant form of social organisation in the future, in every branch of labour and science."* [**Basic Bakunin**, p. 153] Therefore, even from the limited examples of co-operatives functioning in the capitalist market, the essential features of a libertarian socialist economy can be seen. The basic economic element, the workplace, will be a free association of individuals, who will organise their joint work co-operatively. To quote Bakunin again, *"[o]nly associated labour, that is, labour organised upon the principles of reciprocity and co-operation, is adequate to the task of maintaining . . . civilised society."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 341]

**"Co-operation"** in this context means that the policy decisions related to their association will be based on the principle of "one member, one vote," with "managers" and other administrative staff elected and held accountable to the workplace as a whole. Workplace self-management does not mean, as many apologists of capitalism suggest, that knowledge and skill will be ignored and **all** decisions made by everyone. This is an obvious fallacy, since engineers, for example, have a greater understanding of their work than non-engineers and under workers' self-management will control it directly. As G.D.H. Cole argues:

*"we must understand clearly wherein this Guild democracy consists, and especially how it bears on relations between different classes of workers included in a single Guild. For since a Guild includes **all** the workers by hand and brain engaged in a common service, it is clear that there will be among its members very wide divergences of function, of technical skill, and of administrative authority. Neither the Guild as a whole nor the Guild factory can determine all issues by the expedient of the mass vote, nor can Guild democracy mean that, on all questions, each member is to count as one and none more than one. A mass vote on a matter of technique understood only by a few experts would be a manifest absurdity, and, even if the element of technique is left out of account, a factory administered by constant mass votes would be neither efficient nor at all a pleasant place to work in. There will be in the Guilds technicians occupying special positions by virtue of their knowledge, and there will be administrators possessing special authority by virtue*

*both of skill an ability and of personal qualifications."* [G.D.H. Cole, **Guild Socialism Restated**, pp. 50-51]

The fact that some decision-making has been delegated in this manner sometimes leads people to ask whether a syndicate would not just be another form of hierarchy. The answer is that it would not be hierarchical because the workers' assemblies and their councils, open to all workers, would decide what types of decision-making to delegate, thus ensuring that ultimate power rests at the mass base. Moreover, **power** would not be delegated. Malatesta clearly indicates the difference between administrative decisions and policy decisions:

*"Of course in every large collective undertaking, a division of labour, technical management, administration, etc. is necessary. But authoritarians clumsily play on words to produce a **raison d'etre** for government out of the very real need for the organisation of work. Government, it is well to repeat, is the concourse of individuals who have had, or seized, the right and the means to make laws and to oblige people to obey; the administrator, the engineer, etc., instead are people who are appointed or assume the responsibility to carry out a particular job and so on. Government means the delegation of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands of a few; administration means the delegation of work, that is tasks given and received, free exchange of services based on free agreement . . . Let one not confuse the function of government with that of an administration, for they are essentially different, and if today the two are often confused, it is only because of economic and political privilege."* [**Anarchy**, pp. 39-40]

Given that power remains in the hands of the workplace assembly, it is clear that the organisation required for every collective endeavour cannot be equated with government. Also, never forget that administrative staff are elected by and accountable to the rest of an association. If, for example, it turned out that a certain type of delegated decision-making activity was being abused, it could be revoked by the whole workforce. Because of this grassroots control, there is every reason to think that crucial types of decision-making activity which could become a source of power (and so with the potential for seriously affecting all workers' lives) would not be delegated but would remain with the workers' assemblies. For example, powers that are now exercised in an authoritarian manner by managers under capitalism, such as those of hiring and firing, introducing new production methods or technologies, changing product lines, relocating production facilities, determining the nature, pace and rhythm of productive activity and so on would remain in the hands of the associated producers and **not** be delegated to anyone.

New syndicates will be created upon the initiative of individuals within communities. These may be the initiative of workers in an existing syndicate who desire to expand production, or members of the local community who see that the current syndicates are not providing adequately in a specific area of life. Either way, the syndicate will be a voluntary association for producing useful goods or services and would spring up and disappear as required. Therefore, an anarchist society would see syndicates developing spontaneously as individuals freely associate to meet their needs, with both local and

confederal initiatives taking place. (The criteria for investment decisions is discussed in [section I.4.8](#)).

What about entry into a syndicate? In the words of Cole, workers syndicates are *"open associations which any man [or woman] may join"* but *"this does not mean, of course, that any person will be able to claim admission, as an absolute right, into the guild of his choice."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 75] This means that there may be training requirements (for example) and obviously *"a man [or woman] clearly cannot get into a Guild [i.e. syndicate] unless it needs fresh recruits for its work. [The worker] will have free choice, but only of the available openings."* [**Ibid.**] Obviously, as in any society, an individual may not be able to pursue the work they are most interested (although given the nature of an anarchist society they would have the free time to pursue it as a hobby). However, we can imagine that an anarchist society would take an interest in ensuring a fair distribution of work and so would try to arrange work sharing if a given work placement is popular.

Of course there may be the danger of a syndicate or guild trying to restrict entry from an ulterior motive. The ulterior motive would, of course, be the exploitation of monopoly power vis-a-vis other groups in society. However, in an anarchist society individuals would be free to form their own syndicates and this would ensure that such activity is self-defeating. In addition, in a non-mutualist anarchist system, syndicates would be part of a confederation (see [section I.3.4](#)). It is a responsibility of the inter-syndicate congresses to assure that membership and employment in the syndicates is not restricted in any anti-social way. If an individual or group of individuals felt that they had been unfairly excluded from a syndicate then an investigation into the case would be organised at the congress. In this way any attempts to restrict entry would be reduced (assuming they occurred to begin with). And, of course, individuals are free to form new syndicates or leave the confederation if they so desire (see [section I.4.13](#) on the question of who will do unpleasant work, and for more on work allocation generally, in an anarchist society).

To sum up, syndicates are voluntary associations of workers who manage their workplace and their own work. Within the syndicate, the decisions which affect how the workplace develops and changes are in the hands of those who work there. In addition, it means that each section of the workforce manages its own activity and sections and that all workers placed in administration tasks (i.e. *"management"*) are subject to election and recall by those who are affected by their decisions. (Workers' self-management is discussed further in section I.3.2 -- ["What is workers' self-management?"](#)).

## I.3.2 What is workers' self-management?

Quite simply, workers' self-management (sometimes called *"workers' control"*) means that all workers affected by a decision have an equal voice in making it, on the principle of *"one worker, one vote."* That is, workers *"ought to be the real managers of industries."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 157] As noted earlier, however, we need to be careful when using the term *"workers' control,"* as the concept is currently being co-opted by the ruling elite, which is to say that it is becoming popular among sociologists, industrial managers, and social-democratic union leaders, and so

is taking on an entirely different meaning from the one intended by anarchists (who originated the term).

In the hands of capitalists, "*workers' control*" is now referred to by such terms as "*participation*," "*democratisation*," "*co-determination*," "*consensus*," "*empowerment*," "*Japanese-style management*," etc. As Sam Dolgoff notes, "*[f]or those whose function it is solve the new problems of boredom and alienation in the workplace in advanced industrial capitalism, workers' control is seen as a hopeful solution. . . . a solution in which workers are given a modicum of influence, a strictly limited area of decision-making power, a voice at best secondary in the control of conditions of the workplace. Workers' control, in a limited form sanctioned by the capitalists, is held to be the answer to the growing non-economic demands of the workers.*" ["*Workers' Control*" in **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 81]

The new managerial fad of "*quality circles*" -- meetings where workers are encouraged to contribute their ideas on how to improve the company's product and increase the efficiency with which it is made -- is an example of "*workers' control*" as conceived by capitalists. However, when it comes to questions such as what products to make, where to make them, and (especially) how revenues from sales should be divided among the workforce and invested, capitalists and managers don't ask for or listen to workers' "input." So much for "*democratisation*," "*empowerment*," and "*participation!*" In reality, capitalistic "*workers control*" is merely another insidious attempt to make workers more willing and "co-operative" partners in their own exploitation.

Hence we prefer the term "***workers' self-management***" -- a concept which refers to the exercise of workers' power through collectivisation and federation (see below). Self-management in this sense "*is not a new form of mediation between the workers and their capitalist bosses, but instead refers to the very process by which the workers themselves overthrow their managers and take on their own management and the management of production in their own workplace. Self-management means the organisation of all workers . . . into a workers' council or factory committee (or agricultural syndicate), which makes all the decisions formerly made by the owners and managers.*" [Dolgoff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 81] As such, it means "*a transition from private to collective ownership*" which, in turn, "*call[s] for new relationships among the members of the working community.*" [Abel Paz, **The Spanish Civil War**, p. 55] Self-management means the end of hierarchy and authoritarian social relationships in workplace and their replacement by free agreement, collective decision-making, direct democracy, social equality and libertarian social relationships.

Therefore workers' self-management is based around general meetings of the whole workforce, held regularly in every industrial or agricultural syndicate. These are the source of and final authority over decisions affecting policy within the workplace as well as relations with other syndicates. These meetings elect workplace councils whose job is to implement the decisions of these assemblies and to make the day to day administration decisions that will crop up. These councils are directly accountable to the workforce and its members subject to re-election and instant recall. It is also likely that membership of these councils will be rotated between all members of the syndicate to ensure that no one monopolises an administrative position. In addition, smaller councils and assemblies would be organised for divisions, units and work teams as circumstances dictate.

In this way, workers would manage their own collective affairs together, as free and equal individuals. They would associate together to co-operate without subjecting themselves to an authority over themselves. Their collective decisions would remain under their control and power. This means that self-management creates *"an organisation so constituted that by affording everyone the fullest enjoyment of his [or her] liberty, it does not permit anyone to rise above the others nor dominate them in any way but through the natural influence of the intellectual and moral qualities which he [or she] possesses, without this influence ever being imposed as a right and without leaning upon any political institution whatever."* [The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 271] Only by convincing your fellow associates of the soundness of your ideas can those ideas become the agreed plan of the syndicate. No one is in a position to impose their ideas simply because of the post they hold or the work they do.

Most anarchists think that it is likely that purely administrative tasks and decisions would be delegated to elected individuals in this way, freeing workers and assemblies to concentrate on important activities and decisions rather than being bogged down in trivial details. As Bakunin put it:

*"Is not administrative work just as necessary to production as is manual labour -- if not more so? Of course, production would be badly crippled, if not altogether suspended, without efficient and intelligent management. But from the standpoint of elementary justice and even efficiency, the management of production need not be exclusively monopolised by one or several individuals. And managers are not at all entitled to more pay. The co-operative workers associations have demonstrated that the workers themselves, choosing administrators from their own ranks, receiving the same pay, can efficiency control and operate industry. The monopoly of administration, far from promoting the efficiency of production, on the contrary only enhances the power and privileges of the owners and their managers."* [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 424]

What is important is that what is considered as important or trivial, policy or administration rests with the people affected by the decisions and subject to their continual approval. Anarchists do not make a fetish of direct democracy and recognise that there is more important things in life than meetings and voting! While workers' assemblies play the key role in self-management, it is not the focal point of **all** decisions. Rather it is the place where all the important policy decisions are made, administrative decisions are ratified or rejected and what counts as a major decision determined. Needless to say, what is considered as important issues will be decided upon by the workers themselves in their assemblies.

A self-managed workplace, like a self-managed society in general, does not mean that specialised knowledge (where it is meaningful) will be neglected or not taken into account. Quite the opposite. Specialists (i.e. workers who are interested in a given area of work and gain an extensive understanding of it) are part of the assembly of the workplace, just like other workers. They can and have to be listened to, like anyone else, and their expert advice included in the decision making process. Anarchists do not reject the idea of expertise nor the rational authority associated with it. As we indicated in [section B.1](#), anarchists recognise the difference between being *an* authority (i.e. having knowledge of a given subject) and being *in* authority (i.e. having power over someone else). We reject the latter and respect

the former:

*"Does it follow that I reject all authority? Far from me such a thought. In the matter of boots, I refer to the authority of the bootmaker; concerning houses, canals, or railroads, I consult that of architect or engineer. For such or such special knowledge I apply to such or such a **savant**. But I allow neither the bootmaker nor the architect nor the **savant** to impose his authority upon me. I listen to them freely and with all the respect merited by their intelligence, their character, their knowledge, reserving always my incontestable right of criticism and censure. . . . If I bow before the authority of specialists and avow a readiness to follow, to a certain extent and as long as may seem to me necessary, their indications and even their directions, it is because their authority is imposed upon me by no one, neither men nor by God . . . . I bow before the authority of special men [and women] because it is imposed upon me by my own reason."* [Bakunin, **God and the State**, pp. 32-3]

However, specialisation does not imply the end of self-management, but rather the opposite. *"The greatest intelligence,"* Bakunin argued, *"would not be equal to a comprehension of the whole. Thence results, for science as well as industry, the necessity of the division and association of labour."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 33] Thus specialised knowledge is part of the associated workers and not placed above them in positions of power. The other workers in a syndicate can compliment the knowledge of the specialists with the knowledge of the work process they have gained by working and so enrich the decision. Knowledge is distributed throughout society and only a society of free individuals associated as equals and managing their own activity can ensure that it is applied effectively (part of the inefficiency of capitalism results from the barriers to knowledge and information flow created by the hierarchical workplace).

A workplace assembly is perfectly able to listen to an engineer, for example, who suggests various ways of reaching various goals (i.e. if you want X, you would have to do A or B. If you do A, then C, D and E is required. If B is decided upon, then F, G, H and I are entailed). But it is the assembly, **not** the engineer, that decides what goals and methods to be implemented. As Cornelius Castoriadis puts it, *"[w]e are not saying: people will have to decide **what** to do, and then technicians will tell them **how** to do it. We say: after listening to technicians, people will decide what to do **and** how to do it. For the **how** is not neutral -- and the **what** is not disembodied. What and how are neither **identical**, nor **external** to each other. A 'neutral' technique is, of course, an illusion. A conveyor belt is linked to a type of product **and** a type of producer -- and vice versa."* [**Social and PPolitical Writings**, vol. 3, p. 265]

However, we must stress that while an anarchist society would "inherit" a diverse level of expertise and specialisation from class society, it would not take this as unchangeable. Anarchists argue for **"all-round"** (or integral) education as a means of ensuring that everyone has a basic knowledge or understanding of science, engineering and other specialised tasks. As Bakunin argued, *"in the interests of both labour and science . . . there should no longer be either workers or scholars but only human beings."* Education must *"prepare every child of each sex for the life of thought as well as for the life of labour."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 116 and p. 119] This does not imply the end of all specialisation



(individuals will, of course, express their individuality and know more about certain subjects than others) but it does imply the end of the artificial specialisation developed under capitalism which tries to deskill and disempower the wage worker by concentrating knowledge into hands of management.

And, just to state the obvious, self-management does not imply that the mass of workers decide on the application of specialised tasks. Self-management implies the autonomy of those who do the work as well as collective decision making on collective issues. For example, in a self-managed hospital the cleaning staff would not have a say in the doctors' treatment of patients just as the doctors would not tell the cleaners how to do their work (of course, it is likely that an anarchist society will **not** have people whose work is simply to clean and nothing else, we just use this as an example people will understand). All members of a syndicate would have a say in what happens in the workplace as it affects them collectively, but individual workers and groups of workers would manage their own activity within that collective.

Needless to say, self-management abolishes the division of labour inherent in capitalism between order takers and order givers. It integrates (to use Kropotkin's words) brain work and manual work by ensuring that those who do the work also manage it and that a workplace is managed by those who use it. Such an integration of labour will, undoubtedly, have a massive impact in terms of productivity, innovation and efficiency. As Kropotkin argued, the capitalist firm has a negative impact on those subject to its hierarchical and alienating structures:

*"The worker whose task has been specialised by the permanent division of labour has lost the intellectual interest in his [or her] labour, and it is especially so in the great industries; he has lost his inventive powers. Formerly, he [or she] invented very much . . . But since the great factory has been enthroned, the worker, depressed by the monotony of his [or her] work, invents no more."* [Fields, **Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 171]

Must all the skills, experience and intelligence that very one has be swept away or crushed by hierarchy? Or could it not become a new fertile source of progress under a better organisation of production? Self-management would ensure that the independence, initiative and inventiveness of workers (which disappears under wage slavery) comes to the fore and is applied. Combined with the principles of "*all-round*" (or integral) education (see [section J.5.13](#)) who can deny that working people could transform the current economic system to ensure "*well-being for all*"? And we must stress that by "*well-being*" we mean well-being in terms of meaningful, productive activity in humane surroundings and using appropriate technology, in terms of goods of utility and beauty to help create strong, healthy bodies and in terms of surroundings which are inspiring to live in and ecologically integrated.

Little wonder Kropotkin argued that self-management and the "*erasing [of] the present distinction between the brain workers and manual worker*" would see "*social benefits*" arising from "*the concordance of interest and harmony so much wanted in our times of social struggles*" and "*the fullness of life which would result for each separate individual, if he [or she] were enabled to enjoy the use of*

*both . . . mental and bodily powers."* This is in addition to the *"increase of wealth which would result from having . . . educated and well-trained producers."* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 180]

It is the face-to-face meetings that bring workers directly into the management process and give them power over the economic decisions that affect their lives. In social anarchism, since the means of production are owned by society as a whole, decisions on matters like how to apportion the existing means of production among the syndicates, how to distribute and reinvest the surpluses, etc. will be made by the grassroots **social** units, i.e. the community assemblies (see [section I.5.2](#)), not by the workers' councils. This does not mean that workers will have no voice in decisions about such matters, but only that they will vote on them as "citizens" in their local community assemblies, not as workers in their local syndicates. As mentioned before, this is because not everyone will belong to a syndicate, yet everyone will still be affected by economic decisions of the above type. This is an example of how the social/political and economic structures of social anarchy are intertwined.

Lastly, the introduction of workers' self-management will be a product of two processes.

Firstly, the class struggle will help workers gain experience of managing their own affairs. Struggles to resist oppression and exploitation in the workplace will mean that workers will have to organise themselves to manage those struggles. This will be an important means of accustoming them to make their own decisions. By participating in the structures created to conduct the class war, they will gain the skills and experience needed to go beyond class society. The process of struggle will ensure we can manage our own working time when we take over the means of life and abolish wage slavery.

Secondly, today workers **do** manage their own working time to a considerable extent. As we have argued before, the capitalist may buy a hour of a workers' time but they have to ensure that the worker follows their orders during that time. Workers resist this imposition and this results in considerable shop-floor conflict. Frederick Talyor, for example, introduced his system of *"scientific management"* in part to try and stop workers managing their own working activity. As David Noble notes, workers *"paced themselves for many reason: to keep time for themselves, to avoid exhaustion, to exercise authority over their work, to avoid killing so-called gravy piece-rate jobs by overproducing and risking a pay cut, to stretch out available work for fear of layoffs, to exercise their creativity, and, last but not least, to express their solidarity and their hostility to management."* These were *"[c]oupled with collective co-operation with their fellows on the floor"* and *"labour-prescribed norms of behaviour"* to achieve *"shop floor control over production."* [**Forces of Production**, p. 33] In other words, workers naturally tend towards self-management anyway and it is this natural movement towards liberty during work hours which is combated by bosses (who wins, of course, depends on objective and subjective pressures which swing the balance of power towards labour or capital).

Self-management will built upon this already existing unofficial workers control over production and, of course, our knowledge of the working process which actually doing it creates. The conflict over who controls the shop floor -- either those who do the work or those who give the orders -- creates two

processes that not only show that self-management is **possible** but also show how it can come about.

### I.3.3 What role do syndicates play in the "economy"?

As we have seen, private ownership of the means of production is the lynchpin of capitalism, because it is the means by which capitalists are able to exploit workers by appropriating surplus value from them. To eliminate such exploitation, social anarchists propose that social capital -- productive assets such as factories and farmland -- be owned by society as a whole and shared out among syndicates and self-employed individuals by directly democratic methods, through face-to-face voting of the whole community in local neighbourhood and confederal assemblies, which will be linked together through voluntary federations. It does **not** mean that the state owns the means of production, as under Marxism-Leninism or social democracy, because there is no state under libertarian socialism. (For more on neighbourhood and community assemblies, see sections [I.5.1](#) and [I.5.2](#)).

Production for use rather than profit/money is the key concept that distinguishes collectivist and communist forms of anarchism from market socialism or from the competitive forms of mutualism advocated by Proudhon and the Individualist Anarchists. Under mutualism, workers organise themselves into syndicates, but ownership of a syndicate's capital is limited to its workers rather than resting with the whole society. The workers' in each co-operative/syndicate share in the gains and losses of workplace. There is no profit as such, for in *"the labour-managed firm there is no profit, only income to be divided among members. Without employees the labour-managed firm does not have a wage bill, and labour costs are not counted among the expenses to be subtracted from profit, as they are in the capitalist firm. . . [T]he labour-managed firm does not hire labour. It is a collective of workers that hires capital and necessary materials."* [Christopher Eaton Gunn, **Workers' Self-Management in the United States**, pp. 41-2]

Thus mutualism eliminates wage labour and unites workers with the means of production they use. Such a system is socialist as it is based on self-management and workers' control/ownership of the means of production. However, social anarchists argue that such a system is little more than *"petit-bourgeois co-operativism"* in which the worker-owners of the co-operatives compete in the marketplace with other co-operatives for customers, profits, raw materials, etc. -- a situation that could result in many of the same problems that arise under capitalism (see [section I.3](#)). Moreover, social anarchists argue, such a system can easily degenerate back into capitalism as any inequalities that exist between co-operatives would be increased by competition, forcing weaker co-operatives to fail and so creating a pool of workers with nothing to sell but their labour. The successful co-operatives could then hire those workers and so re-introduce wage labour.

Some Mutualists recognise this danger. Proudhon, for example, argued for an *"agro-industrial federation"* which would *"provide reciprocal security in commerce and industry"* and *"protect the citizens . . . from capitalist and financial exploitation."* In this way, the *"agro-industrial federation. . . will tend to foster increasing equality . . . through mutualism in credit and insurance . . . guaranteeing the right to work and to education, and an organisation of work which allows each labourer to become a*

*skilled worker and an artist, each wage-earner to become his own master.*" Thus mutualism sees *"all industries guaranteeing one another mutually"* and *"the conditions of common prosperity."* [**The Principle of Federation**, p. 70, p. 71 and p. 72] It seems likely that this agro-industrial federation would be the body which would fix *"after amicable discussion of a maximum and minimum profit margin"* and *"the organising of regulating societies. . . to regulate the market."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 70]

Thus, some Mutualists are aware of the dangers associated with even a self-managed, socialistic market and create support structures to defend workers' self-management. Moreover, it is likely that industrial syndicates would be linked to mutual banks (a credit syndicate). Such syndicates would exist to provide interest-free credit for self-management, new syndicate expansion and so on. And if the experience of capitalism is anything to go by, mutual banks will also reduce the Business cycle as its effects as *"[c]ountries like Japan and Germany that are usually classified as bank-centred -- because banks provide more outside finance than markets, and because more firms have long-term relationships with their banks -- show greater growth in and stability of investment over time than the market-centred ones, like the US and Britain. . . Further, studies comparing German and Japanese firms with tight bank ties to those without them also show that firms with bank ties exhibit greater stability in investment over the business cycle."* [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, pp. 174-5]

In addition, supporters of mutualism can point to the fact that existing co-operatives rarely fire their members and are far more egalitarian in nature than corresponding capitalist firms. This they argue will ensure that mutualism will remain socialist, with easy credit available to those who are made unemployed to start their own businesses again.

In contrast, within anarcho-collectivism and anarcho-communism, society as a whole owns the social capital, which allows for the elimination of both competition for survival and the tendency for workers to develop a proprietary interest in the enterprises in which they work. As Kropotkin argued, *"[t]here is no reason why the factory . . . should not belong to the community. . . It is evident that now, under the capitalist system, the factory is the curse of the village, as it comes to overwork children and to make paupers of its male inhabitants; and it is quite natural that it should be opposed by all means by the workers. . . But under a more rational social organisation, the factory would find no such obstacles; it would be a boon to the village."* Needless to say, such a workplace would be based on workers' self-management, as *"the workers . . . ought to be the real managers of industries."* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 152 and p. 157] This *"socially organised industrial production"* (to use Kropotkin's term) would ensure a decent standard of living without the problems associated with a market, even a non-capitalist one. It would enable goods to be either sold at their production prices (or labour-cost) so as to reduce their cost to consumers or distributed in accordance with communist principles (namely free); it facilitates efficiency gains through the consolidation of formerly competing enterprises; and it eliminates the many problems due to the predatory nature of competition, including the destruction of the environment through the *"grow or die"* principle, the development of oligopolies from capital concentration and centralisation, and the business cycle, with its periodic recessions and depressions, and the turning of free people into potential wage slaves.

For social anarchists, therefore, libertarian socialism is based on decentralised decision making within the framework of communally-owned but independently-run and worker-self-managed syndicates (or co-operatives):

*"[T]he land, the instruments of work and all other capital may become the collective property of the whole of society and be utilised only by the workers, on other words, by the agricultural and industrial associations."* [Bakunin, **Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 174]

In other words, the economy is communalised, with land and the means of production being turned into communal *"property."* The community determines the social and ecological framework for production while the workforce makes the day-to-day decisions about what to produce and how to do it. This is because a system based purely on workplace assemblies effectively disenfranchises those individuals who do not work but live with the effects of production (e.g., ecological disruption). In Howard Harkins' words, *"the difference between workplace and community assemblies is that the internal dynamic of direct democracy in communities gives a hearing to solutions that bring out the common ground and, when there is not consensus, an equal vote to every member of the community."* ["*Community Control, Workers' Control and the Co-operative Commonwealth*", pp. 55-83, **Society and Nature** No. 3, p. 69]

This means that when a workplace joins a confederation, that workplace is communalised as well as confederated. In this way, workers' control is placed within the broader context of the community, becoming an aspect of community control. This does not mean that workers' do not control what they do or how they do it. Rather, it means that the framework within which they make their decisions is determined by the community. For example, the local community may decide that production should maximise recycling and minimise pollution, and workers informed of this decision make investment and production decisions accordingly. In addition, consumer groups and co-operatives may be given a voice in the confederal congresses of syndicates or even in the individual workplaces (although it would be up to local communities to decide whether this would be practical or not). In these ways, consumers could have a say in the administration of production and the type and quality of the product, adding their voice and interests in the creation as well as the consumption of a product.

Given the general principle of social ownership and the absence of a state, there is considerable leeway regarding the specific forms that collectivisation might take -- for example, in regard to methods of surplus distribution, the use or non-use of money, etc. -- as can be seen by the different systems worked out in various areas of Spain during the Revolution of 1936-39 (as described, for example, in Sam Dolgoff's **The Anarchist Collectives**).

Nevertheless, democracy is undermined when some communities are poor while others are wealthy. Therefore the method of surplus distribution must insure that all communities have an adequate share of pooled revenues and resources held at higher levels of confederation as well as guaranteed minimum levels of public services and provisions to meet basic human needs.

## I.3.4 What relations would exist between individual syndicates?

Just as individuals associate together to work on and overcome common problems, so would syndicates. Few, if any, workplaces are totally independent of others. They require raw materials as inputs and consumers for their products. Therefore there will be links between different syndicates. These links are twofold: firstly, free agreements between individual syndicates, and secondly, confederations of syndicates (within branches of industry and regionally). Let's consider free agreement first.

Anarchists recognise the importance of letting people organise their own lives. This means that they reject central planning and instead urge direct links between workers' associations. In the words of Kropotkin, "*[f]ree workers would require a free organisation, and this cannot have any other basis than free agreement and free co-operation, without sacrificing the autonomy of the individual.*" [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 52] Those directly involved in production (and in consumption) know their needs far better than any bureaucrat. Thus voluntary agreement is the basis of a free economy, such agreements being "*entered by free consent, as a free choice between different courses equally open to each of the agreeing parties.*" [Peter Kropotkin, **Anarchism and Anarchist Communism**, p. 52] Without the concentration of wealth and power associated with capitalism, free agreement will become real and no longer a mask for hierarchy. So anarchists think that "*[i]n the same way that each free individual has associated with his brothers [and sisters!] to produce . . . all that was necessary for life, driven by no other force than his desire for the full enjoyment of life, so each institution is free and self-contained, and co-operates and enters into agreements with others because by so doing it extends its own possibilities.*" [George Barrett, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 18] An example of one such agreement would be orders for products and services.

This suggests a decentralised economy -- even more decentralised than capitalism (which is "*decentralised*" only in capitalist mythology, as shown by big business and transnational corporations, for example) -- one "*growing ever more closely bound together and interwoven by free and mutual agreements.*" [**Ibid.**, p. 18] For social anarchists, this would take the form of "*free exchange without the medium of money and without profit, on the basis of requirement and the supply at hand.*" [Alexander Berkman, **ABC of Anarchism**, p. 69]

Therefore, an anarchist economy would be based on spontaneous order as workers practised mutual aid and free association. The anarchist economy "*starts from below, not from above. Like an organism, this free society grows into being from the simple unit up to the complex structure. The need for . . . the individual struggle for life . . . is . . . sufficient to set the whole complex social machinery in motion. Society is the result of the individual struggle for existence; it is not, as many suppose, opposed to it.*" [George Barrett, **Op. Cit.**, p. 18]

In other words, "*[t]his factory of ours is, then, to the fullest extent consistent with the character of its service, a self-governing unit, managing its own productive operations, and free to experiment to the heart's content in new methods, to develop new styles and products. . . This autonomy of the factory is the safeguard. . . against the dead level of mediocrity, the more than adequate substitute for the variety*

*which the competitive motive was once supposed to stimulate, the guarantee of liveliness, and of individual work and workmanship.*" [G.D.H. Cole, **Guild Socialism Restated**, p. 59]

This brings us to the second form of relationships between syndicates, namely confederations of syndicates. If individual or syndicate activities spread beyond their initial locality, they would probably reach a scale at which they would need to constitute a confederation. At this scale, industrial confederations of syndicates are necessary to aid communication between workplaces who produce for a large area. No syndicate exists in isolation, and so there is a real need for a means by which syndicates can meet together to discuss common interests and act on them. Thus confederations are complementary to free agreement. Bakunin's comments are very applicable here:

*"[A] truly popular organisation begins from below, from the association, from the commune. Thus starting out with the organisation of the lowest nucleus and proceeding upward, federalism becomes a political institution of socialism, the free and spontaneous organisation of popular life."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 273-4]

Given that Bakunin, like many anarchists, considered that *"the federative Alliance of all working men's [sic!] associations . . . [would] constitute the Commune,"* the political institutions of anarchy would be similar to its economic institutions. Indeed, Bakunin argued for a *"free federation of agricultural and industrial associations . . . organised from the bottom upwards"* to be the basis of a revolution (in 1905 and in 1917, revolutionary workers and peasants did exactly that, we should note, when they created **soviets** -- Russian for councils -- during their revolutions). Hence Bakunin's comments on *"political"* institutions and federalism are applicable to a discussion of economic institutions. [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 170 and p. 172]

A confederation of syndicates (called a *"guild"* by some libertarian socialists, or *"industrial union"* by others) works on two levels: within an industry and across industries. The basic operating principle of these confederations is the same as that of the syndicate itself -- voluntary co-operation between equals in order to meet common needs. In other words, each syndicate in the confederation is linked by horizontal agreements with the others, and none owe any obligations to a separate entity above the group (see section A.2.11, [\*"Why are anarchists in favour of direct democracy?"\*](#) for more on the nature of anarchist confederation).

Kropotkin's comments on federalism between communes indicate this (a syndicate can be considered as a producers' commune):

*"The Commune of tomorrow will know that it cannot admit any higher authority; above it there can only be the interests of the Federation, freely accepted by itself as well as other communes. . ."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 83]

Nor need federalism conflict with autonomy, as each member would have extensive freedom of action within its boundaries:

*"The Commune will be absolutely free to adopt all the institutions it wishes and to make all the reforms and revolutions it finds necessary."* [Op. Cit., p. 83]

Moreover, these federations would be diverse and functional. Economic federation would produce a complex inter-networking between associations and federations. In Kropotkin's words:

*"Our needs are in fact so various, and they emerge with such rapidity, that soon a single federation will not be sufficient to satisfy them all. The Commune will then feel the need to contract other alliances, to enter into other federations. Belonging to one group for the acquisition of food supplies, it will have to join a second group to obtain other goods, such as metals, and then a third and a fourth group for textiles and works of art."* [Op. Cit., p. 87]

As such, the confederations reflect anarchist ideas of free association and decentralised organisation as well as concern for practical needs:

*"Anarchists are strenuously opposed to the authoritarian, centralist spirit . . . So they picture a future social life in the basis of federalism, from the individual to the municipality, to the commune, to the region, to the nation, to the international, on the basis of solidarity and free agreement. And it is natural that this ideal should be reflected also in the organisation of production, giving preference as far as possible, to a decentralised sort of organisation; but this does not take the form of an absolute rule to be applied in every instance. A libertarian order would be in itself, on the other hand, rule out the possibility of imposing such a unilateral solution."* [Luigi Fabbri, "Anarchy and 'Scientific Communism'", pp. 13-49, **The Poverty of Statism**, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 23]

Therefore, a confederation of syndicates would be adaptive to its members needs. As Tom Brown argued, the *"syndicalist mode of organisation is extremely elastic, therein is its chief strength, and the regional confederations can be formed, modified, added to or reformed according to local conditions and changing circumstances."* [**Syndicalism**, p. 58]

As would be imagined, these confederations are voluntary associations and *"[j]ust as factory autonomy is vital in order to keep the Guild system alive and vigorous, the existence of varying democratic types of factories in independence of the National Guilds may also be a means of valuable experiment and fruitful initiative of individual minds. In insistently refusing to carry their theory to its last 'logical' conclusion, the Guildsmen [and anarchists] are true to their love of freedom and varied social enterprise."* [G.D.H. Cole, **Op. Cit.**, p. 65]

As we noted, in the [last section](#), inter-workplace federations are not limited to collectivist, syndicalist and communist anarchists. Proudhon, for example, suggested an *"agro-industrial federation"* as the structural support organisation for his system of self-managed co-operatives. As the example many



isolated co-operatives have shown, support networks are essential for co-operatives to survive under capitalism. It is no coincidence that the Mondragon co-operative complex in the Basque region of Spain has a credit union and mutual support networks between its co-operatives and is by far the most successful co-operative system in the world.

If a workplace agrees to confederate, then it gets to share in the resources of the confederation and so gains the benefits of mutual aid. In return for the benefits of confederal co-operation, the syndicate's tools of production become the "*property*" of society, to be used but not owned by those who work in them. This does not mean centralised control from the top, for "*when we say that ownership of the tools of production, including the factory itself, should revert to the corporation [i.e. confederation] we do not mean that the workers in the individual workshops will be ruled by any kind of industrial government having power to do what it pleases with [them]. . . . No, the workers. . . [will not] hand over their hard-won control. . . to a superior power. . . . What they will do is. . . to guarantee reciprocal use of their tools of production and accord their fellow workers in other factories the right to share their facilities [and vice versa]. . . with [all] whom they have contracted the pact of solidarity.*" [James Guillaume, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 363-364]

Facilitating this type of co-operation is the major role of inter-industry confederations, which also ensure that when the members of a syndicate change work to another syndicate in another (or the same) branch of industry, they have the same rights as the members of their new syndicate. In other words, by being part of the confederation, a worker ensures that s/he has the same rights and an equal say in whatever workplace is joined. This is essential to ensure that a co-operative society remains co-operative, as the system is based on the principle of "*one person, one vote*" by all those involved the work process.

So, beyond this reciprocal sharing, what other roles does the confederation play? Basically, there are two. Firstly, the sharing and co-ordination of information produced by the syndicates (as will be discussed in [section I.3.5](#)), and, secondly, determining the response to the changes in production and consumption indicated by this information. As the "*vertical*" links between syndicates are non-hierarchical, each syndicate remains self-governing. This ensures decentralisation of power and direct control, initiative, and experimentation by those involved in doing the work. Hence, "*the internal organisation [of one syndicate] . . . need not be identical [to others]: Organisational forms and procedures will vary greatly according to the preferences of the associated workers.*" [**Ibid.**, p. 361] In practice, this would probably mean that each syndicate gets its own orders and determines the best way to satisfy them (i.e. manages its own work and working conditions).

As indicated above, free agreement will ensure that customers would be able to choose their own suppliers, meaning that production units would know whether they were producing what their customers wanted, i.e., whether they were meeting social need as expressed through demand. If they were not, customers would go elsewhere, to other production units within the same branch of production. We should stress that in addition to this negative check (i.e. "*exit*" by consumers) it is likely, via consumer groups and co-operatives as well as communes, that workplaces will be subject to positive checks on what they produced. Consumer groups, by formulating and communicating needs to producer groups,

will have a key role in ensuring the quality of production and goods and that it satisfies their needs (see [section I.4.7](#) for more details of this).

However, while production will be based on autonomous networking, the investment response to consumer actions would, to some degree, be co-ordinated by a confederation of syndicates in that branch of production. By such means, the confederation can ensure that resources are not wasted by individual syndicates over-producing goods or over-investing in response to changes in production (see the [next section](#)).

### I.3.5 What would confederations of syndicates do?

Voluntary confederation among syndicates is required in order to decide on the policies governing relations between syndicates and to co-ordinate their activities. There are two basic kinds of confederation: within all workplaces of a certain type, and within the whole economy (the federation of all syndicates). Both would operate at different levels, meaning there would be confederations for both industrial and inter-industrial associations at the local and regional levels and beyond. The basic aim of this inter-industry and cross-industry networking is to ensure that the relevant information is spread across the various elemental parts of the economy so that each can effectively co-ordinate its plans with the others. By communicating across workplaces, people can overcome the barriers to co-ordinating their plans which one finds in market systems (see [section C.7.2](#)) and so avoid the economic and social disruptions associated with capitalism.

However, it is essential to remember that each syndicate within the confederation is autonomous. The confederations seek to co-ordinate activities of joint interest (in particular investment decisions for new plant and the rationalisation of existing plant in light of reduced demand). They do not determine what work a syndicate does or how they do it. As Kropotkin argued (based on his firsthand experience of Russia under Lenin):

*"No government would be able to organise production if the workers themselves through their unions did not do it in each branch of industry; for in all production there arise daily thousands of difficulties which no government can solve or foresee. It is certainly impossible to foresee everything. Only the efforts of thousands of intelligences working on the problems can co-operate in the development of a new social system and find the best solutions for the thousands of local needs."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, pp. 76-77]

Thus Cole's statement:

*"With the factory thus largely conducting its own concerns, the duties of the larger Guild organisations [i.e. confederations] would be mainly those of co-ordination, or regulation, and of representing the Guild in its external relations. They would, where it was*

*necessary, co-ordinate the production of various factories, so as to make supply coincide with demand. . . they would organise research . . . This large Guild organisation. . . must be based directly on the various factories included in the Guild."* [**Guild Socialism Restated**, pp. 59-60]

So it is important to note that the lowest units of confederation -- the workers' councils -- will control the higher levels, through their power to elect mandated and recallable delegates to meetings of higher confederal units. "**Mandated**" means that the delegates will go to the meeting of the higher confederal body with specific instructions on how to vote on a particular issue, and if they do not vote according to that mandate they will be recalled and the results of the vote nullified. Delegates will be ordinary workers rather than paid representatives or union leaders, and they will return to their usual jobs as soon as the mandate for which they have been elected has been carried out. In this way, decision-making power remains with the workers' councils and does not become concentrated at the top of a bureaucratic hierarchy in an elite class of professional administrators or union leaders. For the workers' councils will have the final say on **all** policy decisions, being able to revoke policies made by those with delegated decision-making power and to recall those who made them:

*"When it comes to the material and technical method of production, anarchists have no preconceived solutions or absolute prescriptions, and bow to what experience and conditions in a free society recommend and prescribe. What matters is that, whatever the type of production adopted, it should be the free choice of the producers themselves, and cannot possibly be imposed, any more than any form is possible of exploitations of another's labour. . . Anarchists do not **a priori** exclude any practical solution and likewise concede that there may be a number of different solutions at different times."* [Luigi Fabbri, "Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism", pp. 13-49, **The Poverty of Statism**, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 22]

Confederations (negotiated-co-ordination bodies) would, therefore, be responsible for clearly defined branches of production, and in general, production units would operate in only one branch of production. These confederations would have direct links to other confederations and the relevant communal confederations, which supply the syndicates with guidelines for decision making (as will be discussed in [section I.4.4](#)) and ensure that common problems can be highlighted and discussed. These confederations exist to ensure that information is spread between workplaces and to ensure that the industry responds to changes in social demand. In other words, these confederations exist to co-ordinate major new investment decisions (i.e. if demand exceeds supply) and to determine how to respond if there is excess capacity (i.e. if supply exceeds demand).

It should be pointed out that these confederated investment decisions will exist along with the investments associated with the creation of new syndicates, plus internal syndicate investment decisions. We are not suggesting that **every** investment decision is to be made by the confederations. (This would be particularly impossible for **new** industries, for which a confederation would not exist!) Therefore, in addition to co-ordinated production units, an anarchist society would see numerous small-scale, local

activities which would ensure creativity, diversity, and flexibility. Only after these activities had spread across society would confederal co-ordination become necessary.

Thus, major investment decisions would be made at congresses and plenums of the industry's syndicates, by a process of horizontal, negotiated co-ordination. This model combines "*planning*" with decentralisation. Major investment decisions are co-ordinated at an appropriate level, with each unit in the confederation being autonomous, deciding what to do with its own productive capacity in order to meet social demand. Thus we have self-governing production units co-ordinated by confederations (horizontal negotiation), which ensures local initiative (a vital source of flexibility, creativity, and diversity) and a rational response to changes in social demand.

It should be noted that during the Spanish Revolution syndicates organised themselves very successfully as town-wide industrial confederations of syndicates. These were based on the town-level industrial confederation getting orders for products for its industry and allocating work between individual workplaces (as opposed to each syndicate receiving orders for itself). Gaston Leval noted that this form of organisation (with increased responsibilities for the confederation) did not harm the libertarian nature of anarchist self-management:

*"Everything was controlled by the syndicates. But it must not therefore be assumed that everything was decided by a few higher bureaucratic committees without consulting the rank and file members of the union. Here libertarian democracy was practised. As in the C.N.T. there was a reciprocal double structure; from the grass roots at the base . . . upwards, and in the other direction a reciprocal influence from the federation of these same local units at all levels downwards, from the source back to the source."* [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 105]

Such a solution, or similar ones, may be more practical in some situations than having each syndicate receive its own orders and so anarchists do not reject such confederal responsibilities out of hand (although the general prejudice is for decentralisation). This is because we "*prefer decentralised management; but ultimately, in practical and technical problems, we defer to free experience.*" [Luigi Fabbri, **Op. Cit.**, p. 24] The specific form of organisation will obviously vary as required from industry to industry, area to area, but the underlying ideas of self-management and free association will be the same. Moreover, in the words of G.D.H Cole, the "*essential thing . . . is that its [the confederation or guild] function should be kept down to the minimum possible for each industry.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 61]

In this way, the periodic crises of capitalism based on over-investment and over-production (followed by depression) and their resulting social problems can be avoided and resources efficiently and effectively utilised. In addition, production (and so the producers) can be freed from the centralised control of both capitalist and state hierarchies.

Another important role for inter-syndicate federations is to even out natural inequalities. After all, each commune will not be identical in terms of natural resources, quality of land, situation, accessibility, and

so on. Simply put, social anarchists *"believe that because of natural differences in fertility, health and location of the soil it would be impossible to ensure that every individual enjoyed equal working conditions."* Under such circumstances, it would be *"impossible to achieve a state of equality from the beginning"* and so *"justice and equity are, for natural reasons, impossible to achieve . . . and that freedom would thus also be unachievable."* [Malatesta, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 16 and p. 21] By federating together, workers can ensure that *"the earth will . . . be an economic domain available to everyone, the riches of which will be enjoyed by all human beings."* [Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 93] Local deficiencies of raw materials, in the quality of land, and, therefore, supplies would be compensated from outside, by the socialisation of production and consumption. This would allow all of humanity to share and benefit from economic activity, so ensuring that well-being for all is possible.

Federation would eliminate the possibility of rich and poor collectives and syndicates co-existing side by side. As Kropotkin argued, *"[c]ommon possession of the necessities for production implies the common enjoyment of the fruits of common production . . . when everybody, contributing for the common well-being to the full extent of his [or her] capacities, shall enjoy also from the common stock of society to the fullest possible extent of his [or her] needs."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 59]

Hence we find the CNT, arguing in its 1936 resolution on libertarian communism, that *"[a]s far as the interchange of produce between communes is concerned, the communal councils are to liaise with the regional federations of communes and with the confederal council of production and distribution, applying for whatever they may need and [giving] any available surplus stocks."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 107] This clearly followed Kropotkin's comments that the *"socialising of production, consumption, and exchange"* would be based on workplaces *"belong[ing] to federated Communes."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 136]

The legacy of capitalism, with its rich and poor areas, its rich and poor workplaces, will be a problem any revolution will face. The inequalities produced by centuries will take time to change. This is one of the tasks of the federation, to ensure the socialisation of both production and consumption so that people are not penalised for the accidents of history and that each commune can develop itself to an adequate level. In the words of the CNT during the Spanish Revolution:

*"Many arguments are used against the idea of socialisation; one of these -- the most delightful -- says that by socialising an industry we simply take it over and run it with the consequence that we have flourishing industries where the workers are privileged, and unfortunate industries where the workers get less benefits but have to work harder than workers elsewhere . . . There are differences between the workers in prosperous industries and those which barely survive. . . Such anomalies, which we don't deny exist, are attributed to the attempts at socialisation. We firmly assert that the opposite is true; such anomalies are the logical result of the absence of socialisation.*

*"The socialisation which we propose will resolve these problems which are used to attack it. Were Catalan industry socialised, everything would be organically linked -- industry,*

*agriculture, and the trade union organisations, in accordance with the council for the economy. They would become normalised, the working day would become more equal or what comes to the same thing, the differences between workers of different activities would end . . .*

*"Socialisation is -- and let its detractors hear it -- the genuine authentic organisation of the economy. Undoubtedly the economy has to be organised; but not according to the old methods, which are precisely those which we are destroying, but in accordance with new norms which will make our people become an example to the world proletariat." [Solidaridad Obrera, 30 April 1937, p. 12]*

However, it could again be argued that these confederations are still centralised and that workers would still be following orders coming from above. This is incorrect, for any decisions concerning an industry or plant are under the direct control of those involved. For example, the steel industry confederation may decide to rationalise itself at one of its congresses. Murray Bookchin sketches the response to this situation as follows:

*"[L]et us suppose that a board of highly qualified technicians is established [by this congress] to propose changes in the steel industry. This board. . . advances proposals to rationalise the industry by closing down some plants and expanding the operation of others . . . Is this a 'centralised' body or not? The answer is both yes and no. Yes, only in the sense that the board is dealing with problems that concern the country as a whole; no, because it can make no decision that **must** be executed for the country as a whole. The board's plan must be examined by all the workers in the plants [that are affected]. . . . The board itself has no power to enforce 'decisions'; it merely makes recommendations. Additionally, its personnel are controlled by the plant in which they work and the locality in which they live." [Post Scarcity Anarchism, p. 267]*

Therefore, confederations would not be in positions of power over the individual syndicates. As Bookchin points out, "[t]hey would have no decision-making powers. The adoption, modification or rejection of their plans would rest entirely with the communities involved." [Op. Cit., p. 267] No attempt is made to determine which plants produce which steel for which customers in which manner. Thus, the confederations of syndicates ensure a decentralised, spontaneous economic order without the negative side-effects of capitalism (namely power concentrations within firms and in the market, periodic crises, etc.).

It should be pointed out that these confederated investment decisions will exist along with the investments associated with the creation of new syndicates, plus internal syndicate investment decisions. We are not suggesting that **every** investment decision is to be made by the confederations. (This would be particularly impossible for **new** industries, for which a confederation would not exist!) Therefore, in addition to co-ordinated production units, an anarchist society would see numerous small-scale, local activities which would ensure creativity, diversity, and flexibility. Only after these activities had spread

across society would confederal co-ordination become necessary.

As one can imagine, an essential feature of these confederations will be the collection and processing of information in order to determine how an industry is developing. This does not imply bureaucracy or centralised control at the top. Taking the issue of centralisation first, the confederation is run by delegate assemblies, meaning that any officers elected at a congress only implement the decisions made by the delegates of the relevant syndicates. It is in the congresses and plenums of the confederation that new investment decisions, for example, are made. The key point to remember is that the confederation exists purely to co-ordinate joint activity and share information, it does not take an interest in how a workplace is run or what orders from consumers it fills. (Of course, if a given workplace introduces policies which other syndicates disapprove of, it can be expelled). As the delegates to these congresses and plenums are mandated and their decisions subject to rejection and modification by each productive unit, the confederation is not centralised.

As far as bureaucracy goes, the collecting and processing of information does necessitate an administrative staff to do the work. However, this problem affects capitalist firms as well; and since syndicates are based on bottom-up decision making, its clear that, unlike a centralised capitalist corporation, administration would be smaller.

In fact, it is likely that a fixed administration staff for the confederation would not exist in the first place! At the regular congresses, a particular syndicate may be selected to do the confederation's information processing, with this job being rotated regularly around different syndicates. In this way, a specific administrative body and equipment can be avoided and the task of collating information placed directly in the hands of ordinary workers. Further, it prevents the development of a bureaucratic elite by ensuring that **all** participants are versed in information-processing procedures.

Lastly, what information would be collected? That depends on the context. Individual syndicates would record inputs and outputs, producing summary sheets of information. For example, total energy input, in kilowatts and by type, raw material inputs, labour hours spent, orders received, orders accepted, output, and so forth. This information can be processed into energy use and labour time per product (for example), in order to give an idea of how efficient production is and how it is changing over time. For confederations, the output of individual syndicates can be aggregated and local and other averages can be calculated. In addition, changes in demand can be identified by this aggregation process and used to identify when investment will be needed or plants closed down. In this way the chronic slumps and booms of capitalism can be avoided without creating a system which is even more centralised than capitalism.

## **I.3.6 What about competition between syndicates?**

This is a common question, particularly from defenders of capitalism. They argue that syndicates will not co-operate together unless forced to do so, but will compete against each other for raw materials, skilled workers, and so on. The result of this process, it is claimed, will be rich and poor syndicates,

inequality within society and within the workplace, and (possibly) a class of unemployed workers from unsuccessful syndicates who are hired by successful ones. In other words, they argue that libertarian socialism will need to become authoritarian to prevent competition, and that if it does not do so it will become capitalist very quickly.

For individualist anarchists and mutualists, competition is not viewed as a problem. They think that competition, based around co-operatives and mutual banks, would minimise economic inequality, as the new economic structure based around free credit and co-operation would eliminate non-labour (i.e. unearned) income such as profit, interest and rent and give workers enough bargaining power to eliminate exploitation. For these anarchists it is a case of capitalism perverting competition and so are not against competition itself (see Proudhon's **General Idea of the Revolution**, pages 50-1 for example). Other anarchists think that whatever gains might accrue from competition (assuming there are, in fact, any) would be more than offset by its negative effects, which are outlined in [section I.1.3](#). It is to these anarchists that the question is usually asked.

Before continuing, we would like to point out that individuals trying to improve their lot in life is not against anarchist principles. How could it be? What **is** against anarchist principles is centralised power, oppression, and exploitation, all of which flow from large inequalities of income. This is the source of anarchist concern about equality -- concern that is not based on some sort of "*politics of envy*." Anarchists oppose inequality because it soon leads to the few oppressing the many (a relationship which distorts the individuality and liberty of all involved as well as the health and very lives of the oppressed).

Anarchists desire to create a society in which such relationships are impossible, believing that the most effective way to do this is by empowering all, by creating an egoistic concern for liberty and equality among the oppressed, and by developing social organisations which encourage self-management. As for individuals' trying to improve their lot, anarchists maintain that co-operation is the best means to do so, **not** competition. And there is substantial evidence to support this claim (see, for example, Alfie Kohn's **No Contest: The Case Against Competition**).

Robert Axelrod, in his book, **The Evolution of Co-operation** agrees and presents abundant evidence that co-operation is in our long term interests (i.e. it provides better results than short term competition). This suggests that, as Kropotkin argued, mutual aid, not mutual struggle, will be in an individual's self-interest and so competition in a free, sane society would be minimised and reduced to sports and other individual pastimes. As Stirner argued, co-operation is just as egoistic as competition (a fact sometimes lost on many due to the obvious ethical superiority of co-operation):

*"But should competition some day disappear, because concerted effort will have been acknowledged as more beneficial than isolation, then will not every single individual inside the associations be equally egoistic and out for his own interests?"* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 22]

Now to the "*competition*" objection, which we'll begin to answer by noting that it ignores a few key



points. Firstly, the assumption that libertarian socialism would "*become capitalist*" in the absence of a **state** is obviously false. If competition did occur between collectives and did lead to massive wealth inequalities, then the newly rich would have to create a state to protect their private property (means of production) against the dispossessed. So inequality, not equality, leads to the creation of states. It is no co-incidence that the anarchic communities that existed for millennia were also egalitarian.

Secondly, as noted in [section A.2.5](#), anarchists do not consider "*equal*" to mean "*identical*." Therefore, to claim that wage differences mean inequality makes sense only if one thinks that "*equality*" means everyone getting **exactly** equal shares. As anarchists do not hold such an idea, wage differences in an otherwise anarchistically organised syndicate do not indicate a lack of equality. How the syndicate is **run** is of far more importance, because the most pernicious type of inequality from the anarchist standpoint is inequality of **power**, i.e. unequal influence on political and economic decision making.

Under capitalism, wealth inequality translates into such an inequality of power, and vice versa, because wealth can buy private property (and state protection of it), which gives owners authority over that property and those hired to produce with it; but under libertarian socialism, minor or even moderate differences in income among otherwise equal workers would not lead to this kind of power inequality, because direct democracy, social ownership of capital, and the absence of a state severs the link between wealth and power (see further below). Empirical evidence supports anarchist claims as co-operatives have a more egalitarian wage structure than corresponding capitalist firms.

Thirdly, anarchists do not pretend that an anarchist society will be "*perfect*." Hence there may be periods, particularly just after capitalism has been replaced by self-management, when differences in skill, etc., leads to a few people exploiting their fellow workers and getting more wages, better hours and conditions, and so forth. This problem existed in the industrial collectives in the Spanish Revolution. As Kropotkin pointed out, "*[b]ut, when all is said and done, some inequalities, some inevitable injustice, undoubtedly will remain. There are individuals in our societies whom no great crisis can lift out of the deep mire of egoism in which they are sunk. The question, however, is not whether there will be injustices or no, but rather how to limit the number of them.*" [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 94]

In other words, these problems will exist, but there are a number of things that anarchists can do to minimise their impact. Primarily there must be a "*gestation period*" before the birth of an anarchist society, in which social struggle, new forms of education and child-rearing, and other methods of consciousness-raising increase the number of anarchists and decrease the number of authoritarians.

The most important element in this gestation period is social struggle. Such self-activity will have a major impact on those involved in it (see [section J.2](#)). By direct action and solidarity, those involved develop bounds of friendship and support with others, develop new forms of ethics and new ideas and ideal. This radicalisation process will help to ensure that any differences in education and skill do not develop into differences in power in an anarchist society.

In addition, education within the anarchist movement should aim, among other things, to give its

members familiarity with technological skills so that they are not dependent on "*experts*" and can thus increase the pool of skilled workers who will be happy working in conditions of liberty and equality. This will ensure that differentials between workers can be minimised.

In the long run, however, popularisation of non-authoritarian methods of child-rearing and education are particularly important because, as we have seen, secondary drives such as greed and the desire to exercise power over others are products of authoritarian upbringing based on punishments and fear (See sections B.1.5, "[What is the mass-psychological basis for authoritarian civilisation?](#)" and J.6, "[What methods of child rearing do anarchists advocate?](#)"). Only if the prevalence of such drives is reduced among the general population can we be sure that an anarchist revolution will not degenerate into some new form of domination and exploitation.

However, there are other reasons why economic inequality -- say, in differences of income levels or working conditions, which may arise from competition for "*better*" workers -- would be far less severe under any form of anarchist society than it is under capitalism. Firstly, the syndicates would be democratically managed. This would result in much smaller wage differentials, because there is no board of wealthy directors setting wage levels for their own gain and who think nothing of hierarchy and having elites. The decentralisation of power in an anarchist society will ensure that there would no longer be wealthy elites paying each other vast amounts of money. This can be seen from the experience of the Mondragon co-operatives, where the wage difference between the highest paid and lowest paid worker was 4 to 1. This was only increased recently when they had to compete with large capitalist companies, and even then the new ratio of 9 to 1 is **far** smaller than those in American or British companies (in America, for example, the ratio is even as high as 200 to 1 and beyond!). Thus, even under capitalism "*[t]here is evidence that the methods of distribution chosen by worker-controlled or self-managed firms are more egalitarian than distribution according to market precepts.*" [Christopher Eaton Gunn, **Workers' Self-Management in the United States**, p. 45] Given that market precepts fail to take into account power differences, this is unsurprising. Thus we can predict that a fully self-managed economy would be just, if not, more egalitarian as differences in power would be eliminated, as would unemployment (James K. Galbraith, in his book **Created Unequal**, has presented extensive evidence that unemployment increases inequality, as would be expected).

It is a common myth that managers, executives and so on are "*rugged individuals*" and are paid so highly because of their unique abilities. Actually, they are so highly paid because they are bureaucrats in command of large hierarchical institutions. It is the hierarchical nature of the capitalist firm that ensures inequality, **not** exceptional skills. Even enthusiastic supporters of capitalism provide evidence to support this claim. Peter Drucker (in **Concept of the Corporation**) brushed away the claim that corporate organisation brings managers with exceptional ability to the top when he noted that "*[n]o institution can possibly survive if it needs geniuses or supermen to manage it. It must be organised in such a way as to be able to get along under a leadership of average human beings.*" [p. 35] For Drucker, "*the things that really count are not the individual members but the relations of command and responsibility among them.*" [p. 34]

Anarchists argue that high wage differences are the result of how capitalism is organised and that capitalist economics exists to justify these results by assuming company hierarchy and capitalist ownership evolved naturally (as opposed to being created by state action and protection). The end of capitalist hierarchy would also see the end of vast differences of income because decision making power would be decentralised back into the hands of those affected by those decisions.

Secondly, corporations would not exist. A network of workplaces co-ordinated by confederal committees would not have the resources available to pay exorbitant wages. Unlike a capitalist company, power is decentralised in a confederation of syndicates and wealth does not flow to the top. This means that there is no elite of executives who control the surplus made from the company's workers and can use that surplus to pay themselves high wages while ensuring that the major shareholders receive high enough dividends not to question their activities (or their pay).

Thirdly, management positions would be rotated, ensuring that everyone gets experience of the work, thus reducing the artificial scarcity created by the division of labour. Also, education would be extensive, ensuring that engineers, doctors, and other skilled workers would do the work because they **enjoyed** doing it and not for financial reward. And lastly, we should like to point out that people work for many reasons, not just for high wages. Feelings of solidarity, empathy, friendship with their fellow workers would also help reduce competition between syndicates for workers. Of course, having no means of unearned income (such as rent and interest), social anarchism will reduce income differentials even more.

Of course, the "*competition*" objection assumes that syndicates and members of syndicates will place financial considerations above all else. This is not the case, and few individuals are the economic robots assumed in capitalist dogma. Indeed, the evidence from co-operatives refutes such claims (ignoring, for the moment, the vast evidence of our own senses and experiences with real people rather than the insane "*economic man*" of capitalist economic ideology). Neo-classical economic theory, deducting from its basic assumptions, argues that members of co-operatives will aim to maximise profit per worker and so, perversely, fire their members during good times. Reality contradicts these claims, with the "*empirical evidence*" showing that there "*has been no tendency for workers to lay-off co-workers when times are good, neither in Mondragon nor in [the former] Yugoslavia. Even in bad times, layoffs are rare.*" [David Schweickart, **Against Capitalism**, p. 92] The experience of self-managed collectives during the Spanish Revolution also confirms this, with collectives sharing work equitably in order to avoid laying people off during the harsh economic conditions caused by the Civil War. In other words, the underlying assumption that people are economic robots cannot be maintained -- there is extensive evidence pointing to the fact that different forms of social organisation produce different considerations and people who are motivated by different considerations.

Also, we must remember that the syndicates are **not** competing for market share, and so it is likely that new techniques would be shared between workplaces and skilled workers might decide to rotate their work between syndicates in order to maximise the effectiveness of their working time until such time as the general skill level in society increases.

So, while recognising that competition for skilled workers could exist, anarchists think there are plenty of reasons not to worry about massive economic inequality being created, which in turn would re-create the state. The apologists for capitalism who put forward this argument forget that the pursuit of self-interest is universal, meaning that everyone would be interested in maximising his or her liberty, and so would be unlikely to allow inequalities to develop which threatened that liberty.

As for competition for scarce resources, it is clear that it would be in the interests of communes and syndicates which have them to share them with others instead of charging high prices for them. This is for two reasons. Firstly, they may find themselves boycotted by others, and so they would be denied the advantages of social co-operation. Secondly, they may be subject to such activities themselves at a future date and so it would wise for them to remember to *"treat others as you would like them to treat you under similar circumstances."* As anarchism will never come about unless people desire it and start to organise their own lives, it's clear that an anarchist society would be inhabited by individuals who followed that ethical principle.

So it is doubtful that people inspired by anarchist ideas would start to charge each other high prices, particularly since the syndicates and community assemblies are likely to vote for a wide basis of surplus distribution, precisely to avoid this problem and to ensure that production will be for use rather than profit (see section I.4.10, ["\*What would be the advantage of a wide basis of surplus distribution?\*"](#)). In addition, as other communities and syndicates would likely boycott any syndicate or commune that was acting in non-co-operative ways, it is likely that social pressure would soon result in those willing to exploit others rethinking their position. Co-operation does not imply a willingness to tolerate those who desire to take advantage of you.

Moreover, given the experience of the period between the 1960s and 1990s (with rising inequality marked by falling growth, lower wage growth, rising unemployment and increased economic instability) the impact of increased competition and inequality harms the vast majority. It is doubtful that people aware of these tendencies (and that, as we argued in [section F.3](#), *"free exchange"* in an unequal society tends to **increase**, not decrease, inequality) would create such a regime.

Examples of anarchism in action show that there is frequently a spontaneous tendency towards charging cost prices for goods, as well as attempts to work together to reduce the dangers of isolation and competition. One thing to remember is that anarchy will not be created *"overnight,"* and so potential problems will be worked out over time. Underlying all these kinds of objections is the assumption that co-operation will **not** be more beneficial to all involved than competition. However, in terms of quality of life, co-operation will soon be seen to be the better system, even by the most highly paid workers. There is far more to life than the size of one's pay packet, and anarchism exists in order to ensure that life is far more than the weekly grind of boring work and the few hours of hectic consumption in which people attempt to fill the *"spiritual hole"* created by a way of life which places profits above people.

### **I.3.7 What about people who do not want to join a syndicate?**

In this case, they are free to work alone, by their own labour. Anarchists have no desire to force people to join a syndicate. As Kropotkin argued:

*"Communist organisations . . . must be the work of all, a natural growth, a product of the constructive genius of the great mass. Communism cannot be imposed from above; it could not live even for a few months if the constant and daily co-operation of all did not uphold it. It must be free."* [Kropotkin's **Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 140]

Therefore, the decision to join a commune will be a free one, with the potential for living outside it guaranteed for non-exploitative and non-oppressive individuals and groups. Malatesta stressed this when he argued that in an anarchist revolution *"what has to be destroyed at once . . . is **capitalistic property**, that is, the fact that a few control the natural wealth and the instruments of production and can thus oblige others to work for them . . . [but one must have a] right and the possibility to live in a different regime, collectivist, mutualist, individualist -- as one wishes, always on the condition that there is no oppression or exploitation of others."* [Malatesta: **Life and Ideas**, p. 102]

In other words, different forms of social life will be experimented with, depending on what people desire. Of course some people (particularly right-wing *"libertarians"*) ask how anarchists can reconcile individual freedom with expropriation of capital. All we can say is that these critics subscribe to the idea that one should not interfere with the *"individual freedom"* of those in positions of authority to oppress others, and that this premise turns the concept of individual freedom on its head, making oppression a *"right"* and the denial of freedom a form of it!

However, right-wing *"libertarians"* do raise a valid question when they ask if anarchism would result in self-employed people being forced into co-operatives, syndicates or collectives as the result of a popular movement. The answer is no. This is because the destruction of title deeds would not harm the independent worker, whose real title is possession and the work done. What anarchists want to eliminate is not possessions but capitalist *property*.

As Peter Kropotkin made clear:

*"when we see a peasant, who is in possession of just amount of land he can cultivate, we do not think it reasonable to turn him off his little farm. He exploits nobody, and nobody would have the right to interfere with his work. . . [W]hen we see a family inhabiting a house which affords them just as much space as . . . are considered necessary for that number of people, why should we interfere with that family and turn them out their house? . . . And finally, when we see a . . . cutler, or a . . . clothier working with their own tools or handloom, we see no use in taking the tools or handloom to give to another workers. The clothier or cutler exploit nobody."* [Act for Yourselves, pp. 104-5]

This means that independent producers will still exist within an anarchist society, and some workplaces -- perhaps whole areas -- will not be part of a confederation. This is natural in a free society, for different

people have different ideas and ideals. Nor does such independent producers imply a contradiction with libertarian socialism, for "[w]hat we concerned with is the destruction of the titles of proprietors who exploit the labour of others and, above all, of expropriating them in fact in order to put . . . all the means of production at the disposal of those who do the work." [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 103]

Of course, some people may desire to become capitalists, and they may offer to employ people and pay them wages. However, such a situation would be unlikely. Simply put, why would anyone desire to work for the would-be employer? Malatesta makes this point as follows:

*"It remains to be seen whether not being able to obtain assistance or people to exploit -- and he [the would-be capitalist] would find none because nobody, having a right to the means of production and being free to work on his own or as an equal with others in the large organisations of production would want to be exploited by a small employer -- . . . it remains to be seen whether these isolated workers would not find it more convenient to combine with others and voluntarily join one of the existing communities." [Op. Cit., pp. 102-103]*

So where would the capitalist wannabe find people to work for him? As Kropotkin argued:

*"Everywhere you will find that the wealth of the wealthy springs from the poverty of the poor. That is why an anarchist society need not fear the advent of a Rothschild [or any other millionaire] who would settle in its midst. If every member of the community knows that after a few hours of productive toil he [or she] will have a right to all the pleasures that civilisation procures, and to those deeper sources of enjoyment which art and science offer to all who seek them, he [or she] will not sell his strength . . . No one will volunteer to work for the enrichment of your Rothschild." [Op. Cit., p. 61]*

And, assuming that he did find someone willing to work for him (and so be governed by him), the would-be capitalist would have to provide such excellent conditions and pay such good wages as to reduce his profits to near zero. Moreover, he would have to face workers whose neighbours would be encouraging them to form a union and strike for even **better** conditions and pay, including workers' control and so on. Such a militant workforce would be the last thing a capitalist would desire.

However, let us suppose there is a self-employed inventor, Ferguson, who comes up with a new innovation without the help of the co-operative sector. Would anarchists steal his idea? Not at all. The co-operatives, which by hypothesis have been organised by people who believe in giving producers the full value of their product, would pay Ferguson an equitable amount for his idea, which would then become common across society. However, if he refused to sell his invention and instead tried to claim a patent monopoly on it in order to gather a group of wage slaves to exploit, no one would agree to work for him unless they got the full control over both the product of their labour and the labour process itself.

In addition, we would imagine they would also refuse to work for someone unless they also got the

capital they used at the end of their contract (i.e. a system of "hire-purchase" on the means of production used). In other words, by removing the statist supports of capitalism, would-be capitalists would find it hard to "compete" with the co-operative sector and would not be in a position to exploit others' labour.

With a system of communal production (in social anarchism) and mutual banks (in individualist anarchism), "usury" -- i.e. charging a use-fee for a monopolised item, of which patents are an instance -- would no longer be possible and the inventor would be like any other worker, exchanging the product of his or her labour. As Ben Tucker argued, *"the patent monopoly . . . consists in protecting inventors and authors against competition for a period of time long enough for them to extort from the people a reward enormously in excess of the labour measure of their services -- in other words, in giving certain people a right of property for a term of years in laws and facts of nature, and the power to extract tribute from others for the use of this natural wealth, which should be open to all. The abolition of this monopoly would fill its beneficiaries with a wholesome fear of competition which should cause them to be satisfied with pay for their services equal to that which other labourers get for theirs, and secure it by placing their products and works on the market at the outset at prices so low that their lines of business would be no more tempting to competitors than any other lines."* [**The Anarchist Reader**, pp. 150-1]

So, if someone has labour to sell then they deserve a free society to do it in -- as Tucker once pointed out. Such an environment would make the numbers seeking employment so low as to ensure that the rate of exploitation would be zero. Little wonder that, when faced with a self-employed, artisan workforce, capitalists have continually turned to the state to create the "correct" market forces (see [section F.8](#)).

Thus while the idea that people will happily become wage slaves may be somewhat common place (particularly with supporters of capitalism) the evidence of history is that people, given a choice, will prefer self-employment and **resist** wage labour (often to the death). As E. P. Thompson notes, for workers at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, the *"gap in status between a 'servant,' a hired wage-labourer subject to the orders and discipline of the master, and an artisan, who might 'come and go' as he pleased, was wide enough for men to shed blood rather than allow themselves to be pushed from one side to the other. And, in the value system of the community, those who resisted degradation were in the right."* [**The Making of the English Working Class**, p. 599] Over one hundred years later, the rural working class of Aragon showed the same dislike of wage slavery. After Communist troops destroyed their self-managed collectives, the *"[d]ispossessed peasants, intransigent collectivists, refused to work in a system of private property, and were even less willing to rent out their labour."* [Jose Peirats, **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 258] The rural economy collapsed (see [section I.8.7](#) for more details).

Therefore, any perception that people will become wage-labourers through choice in a free society is based on the assumption what people accept through necessity under capitalism will pass over, without change, into a free one. This assumption is unfounded and anarchists expect that once people struggle for freedom and taste the pleasures of freedom they will not freely accept a degradation back to having a master -- and as history shows, we have some evidence to support our argument.

In other words, with the end of capitalism and statism, a free society has no fear of capitalist firms being created or growing again because it rejects the idea that everyone must be in a syndicate. Few, if any, people would desire to have bosses when they have the choice of being free (to use an analogy, few people prefer dictatorship to democracy once the former has been overthrown). Also, without statism to back up various class-based monopolies of capitalist privilege, capitalism could not become dominant. In addition, the advantages of co-operation between syndicates would exceed whatever temporary advantages existed for syndicates to practice commodity exchange in a mutualist market.

### **I.3.8 Do anarchists seek "*small autonomous communities, devoted to small scale production*"?**

As we indicated at the start of this section, anarchists see a free society's productive activity centred around federations of syndicates. This shows that anarchism rejects the idea of isolated communes. Rather, we argue that communes and syndicates would work together in a federal structure. This would, as we argue in [section I.3.5](#), necessitate confederations to help co-ordinate economic activity and, as indicated in [section I.3.4](#), involve extensive links between productive syndicates and the communes they are part of.

The idea that anarchism aims for small, self-sufficient, communes is a Leninist slander. They misrepresent anarchist ideas on this matter, suggesting that anarchists seriously want society based on "*small autonomous communities, devoted to small scale production.*" In particular, they point to Kropotkin, arguing that he "*looked backwards for change*" and "*witnessed such communities among Siberian peasants and watchmakers in the Swiss mountains.*" [Pat Stack, "*Anarchy in the UK?*", **Socialist Review**, no. 246, November 2000]

While it may be better to cover this issue in section H.2 ("[What parts of anarchist theory do Marxists particularly misrepresent?](#)") we discuss it here simply because, firstly, it seems to be a depressingly common assertion and, secondly, it relates directly to what an anarchist society could look like. Hence our discussion of these assertions in this section of the FAQ. Also, it allows us to fill in more of the picture of what a free society could look like.

So what do anarchists make of the assertion that we aim for "*small autonomous communities, devoted to small scale production*"? Simply put, we think it is nonsense (as would be quickly obvious from reading anarchist theory). Indeed, it is hard to know where this particular anarchist "*vision*" comes from. As Luigi Fabbri noted, in his reply to an identical assertion by the leading Bolshevnik Nikolai Bukharin, "*[i]t would be interesting to learn in what anarchist book, pamphlet or programme such an 'ideal' is set out, or even such a hard and fast rule!*" ["*Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism*", pp. 13-49, **The Poverty of Statism**, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 21]

If we look at, say, Proudhon, we soon see no such argument for "*small scale*" production. He argued for "*the mines, canals, railways [to be] handed over to democratically organised workers' associations . . .*"



*We want these associations to be models for agriculture, industry and trade, the pioneering core of that vast federation of companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic social Republic.*" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 62] Similarly, rather than dismiss the idea of large-scale industry Proudhon argued that "[l]arge industry . . . come to us by big monopoly and big property: it is necessary in the future to make them rise from the [labour] association." [quoted by K. Steven Vincent, **Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 156] As Vincent correctly summarises:

*"On this issue, it is necessary to emphasise that, contrary to the general image given on the secondary literature, Proudhon was not hostile to large industry. Clearly, he objected to many aspects of what these large enterprises had introduced into society. For example, Proudhon strenuously opposed the degrading character of . . . work which required an individual to repeat one minor function continuously. But he was not opposed in principle to large-scale production. What he desired was to humanise such production, to socialise it so that the worker would not be the mere appendage to a machine. Such a humanisation of large industries would result, according to Proudhon, from the introduction of strong workers' associations. These associations would enable the workers to determine jointly by election how the enterprise was to be directed and operated on a day-to-day basis."* [Op. Cit., p. 156]

Moreover, Proudhon did not see an anarchist society as one of isolated communities or workplaces. Instead, he saw the need for workplace and community federations to co-ordinate joint activities and interests. Economically, there would be an *"agro-industrial federation"* would *"tend to foster increasing equality, by organising all public services in an economical fashion and in hands other than the state's, through mutualism in credit and insurance . . . guaranteeing the right to work and to education, and an organisation of work which allows each labourer to become a skilled worker and an artist, each wage-earner to become his own master."* This would end *"industrial and financial feudalism"* and *"wage-labour or economic servitude."* [**The Principle of Federation**, pp. 70-1]

The need for economic federation was also required due to differences in raw materials, quality of land and so on. Proudhon argued that a portion of income from agricultural produce be paid into a central fund which would be used to make equalisation payments to compensate farmers with less favourably situated or less fertile land. As he put it, economic rent *"in agriculture has no other cause than the inequality in the quality of land . . . if anyone has a claim on account of this inequality . . . [it is] the other land workers who hold inferior land. That is why in our scheme for liquidation [of capitalism] we stipulated that every variety of cultivation should pay a proportional contribution, destined to accomplish a balancing of returns among farm workers and an assurance of products."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 209]

This vision of a federation of workplaces can also be found in Bakunin's writings. As he put it, the *"future organisation of society must proceed from the bottom up only, through free association or federations of the workers, into their associations to begin with, then into communes, regions, nations and, finally, into a great international and universal federation."* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 176] Bakunin, like Proudhon, considered that *"[i]ntelligent free labour will necessarily be associated labour"*

as under capitalism the worker *"works for others"* and her labour is *"bereft of liberty, leisure and intelligence."* Under anarchism, *"the free productive associations"* would become *"their own masters and the owners of the necessary capital"* and *"amalgamate among themselves"* and *"sooner or later"* will *"expand beyond national frontiers"* and *"form one vast economic federation."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 81-3]

Neither can such a vision be attributed to Kropotkin. While, of course, supporting decentralisation of power and decision making as did Proudhon and Bakunin, he did not reject the necessity of federations to co-ordinate activity. As he put it, the *"commune of tomorrow will know that it cannot admit any higher authority; above it there can only be the interests of the Federation, freely accepted by itself as well as the other communes . . . The Commune will know that it must break the State and replace it by the Federation."* For anarchists the commune *"no longer means a territorial agglomeration; it is rather a generic name, a synonym for the grouping of equals which knows neither frontiers nor walls . . . Each group in the Commune will necessarily be drawn towards similar groups in other communes; they will come together and the links that federate them will be as solid as those that attach them to their fellow citizens."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 83 and p. 88]

Nor did he see an anarchist society as one with an economy based purely around the small commune or community. He took the basic unit of a free society as one *"large enough to dispose of a certain variety of natural resources -- it may be a nation, or rather a region -- produces and itself consumes most of its own agricultural and manufactured produce."* Such a region would *"find the best means of combining agriculture with manufacture -- the work in the field with a decentralised industry."* Moreover, he recognised that the *"geographical distribution of industries in a given country depends . . . to a great extent upon a complexus of natural conditions; it is obvious that there are spots which are best suited for the development of certain industries . . . The[se] industries always find some advantages in being grouped, to some extent, according to the natural features of separate regions."* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 26, p. 27 and pp. 154-5]

Kropotkin stressed that agriculture *"cannot develop without the aid of machinery and the use of a perfect machinery cannot be generalised without industrial surroundings. . . . The village smith would not do."* Thus he supported the integration of agriculture and industry, with *"the factory and workshop at the gates of your fields and gardens."* These factories would be *"airy and hygienic, and consequently economical, factories in which human life is of more account than machinery and the making of extra profits."* A *"variety of agricultural, industrial and intellectual pursuits are combined in each community"* to ensure *"the greatest sum total of well-being."* He thought that *"large establishments"* would still exist, but these would be *"better placed at certain spots indicated by Nature."* He stressed that it *"would be a great mistake to imagine industry ought to return to its hand-work stage in order to be combined with agriculture. Whenever a saving of human labour can be obtained by means of a machine, the machine is welcome and will be resorted to; and there is hardly one single branch of industry into which machinery work could not be introduced with great advantage, at least at some of the stages of the manufacture . . . The machine will supersede hand-work in the manufacture of plain goods. But at the same time, hand-work very probably will extend its domain in the artistic finishing of many things which are now made entirely in the factory."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 156, p. 197, p. 18, pp. 154-5 and

pp. 151-2]

Clearly Kropotkin was **not** opposed to large-scale industry as such. As he put it, *"if we analyse the modern industries, we soon discover that for some of them the co-operation of hundred, even thousands, of workers gathered at the same spot is really necessary. The great iron works and mining enterprises decidedly belong to that category; oceanic steamers cannot be built in village factories."* However, he stressed that this objective necessity was not the case in many other industries and centralised production existed in these purely to allow capitalists *"to hold command of the market."* Once we consider the *"moral and physical advantages which man would derive from dividing his work between field and the workshop"* we must automatically evaluate the structure of modern industry with the criteria of what is best for the worker (and society and the environment) rather than what was best for capitalist profits and power. [Op. Cit., p. 153]

Clearly, Leninist summaries of Kropotkin's ideas on this subject are nonsense. Rather than seeing *"small-scale"* production as the basis of his vision of a free society, he saw production as being geared around the economic unit of a nation or region (*"Each region will become its own producer and its own consumer of manufactured goods . . . [and] its own producer and consumer of agricultural produce."* [Op. Cit., p. 40]). Industry would come to the village *"not in its present shape of a capitalist factory"* but *"in the shape of a socially organised industrial production, with the full aid of machinery and technical knowledge."* [Op. Cit., p. 151]

Industry would be decentralised and integrated with agriculture and based around communes, but these communes would be part of a federation and so production would be based around meeting the needs of these federations. A system of rational decentralisation would be the basis of Kropotkin's communist-anarchism, with productive activity and a free society's workplaces geared to the appropriate level. For those forms of industry which would be best organised on a large-scale would continue to be so organised, but for those whose current (i.e. capitalist) structure had no objective need to be centralised would be broken up to allow the transformation of work for the benefit of both workers and society.

Thus we would see a system of workplaces geared to local and district needs complementing larger factories which would meet regional and wider needs. Kropotkin was at pains to show that such a system would be economical, stressing that *"[t]his is why the 'concentration' so much spoken of is often nothing but an amalgamation of capitalists for the purpose of **dominating the market**, not for cheapening the technical process."* [Op. Cit., p. 154] In other words, that the structure of modern industry was skewed by the needs of capitalist profit and power and so it cannot be assumed that what is *"efficient"* under a capitalist criteria is necessarily the best for a free society.

Kropotkin was well aware that modern industry was shaped *"to suit the temporary interests of the few -- by no means those of the nation."* [Op. Cit., p. 147] Therefore he made a clear division between economic tendencies which existed to aid the capitalist to dominate the market and enhance their profits and power and those which indicated a different kind of future. He placed the tendency of industry to spread across the world, to decentralise itself into all nations and regions, as a tendency of the second

kind (one often swallowed up by the first, of course). As such, he looked at and analysed existing society and its tendencies. Therefore it cannot be said that Kropotkin based this analysis on "*look[ing] backwards for change.*" Indeed, the opposite was obviously the case. He continually stressed that "*the present tendency of humanity is to have the greatest possible variety of industries gathering in each country.*" [Op. Cit., pp. 25-6]

Kropotkin backed this claim, as all the claims in his work, with extensive empirical evidence and research. In other words, he clearly looked to the present for change, charting tendencies within modern society which pointed in a libertarian direction and backing up his arguments with extensive and recent research. To state otherwise simply shows an unfamiliarity with Kropotkin's work.

The obvious implication of Leninist comments arguments against anarchist ideas on industrial transformation after a revolution is that they think that a socialist society will basically be the same as capitalism, using the technology, industrial structure and industry developed under class society without change. After all, did Lenin not argue that "*Socialism is nothing but the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly . . . Socialism is merely state capitalist monopoly made to benefit the whole people*"? [The Threatening Catastrophe and how to avoid it, p. 37] Needless to say, capitalist industry, as Kropotkin was aware, has not developed neutrally nor purely because of technical needs. Rather it has been distorted by the twin requirements to maintain capitalist profits and power. The one of the first tasks of a social revolution will be to transform the industrial structure, not keep it as it is. You cannot use capitalist means for socialist ends. As Alexander Berkman correctly argued:

*"The role of industrial decentralisation in the revolution is unfortunately too little appreciated. . . Most people are still in the thralldom of the Marxian dogma that centralisation is 'more efficient and economical.' They close their eyes to the fact that the alleged 'economy' is achieved at the cost of the workers' limb and life, that the 'efficiency' degrades him to a mere industrial cog, deadens his soul, kills his body. Furthermore, in a system of centralisation the administration of industry becomes constantly merged in fewer hands, producing a powerful bureaucracy of industrial overlords. It would indeed be the sheerest irony if the revolution were to aim at such a result. It would mean the creation of a new master class."* [The ABC of Anarchism, pp. 80-1]

In other words, it would be a new bureaucracy exploiting and oppressing those who do the actual work -- as in private capitalism -- simply because capitalist economic structures are designed to empower the few over the many. Like the capitalist state, they cannot be used by the working class to achieve their liberation (they are not created for the mass participation that real socialism requires, quite the reverse in fact!). While we will "inherit" an industrial structure from capitalism it would be the greatest possible error to leave it unchanged and an even worse one to accelerate the processes by which capitalists maintain and increase their power (i.e. centralisation and concentration) in the name of "socialism."

One last factor should be mentioned with regards to the issue of decentralising production. Kropotkin, as well as thinking that "*a country with no large factories to bring steel to a finished condition is doomed*

*to be backward in all other industries,"* also saw that a society in revolution would be thrust back on its own resources as "*[i]nternational commerce will come to a standstill*" and the economy would be "*paralysed.*" This would force a revolutionary people if "*cut off from the world for a year or two by the supporters of middle-class rule*" to "*provide for itself, and to reorganise its production, so as satisfy its own needs. If it fails to do so, it is death. If it succeeds, it will revolutionise the economic life of the country.*" This would involve "*the necessity of cultivating the soil, of combining agricultural production with industrial production in the suburbs of [cities] and its environs.*" Thus the danger of the initial isolation of a revolution was a factor in Kropotkin's ideas on this issue. [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 190, p. 191, p. 192 and p. 191]

We are sorry to have laboured this point, but this issue is one which arises with depressing frequency in Marxist accounts of anarchism. It is best that we indicate that those who make the claim that anarchists seek "*small scale*" production geared for "*small autonomous communities*" simply show their ignorance of the source material. In actually, anarchists see production as being geared to whatever makes most social, economic and ecological sense. Some production and workplaces will be geared to the local commune, some will be geared to the district federation, some to the regional federation, and so on. It is for this reason anarchists support the federation of workers' associations as the means of combining local autonomy with the needs for co-ordination and joint activity. To claim otherwise is simply to misrepresent anarchist theory.

# I.1 Isn't libertarian socialism an oxymoron?

In a word, no. This question is often asked by those who have come across the so-called "libertarian" right. As discussed in [section A.1.3](#), the word "*libertarian*" has been used by anarchists for far longer than the pro-free market right have been using it. Indeed, outside of North America "*libertarian*" is still essentially used as an equivalent of "*anarchist*" and as a shortened version of "*libertarian socialist*."

This in itself does not, of course, prove that the term "*libertarian socialist*" is free of contradiction. However, as we will show below, the claim that the term is self-contradictory rests on the assumption that socialism requires the state in order to exist and that socialism is incompatible with liberty (and the equally fallacious claim that capitalism is libertarian and does not need the state). This assumption, as is often true of many objections to socialism, is based on a misconception of what socialism is, a misconception that many authoritarian socialists and the state capitalism of Soviet Russia have helped to foster. In reality it is the term "*state socialism*" which is the true oxymoron.

Sadly many people take for granted the assertion of many on the right and left that socialism equals Leninism or Marxism and ignore the rich and diverse history of socialist ideas, ideas that spread from communist and individualist-anarchism to Leninism. As Benjamin Tucker once noted, "*the fact that State Socialism . . . has overshadowed other forms of Socialism gives it no right to a monopoly of the Socialistic idea.*" [**Instead of a Book**, pp. 363-4] Unfortunately, many on the left combine with the right to do exactly that. Indeed, the right (and, of course, many on the left) consider that, by definition, "*socialism*" is state ownership and control of the means of production, along with centrally planned determination of the national economy (and so social life). This definition has become common because many Social Democrats, Leninists, and other statists **call** themselves socialists. However, the fact that certain people call themselves socialists does not imply that the system they advocate is really socialism (Hitler, for example, called himself a "*National Socialist*" while, in practice, ensuring and enhancing the power and profits of capitalists). We need to analyse and understand the systems in question, by applying critical, scientific thought, in order to determine whether their claims to the socialist label are justified. As we will see, to accept the above definition one has to ignore the overall history of the socialist movement and consider only certain trends within it as representing the movement as a whole.

Even a quick glance at the history of the socialist movement indicates that the identification of socialism with state ownership and control is not common. For example, Anarchists, many Guild Socialists, council communists (and other libertarian Marxists), as well as followers of Robert Owen, all rejected state ownership. Indeed, anarchists recognised that the means of production did not change their form as capital when the state took over their ownership nor did wage-labour change its nature when it is the state employing labour (for example, Proudhon argued that if the "*State confiscate[d] the mines, canals and railways*" it would only "*add to monarchy, and [create] more wage slavery.*" [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 62]). For anarchists state ownership of capital is not socialistic in the slightest but rather a tendency **within**, not **opposed** to, capitalism just as the growth of larger and larger companies does not imply in any way a tendency to socialism (regardless of what Lenin or Marx argued -- see

[section H.3.12](#) for more on this). Indeed, as Tucker was well aware, state ownership turned **everyone** into a proletarian (bar the state bureaucracy) -- hardly a desirable thing for a political theory aiming for the end of wage slavery!

So what **does** socialism mean? And is it compatible with libertarian ideals? What do the words "*libertarian*" and "*socialism*" actually mean? It is tempting to use dictionary definitions as a starting point, although we should stress that such a method holds problems as different dictionaries have different definitions and the fact that dictionaries are rarely politically sophisticated. Use one definition, and someone else will counter with one more to their liking. For example, "*socialism*" is often defined as "*state ownership of wealth*" and "*anarchy*" as "*disorder*." Neither of these definitions are useful when discussing political ideas. Therefore, the use of dictionaries is not the end of a discussion and often misleading when applied to politics.

With that warning, what do we find?

**Webster's New International Dictionary** defines a libertarian as "*one who holds to the doctrine of free will; also, one who upholds the principles of liberty, esp. individual liberty of thought and action.*" As we discussed earlier (see [section B.1](#), for example), capitalism denies liberty of thought and action within the workplace (unless one is the boss, of course). Therefore, **real** libertarian ideas **must** be based on workers self-management, i.e. workers must control and manage the work they do, determining where and how they do it and what happens to the fruit of their labour, which in turn means the elimination of wage labour. The elimination of wage labour is the common theme of socialism (in theory at least, anarchist argue that state socialism does not eliminate wage labour, rather it universalises it). Or, to use Proudhon's words, the "*abolition of the proletariat.*" [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 179] It implies a classless and anti-authoritarian (i.e. libertarian) society in which people manage their own affairs, either as individuals or as part of a group (depending on the situation). In other words, it implies self-management in all aspects of life -- including work. It has always struck anarchists as somewhat strange and paradoxical (to say the least) that a system of "*natural*" liberty (Adam Smith's term, misappropriated by supporters of capitalism) involves the vast majority having to sell that liberty in order to survive.

According to the **American Heritage Dictionary** "*socialism*" is "*a social system in which the producers possess both political power and the means of producing and distributing goods.*" This definition fits neatly with the implications of the word "*libertarian*" indicated above. In fact, it shows that socialism is **necessarily** libertarian, not statist. For if the state owns the workplace, then the producers do not, and so they will not be at liberty to manage their own work but will instead be subject to the state as the boss. Moreover, replacing the capitalist owning class by state officials in no way eliminates wage labour; in fact it makes it worse in many cases. Therefore "*socialists*" who argue for nationalisation of the means of production are **not** socialists (which means that the Soviet Union and the other 'socialist' countries are **not** socialist nor are parties which advocate nationalisation socialist).

Indeed, attempts to associate socialism with the state misunderstands the nature of socialism. It is an

essential principle of socialism that (social) inequalities between individuals must be abolished to ensure liberty for all (**natural** inequalities cannot be abolished, nor do anarchists desire to do so). Socialism, as Proudhon put it, "*is egalitarian above all else.*" [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 57] This applies to inequalities of power as well, especially to **political** power. And any hierarchical system (particularly the state) is marked by inequalities of power -- those at the top (elected or not) have more power than those at the bottom. Hence the following comments provoked by the expulsion of anarchists from the social democratic Second International:

*"It could be argued. . . that we [anarchists] are the most logical and most complete socialists, since we demand for every person not just his entire measure of wealth of society, but also his portion of social power, which is to say, the real ability to make his influence felt, along with that of everybody else, in the administration of public affairs."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p.20]

The election of someone to administer public affairs **for you** is not having a portion of social power. It is, to use the words of Emile Pouget (a leading French anarcho-syndicalist) "*an act of abdication,*" the delegating of power into the hands of a few. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 67] This means that "*[a]ll political power inevitably creates a privileged situation for the men who exercise it. Thus it violates, from the beginning, the equalitarian principle.*" [Voline, **The Unknown Revolution**, p. 249]

From this short discussion we see the links between libertarian and socialism. To be a true libertarian requires you to support workers' control otherwise you support authoritarian social relationships. To support workers' control, by necessity, means that you must ensure that the producers own (and so control) the means of producing and distributing the goods they create (i.e. they must own/control what they use to produce goods). Without ownership, they cannot truly control their own activity or the product of their labour. The situation where workers possess the means of producing and distributing goods is socialism. Thus to be a true libertarian requires you to be a socialist.

Similarly, a true socialist must also support individual liberty of thought and action, otherwise the producers "possess" the means of production and distribution in name only. If the state owns the means of life, then the producers do not and so are in no position to manage their own activity. As the experience of Russia under Lenin shows, state ownership soon produces state control and the creation of a bureaucratic class which exploits and oppresses the workers even more so than their old bosses. Since it is an essential principle of socialism that inequalities between people must be abolished in order to ensure liberty, it makes no sense for a genuine socialist to support any institution based on inequalities of power. And as we discussed in [section B.2](#), the state is just such an institution. To oppose inequality and not extend that opposition to inequalities in power, especially **political** power, suggests a lack of clear thinking. Thus to be a true socialist requires you to be a libertarian, to be for individual liberty and opposed to inequalities of power which restrict that liberty.

Therefore, rather than being an oxymoron, "*libertarian socialism*" indicates that true socialism must be libertarian and that a libertarian who is not a socialist is a phoney. As true socialists oppose wage labour,



they must also oppose the state for the same reasons. Similarly, libertarians must oppose wage labour for the same reasons they must oppose the state.

So, libertarian socialism rejects the idea of state ownership and control of the economy, along with the state as such. Through workers' self-management it proposes to bring an end to authority, exploitation, and hierarchy in production. This in itself will increase, not reduce, liberty. Those who argue otherwise rarely claim that political democracy results in less freedom than political dictatorship.

One last point. It could be argued that many social anarchists smuggle the state back in via communal ownership of the means of life. This, however, is not the case. To argue so confuses society with the state. The communal ownership advocated by collectivist and communist anarchists is not the same as state ownership. This is because it is based on horizontal relationships between the actual workers and the "owners" of social capital (i.e. the federated communities as a whole, which includes the workers themselves we must stress), not vertical ones as in nationalisation (which are between state bureaucracies and its "citizens"). Also, such communal ownership is based upon letting workers manage their own work and workplaces. This means that it is based upon, and does not replace, workers' self-management. In addition, all the members of a participatory anarchist community fall into one of three categories:

- (1) producers (i.e. members of a collective or self-employed artisans);
- (2) those unable to work (i.e. the old, sick and so on, who **were** producers); or
- (3) the young (i.e. those who **will be** producers).

Therefore, workers' self-management within a framework of communal ownership is entirely compatible with libertarian and socialist ideas concerning the possession of the means of producing and distributing goods by the producers themselves.

Hence, far from there being any contradiction between libertarianism and socialism, libertarian ideals imply socialist ones, and vice versa. As Bakunin argued in 1867:

*"We are convinced that freedom without Socialism is privilege and injustice, and that Socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 127]

History has proven him correct.

## **I.1.1 Didn't Ludwig von Mises's "*calculation argument*" prove that socialism can not work?**

In 1920, the right-wing economist Ludwig von Mises declared socialism to be impossible. A leading member of the "*Austrian*" school of economics, he argued this on the grounds that without private ownership of the means of production, there cannot be a competitive market for production goods and

without a market for production goods, it is impossible to determine their values. Without knowing their values, economic rationality is impossible and so a socialist economy would simply be chaos -- *"the absurd output of a senseless apparatus."* [*"Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth"*, in **Collectivist Economic Planning**, F.A von Hayek (ed.), p.104] While applying his *"calculation argument"* to Marxist ideas of a future socialist society, his argument, it is claimed, is applicable to **all** schools of socialist thought, including libertarian ones. It is on the basis of his arguments that many right-wingers claim that libertarian (or any other kind of) socialism is impossible in principle.

As David Schweickart observes *"[i]t has long been recognised that von Mises's argument is logically defective. Even without a market in production goods, their monetary values can be determined."* [**Against Capitalism**, p. 88] In other words, economic calculation based on prices is perfectly possible in a libertarian socialist system. After all, to build a workplace requires so many tonnes of steel, of many bricks, so many hours of work and so on. If we assume a mutualist (i.e. market socialist/co-operative) libertarian socialist society, then the prices of these goods can be easily found as the co-operatives in question would be offer their services on the market. These commodities would be the inputs for the construction of production goods and so the latter's monetary values can be found (this does not address whether monetary values accurately reflect real costs, an issue we will discuss in the [next section](#)).

Ironically enough, von Mises **did** mention the idea of such a mutualist system in his initial essay. He wrote of a system in which *"the 'coal [miners'] syndicate' provides the 'iron [workers'] syndicate"* with goods and argued that *"no price can be formed, except when both syndicates are the owners of the means of production employed in their business"* (which may come as a surprise to transnational companies whose different workplaces sell each other their products!) Such a system is dismissed: *"This would not be socialisation but workers' capitalism and syndicalism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 112]

However, his logic is flawed. Firstly, as we noted, modern capitalism shows that workplaces owned by the same body (in this case, a large company) can exchange goods via the price form. That von Mises makes such a statement indicates well the firm basis of his argument in reality. Secondly, such a system may be, as von Mises states, *"syndicalism"* (at least a form of syndicalism, as most syndicalists were and still are in favour of libertarian communism, a simple fact apparently unknown to von Mises) but it is not capitalist as there is no wage labour involved as workers' own and control their own means of production. Indeed, von Mises ignorance of syndicalist thought is striking. In **Human Action** he asserts that the *"market is a consumers' democracy. The syndicalists want to transform it into a producers' democracy."* [p. 809] Most syndicalists, however, aim to **abolish** the market and **all** aim for workers' control of production to **complement** (not replace) consumer choice. Syndicalists, like other anarchists, do not aim for workers' control of consumption as von Mises asserts. Given that von Mises asserts that the market, in which one person can have a thousand votes and another one, is a *"democracy"* his ignorance of syndicalist ideas is perhaps only one aspect of a general ignorance of reality.

Indeed, such an economy also strikes at the heart of von Mises' claims that socialism was *"impossible."* Given that von Mises accepted that there may be markets, and hence market prices, for consumer goods

in a socialist economy his claims of the impossibility of socialism seems unfounded. For von Mises, the problem for socialism is that *"because no production-good will ever become the object of exchange, it will be impossible to determine its monetary value."* [Op. Cit., p. 92] The flaw in his argument is clear. Taking, for example, coal, we find that it is both a means of production and of consumption. If a market in consumer goods is possible for a socialist system, then competitive prices for production goods is also possible as syndicates producing production-goods would also sell the product of their labour to other syndicates or communes. Thus, when deciding upon a new workplace, railway or house, the designers in question do have access to competitive prices with which to make their decisions. Nor does his argument work against communal ownership in such a system as the commune would be buying products from syndicates in the same way as one part of a multi-national company can buy products from another part of the same company under capitalism. That goods produced by self-managed syndicates have prices does not imply capitalism, regardless of von Mises' claims.

Thus economic calculation based on competitive market prices is possible under a socialist system. Indeed, we see examples of this even under capitalism. For example, the Mondragon co-operative complex in the Basque Country indicate that a libertarian socialist economy can exist and flourish. There is no need for capital markets in a system based on mutual banks and networks of co-operatives (indeed, as we argue at the end of [section I.4.8](#), capital markets **hinder** economic efficiency by generating a perverse set of incentives and misleading information flows and so their abolition would actually **aid** production and productive efficiency). Unfortunately, the state socialists who replied to Mises did not have such a libertarian economy in mind.

In response to von Mises initial challenge, a number of economists pointed out that Pareto's disciple, Enrico Barone, had already, 13 years earlier, demonstrated the theoretical possibility of a *"market-simulated socialism."* However, the principal attack on von Mises's argument came from Fred Taylor and Oscar Lange (for a collection of their main papers, see **On the Economic Theory of Socialism**, Benjamin Lippincott (ed.), University of Minnesota, 1938). In light of their work, Frederick von Hayek shifted the question from theoretical impossibility to whether the theoretical solution could be approximated in practice. Thus even von Hayek, a major free-market capitalist guru, seemed to think that von Mises's argument could not be defended.

Moreover, it should be noted that both sides of the argument accepted the idea of central planning of some kind or another. This means that many of von Mises's and von Hayek's arguments did not apply to libertarian socialism, which rejects central planning along with every other form of centralisation. This is a key point, as most members of the right seem to assume that "socialists" all agree with each other in supporting a centralised economic system. In other words, they ignore a large segment of socialist thought and history in order to concentrate on Social Democracy and Leninism. The idea of a network of *"people's banks"* and co-operatives working together to meet their common interests is ignored, although it has been a common feature in socialist thought since the time of Robert Owen.

Nor was Taylor and Lange's response particularly convincing in the first place. This was because it was based far more on neo-classical capitalist economic theory than on an appreciation of reality. In place of

the Walsrian "*Auctioneer*" (the "*god in the machine*" of general equilibrium theory which ensures that all markets clear) Taylor and Lange presented the Planning Authority (the "*Central Planning Board*"), whose job it was to adjust prices so that all markets cleared. Neo-classical economists who are inclined to accept Walrasian theory as an adequate account of a working capitalist economy will be forced to accept the validity of Taylor and Lange's version of "*socialism*." Little wonder Taylor and Lange were considered, at the time, the victors in the "*socialist calculation*" debate by most of the economics profession (with the collapse of the Soviet Union, this decision has been revised somewhat -- although we must point out that Taylor and Lange's model was not the same as the Soviet system, a fact conveniently ignored by commentators).

Unfortunately, given that Walrasian theory has little bearing to reality, we must also come to the conclusion that the Taylor-Lange "solution" has about the same relevance (even ignoring its non-libertarian aspects, such as its basis in state-ownership, its centralisation, its lack of workers' self-management and so on). Many people consider Taylor and Lange as fore-runners of "*market socialism*." This is incorrect -- rather than being market socialists, they are in fact "neo-classical" socialists, building a "socialist" system which mimics capitalist economic **theory** rather than its **reality**. Replacing Walrus's mythical creation of the "*Auctioneer*" with a planning board does not really get to the heart of the problem! Nor does their vision of "socialism" have much appeal -- a re-production of capitalism with a planning board and a more equal distribution of money income. Anarchists reject such "socialism" as little more than a nicer version of capitalism, if that.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has been fashionable to argue that "*von Mises was right*" and that socialism is impossible (of course, **during** the cold war such claims were ignored as the Soviet threat had to be boosted and used as a means of social control and to justify state aid to capitalist industry). Nothing could be further from the truth. As we have argued in the [previous section](#) and elsewhere, these countries were not socialist at all and did not even approximate the (libertarian) socialist idea (which is the only true form of socialism). Obviously the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries had authoritarian "*command economies*" with central bureaucratic planning, and so their failure cannot be taken as proof that a decentralised, libertarian socialism cannot work. Nor can von Mises' and von Hayek's arguments against Taylor and Lange be used against a libertarian mutualist or collectivist system as such a system is decentralised and dynamic (unlike the "neo-classical" socialist model they proposed). Libertarian socialism of this kind did, in fact, work remarkably well during the Spanish Revolution in the face of amazing difficulties, with increased productivity and output in many workplaces as well as increased equality and liberty (see Sam Dolgoff, **The Anarchist Collectives** or Gaston Leval's **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution** as well as [section I.8](#) of this FAQ).

Thus von Mises "*calculation argument*" does not prove that socialism is impossible. The theoretical work of such socialists as David Schweickart (see his **Against Capitalism** for an extensive discussion of a dynamic, decentralised market socialist system) and others on market socialism shows that von Mises was wrong in asserting that "*a socialist system with a market and market prices is as self-contradictory as is the notion of a triangular square*." Indeed, by suppressing capital markets in favour of simple commodity production, a mutualist system will improve upon capitalism by removing an important

source of perverse incentives which hinder long term investment and social responsibility (see [section I.4.8](#)) in addition to reducing inequalities, increasing freedom and improving general economic performance.

So far, most models of market socialism have not been fully libertarian, but instead involve the idea of workers' control within a framework of state ownership of capital (Engler in **Apostles of Greed** is an exception to this, supporting community ownership). However, libertarian forms of market socialism are indeed possible and would be similar to Proudhon's mutualism. As anarchist Robert Graham points out, *"Market socialism is but one of the ideas defended by Proudhon which is both timely and controversial. . . Proudhon's market socialism is indissolubly linked with his notions of industrial democracy and workers' self-management."* ["Introduction", P-J Proudhon, **General Idea of the Revolution**, p. xxxii] His system of agro-industrial federations can be seen as a non-statist way of protecting self-management, liberty and equality in the face of market forces (as he argued in **The Principle of Federation**, *"[h]owever impeccable in its basic logic the federal principle may be. . . it will not survive if economic factors tend persistently to dissolve it. In other words, political right requires to be buttressed by economic right"* and *"in an economic context, confederation may be intended to provide reciprocal security in commerce and industry. . . The purpose of such specific federal arrangements is to protect the citizens. . . from capitalist and financial exploitation. . . in their aggregate they form . . . an agro-industrial federation"* [**The Principle of Federation**, p. 67 and p. 70]).

Indeed, some Leninist Marxists recognise the links between Proudhon and market socialism. For example, the unorthodox Trotskyite Hillel Ticktin argues that Proudhon, *"the anarchist and inveterate foe of Karl Marx. . . put forward a conception of society, which is probably the first detailed exposition of a 'socialist market.'" ["The Problem is Market Socialism", in **Market Socialism: The Debate Among Socialists**, edited by Bertell Ollman, p. 56]* In addition, see **Against the Market** in which the author, Dave McNally, correctly argues that Proudhon was a precursor of the current market socialists. Needless to say, these Leninists reject the idea of market socialism as contradictory and, basically, not socialist (while, strangely enough, acknowledging that the transition to Marxist-communism under the workers' state would use the market!).

Thus it is possible for a socialist economy to allocate resources using a competitive market. However, does von Mises's argument mean that a socialism that abolishes the market (such as libertarian communism) is impossible? Given that the vast majority of anarchists seek a libertarian communist society, this is an important question. We address it in the [next section](#).

## I.1.2 Does Mises' argument mean libertarian communism is impossible?

In a word, no. While the *"calculation argument"* is often used by right-libertarian's as **the** "scientific" basis for the argument that communism (a moneyless society) is impossible, it is based on certain false ideas of what money does and how an anarchist society would function without it. This is hardly

surprising, as Mises based his theory on the "subjective" theory of value and the Marxist social-democratic (and so Leninist) ideas of what a "socialist" economy would look like. As Libertarian Marxist Paul Mattick correctly argued:

*"However divided the old [social-democratic] labour movement may be by disagreements on various topics, on the question of socialism it stands united. Hilferding's abstract 'General-Cartel', Lenin's admiration for the German war socialism and the German postal service. Kautsky's eternalisation of the value-price-money economy (desiring to do consciously what in capitalism is performed by blind market forces). Trotsky's war communism equipped with supply and demand features, and Stalin's institutional economics -- all these concepts have at their base the continuation of the existing conditions of production. As a matter of fact, they are mere reflections of what is actually going on in capitalist society. Indeed, such 'socialism' is discussed today by famous bourgeois economists like Pigou, Hayek, Robbins, Keynes, to mention only a few, and has created a considerable literature to which the socialists now turn for their material."* [Anti-Bolshevik Communism, pp. 80-1]

Therefore, there has been little discussion of what a true (i.e. libertarian) communist society would be like, one that utterly transformed the existing conditions of production by workers' self-management and the abolition of both the wages system and money. However, it is useful here to indicate exactly why a moneyless (i.e. truly communist) "economy" would work and why the "*calculation argument*" is flawed as an objection to it.

Mises argued that without money there was no way a socialist economy would make "*rational*" production decisions. Not even von Mises denied that a moneyless society could estimate what is likely to be needed over a given period of time (as expressed as physical quantities of definite types and sorts of objects). As he argued, "*calculation in natura in an economy without exchange can embrace consumption-goods only.*" [Collectivist Economic Planning, F.A. Von Hayek (ed.), p. 104] Mises' argument is that the next step, working out which productive methods to employ, would not be possible, or at least would not be able to be done "*rationally,*" i.e. avoiding waste and inefficiency. As he argues, the evaluation of producer goods "*can only be done with some kind of economic calculation. The human mind cannot orient itself properly among the bewildering mass of intermediate products and potentialities without such aid. It would simply stand perplexed before the problems of management and location.*" [Op. Cit., p. 103] Mises' claimed that monetary calculation based on market prices is the only solution.

This argument is not without its force. How can a producer be expected to know if tin is a better use of resources than iron when creating a product if all they know is that iron and tin are available and suitable for their purpose? Or, if we have a consumer good which can be made with  $A + 2B$  or  $2A + B$  (where A and B are both input factors such as steel, oil electricity, etc.) how can we tell which method is more efficient (i.e. which one used least resources and so left the most over for other uses)? With market prices, Mises' argued, it is simple. If the iron cost \$5 and tin \$4, then tin should be used. Similarly, if A cost \$10 and B \$5, then clearly method one would be the most efficient (\$20 versus \$25). Without the

market, von Mises argued, such a decision would be impossible and so every decision would be a "*leap in the dark.*"

However, Mises' argument is based on a number of flawed assumptions.

Firstly, he assumes a centralised, planned economy. While this was a common idea in Marxian social democracy (and the Leninism that came from it), it is rejected by anarchism. No small body of people can be expected to know what happens in society ("*No single brain nor any bureau of brains can see to this organisation,*" in the words of Issac Puente [**Libertarian Communism**, p. 29]). As Bakunin argued, it would lead in practice to "*an extremely complex government. This government will not content itself with administering and governing the masses politically . . . it will also administer the masses economically, concentrating in the hands of the State [all economic and social activity] . . . All that will demand an immense knowledge and many heads 'overflowing with brains' in this government. It will be the reign of **scientific intelligence**, the most aristocratic, despotic, arrogant, and elitist of all regimes. There will be a new class, a new hierarchy . . . Such a regime will not fail to arouse very considerable discontent in the masses of the people, and in order to keep them in check . . . [a] considerable armed force [would be required].*" [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 319] Hence anarchists can agree with Mises: central planning cannot work in practice. However, socialist ideas are not limited to Marxian Social Democracy, and so von Mises ignores far more socialistic ideas than he attacks.

His next assumption is equally flawed. This is that without the market, no information is passed between producers beyond the final outcome of production. In other words, he assumes that the final product is all that counts in evaluating its use. Needless to say, it is true that without more information than the name of a given product, it is impossible to determine whether using it would be an efficient utilisation of resources. But von Mises misunderstands the basic concept of use-value, namely the utility of a good to the consumer of it. As Adam Buick and John Crump point out, "*at the level of the individual production unit or industry, the only calculations that would be necessary in socialism would be calculations in kind. On the one side would be recorded the resources (materials, energy, equipment, labour) used up in production and on the other the amount of good produced, together with any by-products. . . . Socialist production is simply the production of use values from use values, and nothing more.*" [**State Capitalism: The Wages System Under New Management**, p. 137]

The generation and communication of such information implies a decentralised, horizontal network between producers and consumers. This is because what counts as a use-value can only be determined by those directly using it. Thus the production of use-values from use-values cannot be achieved via central planning, as the central planners have no notion of the use-value of the goods being used or produced. Such knowledge lies in many hands, dispersed throughout society, and so socialist production implies decentralisation. Capitalist ideologues claim that the market allows the utilisation of such dispersed knowledge, but as John O'Neil notes, "*the market may be **one** way in which dispersed knowledge can be put to good effect. It is not . . . the only way.*" [**Ecology, Policy and Politics**, p. 118]

So, in order to determine if a specific good is useful to a person, that person needs to know its "*cost.*"

Under capitalism, the notion of cost has been so associated with **price** that we have to put the word "*cost*" in quotation marks. However, the real cost of, say, writing a book, is not a sum of money but so much paper, so much energy, so much ink, so much human labour. In order to make a rational decision on whether a given good is better for meeting a given need than another, the would-be consumer requires this information. However, under capitalism this information is **hidden** by the price.

Moreover, a purely market-based system leaves out information on which to base rational resource allocations (or, at the very least, hides it). The reason for this is that a market system measures, at best, preferences of **individual** buyers among the **available** options. This assumes that all the pertinent use-values that are to be outcomes of production are things that are to be consumed by the individual, rather than use-values that are collectively enjoyed (like clean air). Prices in the market do not measure social costs or externalities, meaning that such costs are not reflected in the price and so you cannot have a rational price system. Similarly, if the market measures only preferences amongst things that can be monopolised and sold to individuals, as distinguished from values that are enjoyed collectively, then it follows that information necessary for rational decision-making in production is not provided by the market.

In other words, prices hide the actual costs that production involved for the individual, society, and the environment, and instead boils everything down into **one** factor, namely price. There is a lack of dialogue and information between producer and consumer. As John O'Neil argues, "*the market distributes a little information and . . . blocks the distribution of a great deal [more]. . . The educative dialogue exists not through the market, but alongside of it.*" [**Ecology, Policy and Politics**, p. 143]

In the words of Joan Robinson:

*"In what industry, in what line of business, are the true social costs of the activity registered in its accounts? Where is the pricing system that offers the consumer a fair choice between air to breath and motor cars to drive about in?"* [**Contribution to Modern Economics**, p. 10]

Indeed, prices often **mis**-value goods as companies can gain a competitive advantage by passing costs onto society (in the form of pollution, for example, or de-skilling workers, increasing job insecurity, and so on). This externalisation of costs is actually rewarded in the market as consumers seek the lowest prices, unaware of the reasons **why** it is lower (such information cannot be gathered from looking at the price). Even if we assume that such activity is penalised by fines later, the damage is still done and cannot be undone. Indeed, the company may be able to weather the fines due to the profits it originally made by externalising costs.

And do prices **actually** reflect costs, even assuming that they accurately reflect social costs and externalities? The question of profit, the reward for owning capital and allowing others to use it, is hardly a cost in the same way as labour, resources and so on (attempts to explain profits as an equivalent sacrifice as labour have always been ridiculous and quickly dropped). When looking at prices to



evaluate efficient use for goods, you cannot actually tell by the price if this is so. Two goods may have the same price, but profit levels (perhaps under the influence of market power) may be such that one has a higher cost price than another. The price mechanism fails to indicate which uses least resources as it is influenced by market power. Indeed, as Takis Fotopoulos notes, "[i]f . . . both central planning and the market economy inevitably lead to concentrations of power, then neither the former nor the latter can produce the sort of information flows and incentives which are necessary for the best functioning of any economic system." [Towards an Inclusive Democracy, p. 252] Moreover, a good produced under a authoritarian state which represses its workforce would have a lower price than one produced in a country which allowed unions to organise and had basic human rights. The repression would force down the cost of labour, so making the good in question appear as a more "efficient" use of resources. In other words, the market can mask inhumanity as "efficiency" and actually reward that behaviour by market share.

Simply put, prices cannot be taken to reflect real costs any more that they can reflect the social expression of the valuation of goods. They are the result of a conflict waged over these goods and those that acted as their inputs (including, of course, labour). Market and social power, much more than need or resource usage, decides the issue. The inequality in the means of purchasers, in the market power of firms and in the bargaining position of labour and capital all play their part, so distorting any relationship a price may have to its costs in terms of resource use. Prices are misshapen. Little wonder Kropotkin asked whether "are we not yet bound to analyse that compound result we call price rather than to accept it as a supreme and blind ruler of our actions?" [Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow, p. 71]

Von Mises argued that anyone "who wished to make calculations in regard to a complicated process of production will immediately notice whether he has worked more economically than others or not; if he finds, from reference to the exchange values obtaining in the market, that he will not be able to produce profitably, this shows that others understand how to make better use of the higher-order goods in question." [Op. Cit., pp. 97-8] However, this only shows whether someone has worked more profitably than others, not whether it is more economical. Market power automatically muddles this issue, as does the possibility of reducing the monetary cost of production by recklessly exploiting natural resources and labour, polluting, or otherwise passing costs onto others. Similarly, the issue of wealth inequality is important, for if the production of luxury goods proves more profitable than basic essentials for the poor does this show that producing the former is a better use of resources? And, of course, the key issue of the relative strength of market power between workers and capitalists plays a key role in determining "profitably."

Therefore, the claim that prices reflect real costs and so efficiency can be faulted on two levels. Moreover, without using another means of cost accounting instead of prices how can supporters of capitalism know there is a correlation between actual and price costs? One can determine whether such a correlation exists by measuring one against the other. If this cannot be done, then the claim that prices measure costs is a tautology (in that a price represents a cost and we know that it is a cost because it has a price). If it can be done, then we can calculate costs in some other sense than in market prices and so that argument that only market prices represent costs falls.

Similarly, von Mises assumes that capitalism can accurately estimate the costs of investing. Using the example of a new railroad, he asks "*[s]hould it be built at all, and if so, which out of the number of conceivable roads should be built? In a competitive and monetary economy, this question would be answered by monetary calculation. The new road will render less expensive the transport of some goods, and it may be possible to calculate whether this reduction of expense transcends that involved in the building and upkeep of the new line.*" [Op. Cit., pp. 108-9] However, this is **not** the case. An investment decision is made based on estimating **possible** future events. The new line **may** reduce transportation costs but the expected reduction may be relatively less than predicted, so causing the investment to fail. Moreover, an investment may fail while it meets a social need simply because people may need the product but cannot afford to pay for it. In other words, von Mises' example hardly shows the superiority of monetary calculation as the decision to invest under capitalism is as much a leap in the dark as it would be in a socialist system (the future is uncertain, in other words).

Lastly, Mises assumes that the market is a rational system. As O'Neil points out, "*Von Mises' earlier arguments against socialist planning turned on an assumption about commensurability. His central argument was that rational economic decision-making required a single measure on the basis of which the worth of alternative states of affairs could be calculated and compared.*" [Op. Cit., p. 115] This central assumption was unchallenged by Taylor and Lange in their defence of "socialism", meaning that from the start the debate against von Mises was defensive and based on the argument that socialist planning could mimic the market and produce results which were efficient from a capitalist point of view. Thus, no one challenged Mises' assumptions either about the centrally planned nature of socialism or about the market being a rational system. Little wonder that the debate put the state socialists on the defensive. As their system was little more than state capitalism, it is unlikely they would attack the fundamentals of capitalism (namely wage labour and centralisation).

So, is capitalism rational? Well, it does exist, but that does not prove that it is rational. The Catholic Church exists, but that shows nothing about the rationality of the institution. To answer the question, we must return to our earlier point that using prices means basing all decision making on one criterion and ignoring all others. This has seriously irrational effects, because the managers of capitalist enterprises are obliged to choose technical means of production which produce the cheapest results. All other considerations are subordinate, in particular the health and welfare of the producers and the effects on the environment. The harmful effects resulting from "*rational*" capitalist production methods have long been pointed out. For example, speed-ups, pain, stress, accidents, boredom, overwork, long hours and so on all harm the physical and mental health of those involved, while pollution, the destruction of the environment, and the exhaustion of non-renewable resources all have serious effects on both the planet and those who live on it. As E. F. Schumacher argued:

*"But what does it mean when we say that something is uneconomic? . . . [S]omething is uneconomic when it fails to earn an adequate profit in terms of money. The method of economics does not, and cannot, produce any other meaning. . . The judgement of economics . . . is an extremely **fragmentary** judgement; out of the large number of aspects which in real life have to be seen and judged together before a decision can be taken,*

*economics supplies only one -- whether a money profit accrues to those who undertake it or not.* [Small is Beautiful, pp. 27-8]

Schumacher stressed that *"about the fragmentary nature of the judgements of economics there can be no doubt whatever. Even with the narrow compass of the economic calculus, these judgements are necessarily and methodically narrow. For one thing, they give vastly more weight to the short than to the long term. . . [S]econd, they are based on a definition of cost which excludes all 'free goods' . . . [such as the] environment, except for those parts that have been privately appropriated. This means that an activity can be economic although it plays hell with the environment, and that a competing activity, if at some cost it protects and conserves the environment, will be uneconomic."* Moreover, *"[d]o not overlook the words 'to those who undertake it.' It is a great error to assume, for instance, that the methodology of economics is normally applied to determine whether an activity carried out by a group within society yields a profit to society as a whole."* [Op. Cit., p. 29]

To claim that prices include all these *"externalities"* is nonsense. If they did, we would not see capital moving to third-world countries with few or no anti-pollution or labour laws. At best, the *"cost"* of pollution would only be included in a price if the company was sued successfully in court for damages -- in other words, once the damage is done. Ultimately, companies have a strong interest in buying inputs with the lowest prices, regardless of **how** they are produced. As Noam Chomsky points out, *"[i]n a true capitalist society, . . . socially responsible behaviour would be penalised quickly in that competitors, lacking such social responsibility, would supplant anyone so misguided as to be concerned with something other than private benefit."* [Language and Politics, p. 301] It is reductionist accounting and its accompanying *"ethics of mathematics"* that produces the *"irrationality of rationality"* which plagues capitalism's exclusive reliance on prices (i.e. profits) to measure *"efficiency."* Moreover, the critique we have just sketched ignores the periodic crises that hit capitalist industry and economies to produce massive unemployment and social disruption -- crises that are due to subjective and objective pressures on the operation of the price mechanism (see [section C.7](#) for details).

Ironically enough, von Mises also pointed to the irrational nature of the price mechanism. He states (correctly) that there are *"extra-economic"* elements which *"monetary calculation cannot embrace"* because of *"its very nature."* He acknowledges that these *"considerations themselves can scarcely be termed irrational"* and, as examples, lists *"[i]n any place where men regard as significant the beauty of a neighbourhood or a building, the health, happiness and contentment of mankind, the honour of individuals or nations."* He states that *"they are just as much motive forces of rational conduct as are economic factors"* but they *"do not enter into exchange relationships."* [von Mises, Op. Cit., p. 99] How rational is an economic system which ignores the *"health, happiness and contentment"* of people? Or the beauty of their surroundings? Which, moreover, penalises those who take these factors into consideration? For anarchists, von Mises comments indicate well the inverted logic of capitalism. That von Mises can support a system which ignores the needs of individuals, their happiness, health, surroundings, environment and so on by *"its very nature"* says a lot (his suggestion that we assign monetary values to such dimensions [p. 100] begs the question and has plausibility only if it assumes what it is supposed to prove. Indeed, the person who would put a price on friendship simply would have no friends. They simply do not understand what friendship is and are thereby excluded from much which

is best in human life. Likewise for other "*extra-economic*" goods that individual's value, such as beautiful places, happiness, the environment and so on).

Under communist-anarchism, the decision-making system used to determine the best use of resources is not more or less "*efficient*" than market allocation, because it goes beyond the market-based concept of "*efficiency*." It does not seek to mimic the market but to do what the market fails to do. This is important, because the market is not the rational system its defenders often claim. While reducing all decisions to one common factor is, without a doubt, an easy method of decision making, it also has serious side-effects **because** of its reductionistic basis (as discussed further in the [next section](#)). As Einstein once pointed out, things should be made as simple as possible but not simplistic. The market makes decision making simplistic and generates a host of irrationalities and dehumanising effects.

Sections [I.4.4](#) and [I.4.5](#) discusses one possible framework for a communist economic decision-making process. Such a framework is necessary because "*an appeal to a necessary role for practical judgements in decision making is **not** to deny any role to general principles. Neither . . . does it deny any place for the use of technical rules and algorithmic procedures . . . Moreover, there is a necessary role for rules of thumb, standard procedures, the default procedures and institutional arrangements that can be followed unreflectively and which **reduce** the scope for **explicit** judgements comparing different states of affairs. There are limits in time, efficient use of resources and the dispersal of knowledge which require rules and institutions. Such rules and institutions can free us for space and time for reflective judgements where they matter most.*" [John O'Neil, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 117-8]

While these algorithmic procedures and guidelines can, and indeed should be, able to be calculated by hand, it is likely that computers will be extensively used to take input data and process it into a suitable format. Indeed, many capitalist companies have software which records raw material inputs and finished product into databases and spreadsheets. Such software could be the basis of a libertarian communist decision making algorithm. Of course, currently such data is submerged beneath money and does not take into account externalities and the nature of the work involved (as would be the case in an anarchist society). However, this does not limit their potential or deny that communist use of such software can be used to inform decisions.

This, we must note, indicates that communist society would use various "*aids to the mind*" to help individuals and groups to make economic decisions. This would reduce the complexity of economic decision making, by allowing different options and resources to be compared to each other. Hence the complexity of economic decision making in an economy with a multitude of goods can be reduced by the use of rational algorithmic procedures and methods to aid the process. Such tools would aid decision making, not dominate it as these decisions affect humans and the planet and should never be made automatically.

It is useful to remember that von Mises argued that it is the **complexity** of a modern economy that ensures money is required. As he put it, "*[w]ithin the narrow confines of household economy, for instance, where the father can supervise the entire economic management, it is possible to determine the*

*significance of changes in the processes of production, without such aids to the mind [as monetary calculation], and yet with more or less of accuracy." However, "the mind of one man alone -- be it ever so cunning, is too weak to grasp the importance of any single one among the countless many goods of higher order. No single man can ever master all the possibilities of production, innumerable as they are, as to be in a position to make straightway evident judgements of value without the aid of some system of computation." [Op. Cit., p. 102]*

That being the case, a libertarian communist society would quickly develop the means of comparing the real impact of specific *"higher order"* goods in terms of their real costs (i.e. the amount of labour, energy and raw materials used plus any social and ecological costs). As we noted above, this essential decision making information would have to be recorded and communicated in a communist society and used to evaluate different options using an agreed methods of comparison. This methods of comparison differs drastically from the price mechanism as it recognises that mindless, automatic calculation is impossible in social choices. Such choices have an unavoidable ethical and political dimension simply because they involve other human beings and the environment. As von Mises himself acknowledges, monetary calculation does not capture such dimensions. We, therefore, need to employ practical judgement in making choices aided by a full understanding of the **real** social and ecological costs involved using, of course, the appropriate *"aids to the mind."*

In addition, a decentralised system will by necessity have to compare less alternatives as local knowledge will eliminate many of the options available. As von Mises acknowledged, a *"household economy"* **can** make economic decisions without money. Being more decentralised than capitalism, a libertarian communist economy will, therefore, be able to do so as well, particularly when it uses the appropriate *"aids to the mind"* to evaluate external resources versus locally produced ones. Given that an anarchist society would be complex and integrated, such aids would be essential but, due to its decentralised nature, it need not embrace the price mechanism. It can evaluate the efficiency of its decisions by looking at the **real** costs involved to society rather than embrace the distorted system of costing explicit in the price mechanism (as Kropotkin once put it, *"if we analyse **price**"* we must *"make a distinction between its different elements"* in order to make rationale allocation and investment decisions [Op. Cit., p. 72]).

Thus, anarchists argue that von Mises' claims were wrong. Communism is viable, but only if it is libertarian communism. Economic decision making in a moneyless *"economy"* is possible. Indeed, it could be argued that von Mises' argument exposes difficulties for capitalism rather than for anarchism. Capitalist *"efficiency"* is hardly rational and for a fully human and ecological efficiency, libertarian communism is required. As two libertarian socialists point out, *"socialist society still has to be concerned with using resources efficiently and rationally, but the criteria of 'efficiency' and 'rationality' are not the same as they are under capitalism."* [Buick and Crump, Op. Cit., p. 137]

So, to claim that communism will be *"more"* efficient than capitalism or vice versa misses the point. Libertarian communism will be *"efficient"* in a totally different way and people will act in ways considered *"irrational"* only under the logic of capitalism.

## I.1.3 What is wrong with markets anyway?

A lot. Markets soon result in what are termed "*market forces*," "*impersonal*" forces which ensure that the people in the economy do what is required of them in order for the economy to function. The market system, in capitalist apologetics, is presented to appear as a regime of freedom where no one forces anyone to do anything, where we "*freely*" exchange with others as we see fit. However, the facts of the matter are somewhat different, since the market often ensures that people act in ways **opposite** to what they desire or forces them to accept "*free agreements*" which they may not actually desire. Wage labour is the most obvious example of this, for, as we indicated in [section B.4](#), most people have little option but to agree to work for others.

We must stress here that not all anarchists are opposed to the market. Individualist anarchists favour it while Proudhon wanted to modify it while retaining competition. For many, the market equals capitalism. However, this is not the case as it ignores the fundamental issue of (economic) class, namely who owns the means of production. Capitalism is unique in that it is based on wage labour, i.e. a market for labour as workers do not own their own means of production and have to sell themselves to those who do. Thus it is entirely possible for a market to exist within a society and for that society **not** to be capitalist. For example, a society of independent artisans and peasants selling their product on the market would not be capitalist as workers would own and control their means of production and so wage labour (and so capitalism) would not exist. Similarly, Proudhon's competitive system of self-managed co-operatives and mutual banks would be non-capitalist (and socialist) for the same reason. Anarchists object to capitalism due to the quality of the social relationships it generates between people (i.e. it generates authoritarian ones). If these relationships are eliminated then the kinds of ownership which do so are anarchistic. Thus the issue of ownership matters only in-so-far it generates relationships of the desired kind (i.e. those based on liberty, equality and solidarity). To concentrate purely on "*markets*" or "*property*" means to ignore social relationships and the key aspect of capitalism, namely wage labour. That right-wingers do this is understandable (to hide the authoritarian core of capitalism) but why (libertarian or other) socialists should do so is less clear.

In this section of the FAQ we discuss anarchist objections to the market **as such** rather than the capitalist market. The workings of the market do have problems with them which are independent of, or made worse by, the existence of wage-labour. It is these problems which make most anarchists hostile to the market and so desire a communist-anarchist society.

So, even if we assume a mutualist or market-socialist system of competing self-managed workplaces, it's clear that market forces would soon result in many irrationalities occurring. Most obviously, operating in a market means submitting to the profit criterion. This means that however much workers might want to employ social criteria, they cannot. To ignore profitability would cause their firm to go bankrupt. Markets therefore create conditions that compel workers and consumers to decide things which are not be in their interest, for example introducing deskilling or polluting technology, longer hours, and so on. We could also point to the numerous industrial deaths and accidents which are due to market forces making it unprofitable to introduce adequate safety equipment or working conditions, (conservative

estimates for industrial deaths in the USA are between 14 000 and 25 000 per year plus over 2 million disabled), or to increased pollution and stress levels which shorten life spans.

In addition, a market-based system can result in what we have termed "*the ethics of mathematics*," where things (particularly money) become more important than people. This can have a de-humanising effect, with people becoming cold-hearted calculators who put profits before people. This can be seen in capitalism, where economic decisions are far more important than ethical ones. And such an inhuman mentality can be rewarded on the market. Merit does not "*necessarily*" breed success, and the successful do not "*necessarily*" have merit. The truth is that, in the words of Noam Chomsky, "*wealth and power tend to accrue to those who are ruthless, cunning, avaricious, self-seeking, lacking in sympathy and compassion, subservient to authority and willing to abandon principle for material gain, and so on. . . Such qualities might be just the valuable ones for a war of all against all.*" [For Reasons of State, pp. 139-140] Thorstein Veblen elaborated at length on this theme in **The Leisure Class**, a classic analysis of capitalist psychology. Needless to be said, if the market does reward such people with success it can hardly be considered as a **good** thing. A system which elevates making money to the position of the most important individual activity will obviously result in the degrading of human values and an increase in neurotic and psychotic behaviour.

Little wonder, as Alfie Kohn has argued, competition can have serious negative effects on us outside of work, with it damaging both our personal psychology and our interpersonal relationships (see his excellent book **No Contest** for details). The market can impoverish us as individuals, sabotaging self-esteem, promoting conformity, ruining relationships and making use less than what we could be. This is a problem of markets as such, not only capitalist ones.

Any market system is also marked by a continuing need to expand production and consumption. This means that market forces ensure that work continually has to expand, causing potentially destructive results for both people and the planet. Competition ensures that we can never take it easy, for as Max Stirner argued, "*[r]estless acquisition does not let us take breath, take a calm enjoyment. We do not get the comfort of our possessions. . . Hence it is at any rate helpful that we come to an agreement about human labours that they may not, as under competition, claim all our time and toil.*" [The Ego and Its Own, p. 268]

Value needs to be created, and that can only be done by labour. It is ironic that supporters of capitalism, while usually saying that "*work*" is and always will be hell, support an economic system which must continually expand that "*work*" (i.e. labour) while deskilling and automating it and those who do it. Anarchists, in contrast, argue that work need not be hell, and indeed, that when enriched by skills and self-management, can be enjoyable. We go further and argue that work need not take all our time and that **labour** (i.e. unwanted and boring work) can and must be minimised. Hence, while the "*anti-work*" capitalist submits humanity to more and more labour, the anarchist desires the liberation of "*work*" and the end of "*labour*" as a way of life.

In addition, market decisions are crucially conditioned by the purchasing power of those income groups

that can back their demands with money. The market is a continuous bidding for goods, resources, and services, with those who have the most purchasing power the winners. This means that the market system is the worst one for allocating resources when purchasing power is unequally distributed. This is why orthodox economists make the convenient assumption of a "*given distribution of income*" when they try to show that a market-based allocation of resources is the best one (for example, "*Pareto optimality*"). While a mutualist system should reduce inequality drastically, it cannot be assumed that inequalities will not increase over time. This is because inequalities in resources leads to inequalities of power on the market. Any trade or contract will benefit the powerful more than the powerless, so reinforcing and potentially increasing the inequalities and power between the parties. This could, over time, lead to a return to capitalism (as Proudhon himself noted, the "*original equality [between contractor and workmen] was bound to disappear through the advantageous position of the master and the dependence of the wage-workers.*" [**System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 201]).

With the means of life monopolised by one class, the effects of market forces and unequal purchasing power can be terrible. As Allan Engler points out, "*[w]hen people are denied access to the means of livelihood, the invisible hand of market forces does not intervene on their behalf. Equilibrium between supply and demand has no necessary connection with human need. For example, assume a country of one million people in which 900,000 are without means of livelihood. One million bushels of wheat are produced. The entire crop is sold to 100,000 people at \$10 a bushel. Supply and demand are in equilibrium, yet 900 000 people will face starvation.*" [**Apostles of Greed**, pp. 50-51] In case anyone thinks that this just happens in theory, the example of African countries hit by famine gives a classic example of this occurring in practice. There, rich landowners grow cash crops and export food to the developed nations while millions starve in their own.

Lastly, there are the distributional consequences of the market system. As markets inform by 'exit' only -- some products find a market, others do not -- 'voice' is absent. The operation of 'exit' rather than 'voice' leaves behind those without power in the marketplace. For example, the wealthy do not buy food poisoned with additives, the poor consume it. This means a division grows between two environments: one inhabited by those with wealth and one inhabited by those without it. As can be seen from the current capitalist practice of "*exporting pollution*" to developing countries, this problem can have serious ecological and social effects. So, far from the market being a "*democracy*" based on "*one dollar, one vote*," it is an oligarchy in which, for example, the "*79 000 Americans who earned the minimum wage in 1987 have the same influence [or "vote"] as Michael Milken, who 'earned' as much as all of them combined.*" [Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel, **The Political Economy of Participatory Economics**, p. 21]

In other words, markets are always biased in favour of effective demand, i.e. in favour of the demands of people with money. A market may be Pareto-optimal, but it can never (except in the imaginary abstractions of mathematical welfare economics) allocate the necessities of life to those who need them the most.

In addition, markets never internalise external costs. Two people (or companies) who strike a market-rational bargain between themselves need not consider the consequences of their bargain for other



people outside their bargain, nor the consequences for the earth. Thus market exchanges are never bilateral agreements as their effects impact on the wider society (in terms of, say, pollution, inequality and so on). The market also ignores the needs of future generations as they always discount the value of the long term future. A payment to be made 1 000 years from now (a mere speck in geological time) has a market value of virtually zero according to any commonly used discount rate. Even 50 years in the future cannot be adequately considered as competitive pressures force a short term perspective on people harmful to present and future generations, plus the ecology of the planet.

Also, markets do not reflect the values of things we do not put a price upon (as we argued in [section B.5](#)). It cannot protect wilderness, for example, simply because it requires people to turn it into property and sell it as a commodity. If you cannot afford to visit the new commodity, the market turns it into something else, no matter how much you value it. This ensures that the market cannot really provide the information necessary for rational-decision making and so resources are inefficiently allocated and we all suffer from the consequences of that.

Thus are plenty of reasons for concluding that efficiency and the market not only do not necessarily coincide, but, indeed, necessarily do not coincide. Indeed, rather than respond to individual needs, the market responds to money (more correctly, profit), which by its very nature provides a distorted indication of individual preferences (and does not take into account values which are enjoyed collectively, such as clean air, or **potentially** enjoyed, such as the wilderness a person may never visit but desires to see exist and protected).

So, for all its talk of "*invisible hands*" and "*individual freedom*," capitalism ignores the actual living individual in the economy and society. The "*individual rights*" on which capitalists' base their "*free*" system are said to be "*man's rights*," on what "*man needs*." But "*man*," after all, is only an abstraction, not a real living being. By talking about "*man*" and basing "*rights*" on what this abstraction is said to need, capitalism and statism ignore the uniqueness of each person and the conditions required to develop that uniqueness. As Max Stirner pointed out, "*[h]e who is infatuated with **Man** leaves persons out of account so far as that infatuation exists, and floats in an ideal, sacred interest. **Man**, you see, is not a person, but an ideal, a spook.*" [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 79] And like all spooks, it requires sacrifice -- the sacrifice of individuality to hierarchy and authority.

This anti-individual biases in capitalism can be seen by its top-down nature and the newspeak used to disguise its reality. For example, there is what is called "*increasing flexibility of the labour market.*" "*Flexibility*" sounds great: rigid structures are unappealing and hardly suitable for human growth. In reality, as Noam Chomsky points out "*[f]lexibility means insecurity. It means you go to bed at night and don't know if you have a job tomorrow morning. That's called flexibility of the labour market, and any economist can explain that's a good thing for the economy, where by 'the economy' now we understand profit-making. We don't mean by 'the economy' the way people live. That's good for the economy, and temporary jobs increase flexibility. Low wages also increase job insecurity. They keep inflation low. That's good for people who have money, say, bondholders. So these all contribute to what's called a 'healthy economy,' meaning one with very high profits. Profits are doing fine. Corporate profits are*

*zooming. But for most of the population, very grim circumstances. And grim circumstances, without much prospect of a future, may lead to constructive social action, but where that's lacking they express themselves in violence.*" [Keeping the Rabble in Line, pp. 283-4]

This does not mean that social anarchists propose to "*ban*" the market -- far from it. This would be impossible. What we do propose is to convince people that a profit-based market system has distinctly **bad** effects on individuals, society and the planet's ecology, and that we can organise our common activity to replace it with libertarian communism. As Max Stirner argued, "*competition. . .has a continued existence. . . [because] all do not attend to **their affair** and come to an **understanding** with each other about it. . . .Abolishing competition is not equivalent to favouring the guild. The difference is this: In the **guild** baking, etc., is the affair of the guild-brothers; in **competition**, the affair of chance competitors; in the **union**, of those who require baked goods, and therefore my affair, yours, the affair of neither guildic nor the concessionary baker, but the affair of the **united**.*" [Ego and Its Own, p. 275]

Therefore, social anarchists do not appeal to "*altruism*" in their struggle against the de-humanising effects of the market, but rather, to egoism: the simple fact that co-operation and mutual aid is in our best interests as individuals. By co-operating and controlling "*the affairs of the united*," we can ensure a free society which is worth living in, one in which the individual is not crushed by market forces and has time to fully develop his or her individuality and uniqueness:

*"Solidarity is therefore the state of being in which Man attains the greatest degree of security and wellbeing; and therefore egoism itself, that is the exclusive consideration of one's own interests, impels Man and human society towards solidarity."* [Errico Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 28]

## I.1.4 If capitalism is exploitative, then isn't socialism as well?

Some "*Libertarian*" capitalists say yes to this question, arguing that the Labour Theory of Value (LTV) does not imply socialism but what they call "*self-managed*" capitalism. This, however, is not a valid inference. The LTV can imply both socialism (selling the product of ones labour) and communism (distribution according to need). The theory is a critique of capitalism, not necessarily the basis of a socialist economy, although it **can** be considered this as well. For example, Proudhon used the LTV as the foundation of his proposals for mutual banking and co-operatives, while Robert Owen used it as the basis of his system of labour notes. Marx, on the other hand, use the LTV purely as a critique of capitalism while hoping for communism.

In other words, though a system of co-operative selling on the market (what is mistakenly termed "*self-managed*" capitalism by some) or exchanging labour-time values would not be communism, it is **not** capitalism. This is because the workers are not separated from the means of production. Therefore, right-libertarians' attempts to claim that it is capitalism are false, an example of misinformed insistence that virtually **every** economic system, bar state socialism and feudalism, is capitalist. Some libertarian Marxists (as well as Leninists) claim, similarly, that non-communist forms of socialism are also just

"*self-managed*" capitalism. Why libertarian Marxists desire to reduce the choices facing humanity to either communism or some form of capitalism is frankly strange, but also understandable because of the potential dehumanising effects of market systems seen under capitalism.

However, it could be argued that communism (based on free access and communal ownership of resources) would mean that workers are exploited by non-workers (the young, the sick, the elderly and so on). While this may reflect the sad lack of personal empathy (and so ethics) of the pro-capitalist defenders of this argument, it totally misses the point as far as communist anarchism goes. This is because of two reasons.

Firstly, "*anarchist communism . . . means voluntary communism, communism from free choice*" [A. Berkman, **ABC of Anarchism**, p. 11], which means it is not imposed on anyone but is created and practised only by those who believe in it. Therefore it would be up to the communities and syndicates to decide how they wish to distribute the products of their labour and individuals to join, or create, those that meet their ideas of right and wrong. Some may decide on equal pay, others on payment in terms of labour time, yet others on communistic associations (we have indicated elsewhere why most anarchists consider that communism would be in people's self-interest, so we will not repeat ourselves here). The important thing to realise is that co-operatives will decide what to do with their output, whether to exchange it or to distribute it freely. Hence, because it is based on free agreement, anarchist communism cannot be exploitative. Members of a co-operative which is communistic are free to leave, after all. Needless to say, the co-operatives will usually distribute their product to others within their confederation and exchange with the non-communist ones in a different manner. We say "*usually*," for in the case of emergencies like earthquakes and so forth the situation would call for mutual aid.

Secondly, the so-called "*non-workers*" have been, or will be, workers. As the noted Spanish anarchist De Santillan pointed out, "*[n]aturally, children, the aged and the sick are not considered parasites. The children will be productive when they grow up. The aged have already made their contribution to social wealth and the sick are only temporarily unproductive.*" [**After the Revolution**, p. 20] In other words, over their life time, everyone contributes to society and it so using the "*account book*" mentality of capitalism misses the point.

The reason why capitalism is exploitative is that workers **have** to agree to give the product of their labour to another (the boss) in order to be employed in the first place (see [section B.4](#)). Capitalists would not remain capitalists if their capital did not produce a profit. In libertarian communism, by contrast, the workers themselves agree to distribute part of their product to others (i.e. society as a whole, their neighbours, friends, and so forth). It is based on free agreement, while capitalism is marked by power, authority, and the firm hand of market forces. As resources are held in common, people have the option of working alone if they so desired.

Similarly, capitalism by its very nature as a "*grow or die*" system, needs to expand into new areas, meaning that unlike libertarian socialism, it will attempt to undermine and replace other social systems (usually by force, if history is any guide). As freedom cannot be given, there is no reason for a

libertarian-socialist system to expand beyond the effect of a "*good example*" on the oppressed of capitalist regimes.

## C.6 Can market dominance by Big Business change?

Capital concentration, of course, does not mean that in a given market, dominance will continue forever by the same firms, no matter what. However, the fact that the companies that dominate a market can change over time is no great cause for joy (no matter what supporters of free market capitalism claim). This is because when market dominance changes between companies all it means is that **old** Big Business is replaced by **new** Big Business:

*"Once oligopoly emerges in an industry, one should not assume that sustained competitive advantage will be maintained forever. . . once achieved in any given product market, oligopoly creates barriers to entry that can be overcome only by the development of even more powerful forms of business organisation that can plan and co-ordinate even more complex specialised divisions of labour."* [William Lazonick, **Business Organisation and the Myth of the Market Economy**, p. 173]

Hardly a great improvement as changing the company hardly changes the impact of capital concentration or Big Business on the economy. While the faces may change, the system itself remains the same.

In a developed market, with a high degree of monopoly (i.e. high market concentration and capital costs that create barriers to entry into it), new companies can usually only enter under four conditions:

1) They have enough capital available to them to pay for set-up costs and any initial losses. This can come from two main sources, from other parts of their company (e.g. Virgin going into the cola business) or large firms from other areas/nations enter the market. The former is part of the diversification process associated with Big Business and the second is the globalisation of markets resulting from pressures on national oligopolies (see section [C.4](#)). Both of which increases competition within a given market for a period as the number of firms in its oligopolistic sector has increased. Over time, however, market forces will result in mergers and growth, increasing the degree of monopoly again.

2) They get state aid to protect them against foreign competition (e.g. the South East Asian "Tiger" economies or the 19th century US economy) - *"Historically, political strategies to develop national economies have provided critical protection and support to overcome. . . barriers to entry."* [William Lazonick, **Op. Cit.**, p. 87]

3) Demand exceeds supply, resulting in a profit level which tempts other big companies into the market or gives smaller firms already there excess profits, allowing them to expand. Demand still

plays a limiting role in even the most oligopolistic market (but this process hardly decreases barriers to entry/mobility or oligopolistic tendencies in the long run).

4) The dominant companies raise their prices too high or become complacent and make mistakes, so allowing other big firms to undermine their position in a market (and, sometimes, allow smaller companies to expand and do the same). For example, many large US oligopolies in the 1970s came under pressure from Japanese oligopolies because of this. However, as noted in section [C.4.2](#), these declining oligopolies can see their market control last for decades and the resulting market will still be dominated by oligopolies (as big firms are generally replaced by similar sized, or bigger, ones).

Usually some or all of these processes are at work at once.

Let's consider the US steel industry as an example. The 1980's saw the rise of the so-called "mini-mills" with lower capital costs. The mini-mills, a new industry segment, developed only after the US steel industry had gone into decline due to Japanese competition. The creation of Nippon Steel, matching the size of US steel companies, was a key factor in the rise of the Japanese steel industry, which invested heavily in modern technology to increase steel output by 2,216% in 30 years (5.3 million tons in 1950 to 122.8 million by 1980). By the mid 1980's, the mini-mills and imports each had a quarter of the US market, with many previously steel-based companies diversifying into new markets.

Only by investing \$9 billion to increase technological competitiveness, cutting workers wages to increase labour productivity, getting relief from stringent pollution control laws and (very importantly) the US government restricting imports to a quarter of the total home market could the US steel industry survive. The fall in the value of the dollar also helped by making imports more expensive. In addition, US steel firms became increasingly linked with their Japanese "rivals," resulting in increased centralisation (and so concentration) of capital.

Therefore, only because competition from foreign capital created space in a previously dominated market, driving established capital out, combined with state intervention to protect and aid home producers, was a new segment of the industry able to get a foothold in the local market. With many established companies closing down and moving to other markets, and once the value of the dollar fell which forced import prices up and state intervention reduced foreign competition, the mini-mills were in an excellent position to increase US market share.

This period in the US steel industry was marked by increased "co-operation" between US and Japanese companies, with larger companies the outcome. This meant, in the case of the mini-mills, that the cycle of capital formation and concentration would start again, with bigger companies driving out the smaller ones through competition.

So, while the actual companies involved may change over time, the economy as a whole will always be marked by Big Business due to the nature of capitalism. That's the way capitalism works -- profits for

the few at the expense of the many.

## C.11 Doesn't Chile prove that the free market benefits everyone?

This is a common right-wing "Libertarian" argument, one which is supported by many other supporters of "free market" capitalism. Milton Friedman, for example, stated that Pinochet *"has supported a fully free-market economy as a matter of principle. Chile is an economic miracle."* [Newsweek, Jan, 1982] This viewpoint is also commonplace in the more mainstream right, with US President George Bush praising the Chilean economic record in 1990 when he visited that country.

General Pinochet was the figure-head of a military coup in 1973 against the democratically elected left-wing government led by President Allende, a coup which the CIA helped organise. Thousands of people were murdered by the forces of "law and order" during the coup and Pinochet's forces *"are conservatively estimated to have killed over 11 000 people in his first year in power."* [P. Gunson, A. Thompson, G. Chamberlain, **The Dictionary of Contemporary Politics of South America**, Routledge, 1989, p. 228]

The installed police state's record on human rights was denounced as barbaric across the world. However, we will ignore the obvious contradiction in this "economic miracle", i.e. why it almost always takes authoritarian/fascistic states to introduce "economic liberty," and concentrate on the economic facts of the free-market capitalism imposed on the Chilean people.

Working on a belief in the efficiency and fairness of the free market, Pinochet desired to put the laws of supply and demand back to work, and set out to reduce the role of the state and also cut back inflation. He, and *"the Chicago Boys"* -- a group of free-market economists -- thought what had restricted Chile's growth was government intervention in the economy -- which reduced competition, artificially increased wages, and led to inflation. The ultimate goal, Pinochet once said, was to make Chile *"a nation of entrepreneurs."*

The role of the Chicago Boys cannot be understated. They had a close relationship with the military from 1972, and according to one expert had a key role in the coup:

*"In August of 1972 a group of ten economists under the leadership of de Castro began to work on the formulation of an economic programme that would replace [Allende's one]. . . In fact, the existence of the plan was essential to any attempt on the part of the armed forces to overthrow Allende as the Chilean armed forces did not have any economic plan of their own."* [Silvia Bortzutzky, *"The Chicago Boys, social security and welfare in Chile"*, **The Radical Right and the Welfare State**, Howard Glennerster and James Midgley (eds.), p. 88]

It is also interesting to note that *"[a]ccording to the report of the United States Senate on covert actions*



*in Chile, the activities of these economists were financed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)" [Bortzutzky, Op. Cit., p. 89]*

Obviously some forms of state intervention were more acceptable than others.

The actual results of the free market policies introduced by the dictatorship were far less than the "miracle" claimed by Friedman and a host of other "Libertarians." The initial effects of introducing free market policies in 1975 was a shock-induced depression which resulted in national output falling by 15 percent, wages sliding to one-third below their 1970 level and unemployment rising to 20 percent. [Elton Rayack, **Not so Free to Choose**, p. 57] This meant that, in per capita terms, Chile's GDP only increased by 1.5% per year between 1974-80. This was considerably less than the 2.3% achieved in the 1960's. The average growth in GDP was 1.5% per year between 1974 and 1982, which was lower than the average Latin American growth rate of 4.3% and lower than the 4.5% of Chile in the 1960's. Between 1970 and 1980, per capita GDP grew by only 8%, while for Latin America as a whole, it increased by 40%. Between the years 1980 and 1982 during which all of Latin America was adversely affected by depression conditions, per capita GDP fell by 12.9 percent, compared to a fall of 4.3 percent for Latin America as a whole. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 64]

In 1982, after 7 years of free market capitalism, Chile faced yet another economic crisis which, in terms of unemployment and falling GDP was even greater than that experienced during the terrible shock treatment of 1975. Real wages dropped sharply, falling in 1983 to 14 percent below what they had been in 1970. Bankruptcies skyrocketed, as did foreign debt and unemployment. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 69] By 1983, the Chilean economy was devastated and it was only by the end of 1986 that Gross Domestic Product per capita (barely) equalled that of 1970. [Thomas Skidmore and Peter Smith, *"The Pinochet Regime"*, pp. 137-138, **Modern Latin America**]

Faced with this massive collapse of a *"free market regime designed by principled believers in a free market"* (to use Milton Friedman's words from an address to the "Smith Centre," a conservative Think Tank at Cal State entitled *"Economic Freedom, Human Freedom, Political Freedom"*) the regime organised a massive bailout. The "Chicago Boys" resisted this measure until the situation became so critical that they could not avoid it. The IMF offered loans to Chile to help it out of the mess its economic policies had helped create, but under strict conditions. The total bailout cost 3 per cent of Chile's GNP for three years, a cost which was passed on to the taxpayers. This follows the usual pattern of "free market" capitalism -- market discipline for the working class, state aid for the elite. During the "miracle," the economic gains had been privatised; during the crash the burden for repayment was socialised.

The Pinochet regime **did** reduce inflation, from around 500% at the time of the CIA-backed coup (given that the US undermined the Chilean economy -- *"make the economy scream"*, Richard Helms, the director of the CIA -- high inflation would be expected), to 10% by 1982. From 1983 to 1987, it fluctuated between 20 and 31%. The advent of the "free market" led to reduced barriers to imports *"on the ground the quotas and tariffs protected inefficient industries and kept prices artificially high. The*

*result was that many local firms lost out to multinational corporations. The Chilean business community, which strongly supported the coup in 1973, was badly affected.*" [Skidmore and Smith, **Op. Cit.**]

The decline of domestic industry had cost thousands of better-paying jobs. The ready police repression made strikes and other forms of protest both impractical and dangerous. According to a report by the Roman Catholic Church 113 protesters had been killed during social protest against the economic crisis of the early 1980s, with several thousand detained for political activity and protests between May 1983 and mid-1984. Thousands of strikers were also fired and union leaders jailed. [Rayack, **Op. Cit.**, p. 70] The law was also changed to reflect the power property owners have over their wage slaves and the *"total overhaul of the labour law system [which] took place between 1979 and 1981. . . aimed at creating a perfect labour market, eliminating collective bargaining, allowing massive dismissal of workers, increasing the daily working hours up to twelve hours and eliminating the labour courts."* [Silvia Borzutzky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 91] Little wonder, then, that this favourable climate for business operations resulted in generous lending by international finance institutions.

By far the hardest group hit was the working class, particularly the urban working class. By 1976, the third year of Junta rule, real wages had fallen to 35% below their 1970 level. It was only by 1981 that they has risen to 97.3% of the 1970 level, only to fall again to 86.7% by 1983. Unemployment, excluding those on state make-work programmes, was 14.8% in 1976, falling to 11.8% by 1980 (this is still double the average 1960's level) only to rise to 20.3% by 1982. [Rayack, **Op. Cit.**, p. 65]. Unemployment (including those on government make-work programmes) had risen to a third of the labour force by mid-1983. By 1986, per capita consumption was actually 11% lower than the 1970 level. [Skidmore and Smith, **Op. Cit.**] Between 1980 and 1988, the real value of wages grew only 1.2 percent while the real value of the minimum wage declined by 28.5 percent. During this period, urban unemployment averaged 15.3 percent per year. [Silvia Bortzutzky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 96] Even by 1989 the unemployment rate was still at 10% (the rate in 1970 was 5.7%) and the real wage was still 8% lower than in 1970. Between 1975 and 1989, unemployment averaged 16.7%. In other words, after nearly 15 years of free market capitalism, real wages had still not exceeded their 1970 levels and unemployment was still higher. As would be expected in such circumstances the share of wages in national income fell from 42.7% in 1970 to 33.9% in 1993. Given that high unemployment is often attributed by the right to strong unions and other labour market "imperfections," these figures are doubly significant as the Chilean regime, as noted above, reformed the labour market to improve its "competitiveness."

Another consequence of Pinochet's neo-classical monetarist policies *"was a contraction of demand, since workers and their families could afford to purchase fewer goods. The reduction in the market further threatened the business community, which started producing more goods for export and less for local consumption. This posed yet another obstacle to economic growth and led to increased concentration of income and wealth in the hands of a small elite."* [Skidmore and Smith, **Op. Cit.**]

It is the increased wealth of the elite that we see the true "miracle" of Chile. According to one expert in the Latin American neo-liberal revolutions, the elite *"had become massively wealthy under Pinochet"* and when the leader of the Christian Democratic Party returned from exile in 1989 he said that economic

growth that benefited the top 10 per cent of the population had been achieved (Pinochet's official institutions agreed). [Duncan Green, **The Silent Revolution**, p. 216, Noam Chomsky, **Deterring Democracy**, p. 231] In 1980, the richest 10% of the population took in 36.5% of the national income. By 1989, this had risen to 46.8%. By contrast, the bottom 50% of income earners saw their share fall from 20.4% to 16.8% over the same period. Household consumption followed the same pattern. In 1970, the top 20% of households had 44.5% of consumption. This rose to 51% in 1980 and to 54.6% in 1989. Between 1970 and 1989, the share going to the other 80% fell. The poorest 20% of households saw their share fall from 7.6% in 1970 to 4.4% in 1989. The next 20% saw their share fall from 11.8% to 8.2%, and middle 20% share fell from 15.6% to 12.7%. The next 20% share their share of consumption fall from 20.5% to 20.1%.

Thus the wealth created by the Chilean economy in during the Pinochet years did **not** "trickle down" to the working class (as claimed would happen by "free market" capitalist dogma) but instead accumulated in the hands of the rich. As in the UK and the USA, with the application of "trickle down economics" there was a vast skewing of income distribution in favour of the already-rich. That is, there has been a 'trickle-up' (or rather, a **flood** upwards). Which is hardly surprising, as exchanges between the strong and weak will favour the former (which is why anarchists support working class organisation and collective action to make us stronger than the capitalists).

In the last years of Pinochet's dictatorship, the richest 10 percent of the rural population saw their income rise by 90 per cent between 1987 and 1990. The share of the poorest 25 per cent fell from 11 per cent to 7 per cent. [Duncan Green, **Op. Cit.**, p. 108] The legacy of Pinochet's social inequality could still be found in 1993, with a two-tier health care system within which infant mortality is 7 per 1000 births for the richest fifth of the population and 40 per 1000 for the poorest 20 per cent. [**Ibid.**, p. 101]

Per capita consumption fell by 23% from 1972-87. The proportion of the population below the poverty line (the minimum income required for basic food and housing) increased from 20% to 44.4% between 1970 and 1987. Per capita health care spending was more than halved from 1973 to 1985, setting off explosive growth in poverty-related diseases such as typhoid, diabetes and viral hepatitis. On the other hand, while consumption for the poorest 20% of the population of Santiago dropped by 30%, it rose by 15% for the richest 20%. [Noam Chomsky, **Year 501**, pp. 190-191] The percentage of Chileans without adequate housing increased from 27 to 40 percent between 1972 and 1988, despite the claims of the government that it would solve homelessness via market friendly policies.

In the face of these facts, only one line of defence is possible on the Chilean "Miracle" -- the level of economic growth. While the share of the economic pie may have dropped for most Chileans, the right argue that the high economic growth of the economy meant that they were receiving a smaller share of a bigger pie. We will ignore the well documented facts that the **level** of inequality, rather than absolute levels of standards of living, has most effect on the health of a population and that ill-health is inversely correlated with income (i.e. the poor have worse health than the rich). We will also ignore other issues related to the distribution of wealth, and so power, in a society (such as the free market re-enforcing and increasing inequalities via "free exchange" between strong and weak parties, as the terms of any exchange will be skewed in favour of the stronger party, an analysis which the Chilean experience

provides extensive evidence for with its "competitive" and "flexible" labour market). In other words, growth without equality can have damaging effects which are not, and cannot be, indicated in growth figures.

So we will consider the claim that the Pinochet regime's record on growth makes it a "miracle" (as nothing else could). However, when we look at the regime's growth record we find that it is hardly a "miracle" at all -- the celebrated economic growth of the 1980s must be viewed in the light of the two catastrophic recessions which Chile suffered in 1975 and 1982. As Edward Herman points out, this growth was *"regularly exaggerated by measurements from inappropriate bases (like the 1982 trough)."* [**The Economics of the Rich**]

This point is essential to understand the actual nature of Chile's "miracle" growth. For example, supporters of the "miracle" pointed to the period 1978 to 1981 (when the economy grew at 6.6 percent a year) or the post 1982- 84 recession up-swing,. However, this is a case of "lies, damn lies, and statistics" as it does not take into account the catching up an economy goes through as it leaves a recession. During a recovery, laid-off workers go back to work and the economy experiences an increase in growth due to this. This means that the deeper the recession, the higher the subsequent growth in the up-turn. So to see if Chile's economic growth was a miracle and worth the decrease in income for the many, we need to look at whole business cycle, rather than for the upturn. If we do this we find that Chile had the second worse rate of growth in Latin America between 1975 and 1980. The average growth in GDP was 1.5% per year between 1974 and 1982, which was lower than the average Latin American growth rate of 4.3% and lower than the 4.5% of Chile in the 1960's.

Looking at the entire Pinochet era we discover that only by 1989 -- 14 years into the free-market policies - did per capita output climb back up to the level of 1970. Between 1970 and 1990, Chile's total GDP grew by a decidedly average 2% a year. Needless to say, these years also include the Allende period and the aftermath of the coup and so, perhaps, this figure presents a false image of the regime's record. If we look at the 1981-90 period to (i.e. during the height of Pinochet's rule, beginning 6 years after the start of the Chilean "Miracle"), the figure is **worse** with the growth rate in GDP just 1.84% a year. This was slower than Chile during the 1950s (4%) or the 1960s (4.5%). Indeed, if we take population increase into account, Chile saw a per capita GDP growth of just 0.3% a year between 1981 and 1990 (in comparison, the UK GDP per capita grew by 2.4% during the same period and the USA by 1.9%).

Thus the growth "miracles" refer to recoveries from depression-like collapses, collapses that can be attributed in large part to the free- market policies imposed on Chile! Overall, the growth "miracle" under Pinochet turns out to be non-existent. The full time frame illustrates Chile's lack of significant economic and social process between 1975 and 1989. Indeed, the economy was characterised by instability rather than real growth. The high levels of growth during the boom periods (pointed to by the right as evidence of the "miracle") barely made up for the losses during the bust periods.

Similar comments are possible in regards to the privatised pension System, regarded by many as a success and a model for other countries. However, on closer inspection this system shows its weaknesses

-- indeed, it can be argued that the system is only a success for those companies making extensive profits from it (administration costs of the Chilean system are almost 30% of revenues, compared to 1% for the U.S. Social Security system [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, p. 305]). For working people, it is a disaster. According to SAFP, the government agency which regulates the system, 96% of the known workforce were enrolled in February 1995, but 43.4% of these were not adding to their funds. Perhaps as many as 60% do not contribute regularly (given the nature of the labour market, this is unsurprising). Unfortunately, regular contributions are required to receive full benefits. Critics argue that only 20% of contributors will actually receive good pensions.

It is interesting to note that when this programme was introduced, the armed forces and police were allowed to keep their own generous public plans. If the plans **were** as good as their supporters claim, you would think that those introducing them would have joined them. Obviously what was good enough for the masses were not suitable for the rulers.

The impact on individuals extended beyond purely financial considerations, with the Chilean labour force *"once accustomed to secure, unionised jobs [before Pinochet] . . . [being turned] into a nation of anxious individualists . . . [with] over half of all visits to Chile's public health system involv[ing] psychological ailments, mainly depression. 'The repression isn't physical any more, it's economic - feeding your family, educating your child,' says Maria Pena, who works in a fishmeal factory in Concepcion. 'I feel real anxiety about the future', she adds, 'They can chuck us out at any time. You can't think five years ahead. If you've got money you can get an education and health care; money is everything here now.'"* [Duncan Green, **Op. Cit.**, p. 96]

Little wonder, then, that *"adjustment has created an atomised society, where increased stress and individualism have damaged its traditionally strong and caring community life. . . suicides have increased threefold between 1970 and 1991 and the number of alcoholics has quadrupled in the last 30 years . . . [and] family breakdowns are increasing, while opinion polls show the current crime wave to be the most widely condemned aspect of life in the new Chile. 'Relationships are changing,' says Betty Bizamar, a 26-year-old trade union leader. 'People use each other, spend less time with their family. All they talk about is money, things. True friendship is difficult now.'"* [**Ibid.**, p. 166]

The experiment with free market capitalism also had serious impacts for Chile's environment. The capital city of Santiago became one of *"the most polluted cities in the world"* due the free reign of market forces. [Nathaniel Nash, cited by Noam Chomsky, **Year 501**, p. 190] With no environmental regulation there is general environmental ruin and water supplies have severe pollution problems. [Noam Chomsky, **Ibid.**] With the bulk of the country's experts being based on the extraction and low processing of natural resources, eco-systems and the environment have been plundered in the name of profit and property. The depletion of natural resources, particularly in forestry and fishing, is accelerating due to the self-interested behaviour of a few large firms looking for short term profit.

All in all, the experience of Chile under Pinochet and its "economic miracle" indicates that the costs involved in creating a free market capitalist regime are heavy, at least for the majority. Rather than being

transitional, these problems have proven to be structural and enduring in nature, as the social, environmental, economic and political costs become embedded into society. The murky side of the Chilean "miracle" is simply not reflected in the impressive macroeconomic indicators used to market "free market" capitalism, indicators themselves subject to manipulation as we have seen.

Since Chile has become (mostly) a democracy (with the armed forces still holding considerable influence) some movement towards economic reforms have begun and been very successful. Increased social spending on health, education and poverty relief has occurred since the end of the dictatorship and has lifted over a million Chileans out of poverty between 1987 and 1992 (the poverty rate has dropped from 44.6% in 1987 to 23.2% in 1996, although this is still higher than in 1970). However, inequality is still a major problem as are other legacies from the Pinochet era, such as the nature of the labour market, income insecurity, family separations, alcoholism, and so on.

Chile has moved away from Pinochet's "free-market" model in other ways too. In 1991, Chile introduced a range of controls over capital, including a provision for 30% of all non-equity capital entering Chile to be deposited without interest at the central bank for one year. This reserve requirement - known locally as the encaje - amounts to a tax on capital flows that is higher the shorter the term of the loan.

As William Greider points out, Chile *"has managed in the last decade to achieve rapid economic growth by abandoning the pure free-market theory taught by American economists and emulating major elements of the Asian strategy, including forced savings and the purposeful control of capital. The Chilean government tells foreign investors where they may invest, keeps them out of certain financial assets and prohibits them from withdrawing their capital rapidly."* [**One World, Ready or Not**, p. 280]

Thus the Chilean state post-Pinochet has violated its "free market" credentials, in many ways, very successfully too. Thus the claims of free-market advocates that Chile's rapid growth in the 1990s is evidence for their model are false (just as their claims concerning South-East Asia also proved false, claims conveniently forgotten when those economies went into crisis). Needless to say, Chile is under pressure to change its ways and conform to the dictates of global finance. In 1998, Chile eased its controls, following heavy speculative pressure on its currency, the peso.

So even the neo-liberal jaguar has had to move away from a purely free market approach on social issues and the Chilean government has had to intervene into the economy in order to start putting back together the society ripped apart by market forces and authoritarian government.

So, for all but the tiny elite at the top, the Pinochet regime of "economic liberty" was a nightmare. Economic "liberty" only seemed to benefit one group in society, an obvious "miracle." For the vast majority, the "miracle" of economic "liberty" resulted, as it usually does, in increased poverty, pollution, crime and social alienation. The irony is that many right-wing "libertarians" point to it as a model of the benefits of the free market.

## **C.11.1 But didn't Pinochet's Chile prove that "economic**

## freedom is an indispensable means toward the achievement of political freedom"?

Pinochet did introduce free-market capitalism, but this meant real liberty only for the rich. For the working class, "economic liberty" did not exist, as they did not manage their own work nor control their workplaces and lived under a fascist state.

The liberty to take economic (never mind political) action in the forms of forming unions, going on strike, organising go-slows and so on was severely curtailed by the very likely threat of repression. Of course, the supporters of the Chilean "Miracle" and its "economic liberty" did not bother to question how the suppression of political liberty effected the economy or how people acted within it. They maintained that the repression of labour, the death squads, the fear installed in rebel workers could be ignored when looking at the economy. But in the real world, people will put up with a lot more if they face the barrel of a gun than if they do not.

The claim that "economic liberty" existed in Chile makes sense only if we take into account that there was only **real** liberty for one class. The bosses may have been "left alone" but the workers were not, unless they submitted to authority (capitalist or state). Hardly what most people would term as "liberty."

As far as political liberty goes, it was only re-introduced once it was certain that it could not be used by ordinary people. As Cathy Scheider notes, "economic liberty" has resulted in most Chileans having

*"little contact with other workers or with their neighbours, and only limited time with their family. Their exposure to political or labour organisations is minimal. . . they lack either the political resources or the disposition to confront the state. The fragmentation of opposition communities has accomplished what brute military repression could not. It has transformed Chile, both culturally and politically, from a country of active participatory grassroots communities, to a land of disconnected, apolitical individuals. The cumulative impact of this change is such that we are unlikely to see any concerted challenge to the current ideology in the near future."* [Report on the Americas, (NACLA) XXVI, 4/4/93]

In such circumstances, political liberty can be re-introduced, as no one is in a position to effectively use it. In addition, Chileans live with the memory that challenging the state in the near past resulted in a fascist dictatorship murdering thousands of people as well as repeated and persistent violations of human rights by the junta, not to mention the existence of "anti-Marxist" death squads -- for example in 1986 "Amnesty International accused the Chilean government of employing death squads." [P. Gunson, A. Thompson, G. Chamberlain, **Op. Cit.**, p. 86] According to one Human Rights group, the Pinochet regime was responsible for 11,536 human rights violations between 1984 and 1988 alone. [Calculation of "Comite Nacional de Defensa do los Derechos del Pueblo," reported in **Fortin**, September 23, 1988]

These facts that would have a strongly deterrent effect on people contemplating the use of political

liberty to actually **change** the status quo in ways that the military and economic elites did not approve of. In addition, it would make free speech, striking and other forms of social action almost impossible, thus protecting and increasing the power, wealth and authority of the employer over their wage slaves. The claim that such a regime was based on "economic liberty" suggests that those who make such claims have no idea what liberty actually is.

As Kropotkin pointed out years ago, *"freedom of press. . . and all the rest, are only respected if the people do not make use of them against the privileged classes. But the day the people begin to take advantage of them to undermine those privileges, then the so-called liberties will be cast overboard."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 42] Chile is a classic example of this.

Moreover, post-Pinochet Chile is not your typical "democracy." Pinochet is a senator for life, for example, and he has appointed one third of the senate (who have veto power - and the will to use it - to halt efforts to achieve changes that the military do not like). In addition, the threat of military intervention is always at the forefront of political discussions. This was seen in 1998, when Pinochet was arrested in Britain in regard of a warrant issued by a Spanish Judge for the murders of Spanish citizens during his regime. Commentators, particularly those on the right, stressed that Pinochet's arrest could undermine Chile's "fragile democracy" by provoking the military. In other words, Chile was only a democracy in-so-far as the military let it be. Of course, few commentators acknowledged the fact that this meant that Chile was not, in fact, a democracy after all. Needless to say, Milton Friedman considers Chile to have "political freedom" now.

It is interesting to note that the leading expert of the Chilean "economic miracle" (to use Milton Friedman's words) did not consider that political liberty could lead to "economic liberty" (i.e. free market capitalism). According to Sergio de Castro, the architect of the economic programme Pinochet imposed, fascism was required to introduce "economic liberty" because:

*"it provided a lasting regime; it gave the authorities a degree of efficiency that it was not possible to obtain in a democratic regime; and it made possible the application of a model developed by experts and that did not depend upon the social reactions produced by its implementation."* [quoted by Silvia Bortzutzky, *"The Chicago Boys, social security and welfare in Chile"*, **The Radical Right and the Welfare State**, Howard Glennerster and James Midgley (eds.), p. 90]

In other words, fascism was an ideal political environment to introduce "economic liberty" **because** it had destroyed political liberty. Perhaps we should conclude that the denial of political liberty is both necessary and sufficient in order to create (and preserve) "free market" capitalism? And perhaps to create a police state in order to control industrial disputes, social protest, unions, political associations, and so on, is no more than to introduce the minimum force necessary to ensure that the ground rules the capitalist market requires for its operation are observed?

As Brian Barry argues in relation to the Thatcher regime in Britain which was also heavily influenced by



the ideas of "free market" capitalists like Milton Friedman and Frederick von Hayek, perhaps it is:

*"Some observers claim to have found something paradoxical in the fact that the Thatcher regime combines liberal individualist rhetoric with authoritarian action. But there is no paradox at all. Even under the most repressive conditions . . . people seek to act collectively in order to improve things for themselves, and it requires an enormous exercise of brutal power to fragment these efforts at organisation and to force people to pursue their interests individually. . . left to themselves, people will inevitably tend to pursue their interests through collective action - in trade unions, tenants' associations, community organisations and local government. Only the pretty ruthless exercise of central power can defeat these tendencies: hence the common association between individualism and authoritarianism, well exemplified in the fact that the countries held up as models by the free-marketers are, without exception, authoritarian regimes" ["The Continuing Relevance of Socialism", in **Thatcherism**, edited Robert Skidelsky, p. 146]*

Little wonder, then, that Pinochet's regime was marked by authoritarianism, terror and rule by savants. Indeed, *"[t]he Chicago-trained economists emphasised the scientific nature of their programme and the need to replace politics by economics and the politicians by economists. Thus, the decisions made were not the result of the will of the authority, but they were determined by their scientific knowledge. The use of the scientific knowledge, in turn, would reduce the power of government since decisions will be made by technocrats and by the individuals in the private sector."* [Silvia Borzutzky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 90]

Of course, turning authority over to technocrats and private power does not change its nature - only who has it. Pinochet's regime saw a marked shift of governmental power away from protection of individual rights to a protection of capital and property rather than an abolition of that power altogether. As would be expected, only the wealthy benefited. The working class were subjected to attempts to create a "perfect labour market" - and only terror can turn people into the atomised commodities such a market requires.

Perhaps when looking over the nightmare of Pinochet's regime we should ponder these words of Bakunin in which he indicates the negative effects of running society by means of science books and "experts":

*"human science is always and necessarily imperfect. . . were we to force the practical life of men - collective as well as individual - into rigorous and exclusive conformity with the latest data of science, we would thus condemn society as well as individuals to suffer martyrdom on a Procrustean bed, which would soon dislocate and stifle them, since life is always an infinitely greater thing than science."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 79]

The Chilean experience of rule by free market ideologues prove Bakunin's points beyond doubt. Chilean society was forced onto the Procrustean bed by the use of terror and life was forced to conform to the

assumptions found in economics textbooks. And as we proved in the last section, only those with power or wealth did well out of the experiment.

## C.12 Doesn't Hong Kong show the potentials of "free market" capitalism?

Given the general lack of laissez-faire in the world, examples to show the benefits of free market capitalism are few and far between. However, Hong Kong is often pointed to as an example of the power of capitalism and how a "pure" capitalism will benefit all.

It is undeniable that the figures for Hong Kong's economy are impressive. Per-capita GDP by end 1996 should reach US\$ 25,300, one of the highest in Asia and higher than many western nations. Enviably tax rates - 16.5% corporate profits tax, 15% salaries tax. In the first 5 years of the 1990's Hong Kong's economy grew at a tremendous rate -- nominal per capita income and GDP levels (where inflation is not factored in) almost doubled. Even accounting for inflation, growth was brisk. The average annual growth rate in real terms of total GDP in the 10 years to 1995 was six per cent, growing by 4.6 per cent in 1995.

However, looking more closely, we find a somewhat different picture than that painted by those claim it as an example of the wonders of free market capitalism (for the example of Chile, see section [C.11](#)).

Firstly, like most examples of the wonders of a free market, it is not a democracy, it was a relatively liberal colonial dictatorship run from Britain. But political liberty does not rate highly with many supporters of laissez-faire capitalism (such as right-libertarians, for example). Secondly, the government owns all the land, which is hardly capitalistic, and the state has intervened into the economy many times (for example, in the 1950s, one of the largest public housing schemes in history was launched to house the influx of about 2 million people fleeing Communist China). Thirdly, Hong Kong is a city state and cities have a higher economic growth rate than regions (which are held back by large rural areas). Fourthly, according to an expert in the Asian Tiger economies, *"to conclude . . . that Hong Kong is close to a free market economy is misleading."* [Robert Wade, **Governing the Market**, p. 332]

Wade notes that:

*"Not only is the economy managed from outside the formal institutions of government by the informal coalition of peak private economic organisations [notably the major banks and trading companies, which are closely linked to the life-time expatriates who largely run the government. This provides a "point of concentration" to conduct negotiations in line with an implicit development strategy], but government itself also has available some unusual instruments for influencing industrial activity. It owns all the land. . . It controls rents in part of the public housing market and supplies subsidised public housing to roughly half the population, thereby helping to keep down the cost of labour. And its ability to increase or decrease the flow of immigrants from China also gives it a way of affecting labour costs."* [Ibid.]

Wade notes that *"its economic growth is a function of its service role in a wider regional economy, as entrepot trader, regional headquarters for multinational companies, and refuge for nervous money."* [Op. Cit., p. 331]. In other words, an essential part of its success is that it gets surplus value produced elsewhere in the world. Handling other people's money is a sure-fire way of getting rich (see Henwood's **Wall Street** to get an idea of the sums involved) and this will have a nice impact on per-capita income figures (as will selling goods produced sweat-shops in dictatorships like China).

By 1995, Hong Kong was the world's 10th largest exporter of services with the industry embracing everything from accounting and legal services, insurance and maritime to telecommunications and media. The contribution of the services sectors as a whole to GDP increased from 60 per cent in 1970 to 83 per cent in 1994. Manufacturing industry has moved to low wage countries such as southern China (by the end of the 1970's, Hong Kong's manufacturing base was less competitive, facing increasing costs in land and labour -- in other words, workers were starting to benefit from economic growth and so capital moved elsewhere). The economic reforms introduced by Deng Xiaoping in southern China in 1978 were important, as this allowed capital access to labour living under a dictatorship (just as American capitalists invested heavily in Nazi Germany -- labour rights were null, profits were high). It is estimated about 42,000 enterprises in the province have Hong Kong participation and 4,000,000 workers (nine times larger than the territory's own manufacturing workforce) are now directly or indirectly employed by Hong Kong companies. In the late 1980's Hong Kong trading and manufacturing companies began to expand further afield than just southern China. By the mid 1990's they were operating across Asia, in Eastern Europe and Central America.

The gradual shift in economic direction to a more service-oriented economy has stamped Hong Kong as one of the world's foremost financial centres. This highly developed sector is served by some 565 banks and deposit-taking companies from over 40 countries, including 85 of the world's top 100 in terms of assets. In addition, it is the 8th largest stock market in the world (in terms of capitalisation) and the 2nd largest in Asia.

Therefore it is pretty clear that Hong Kong does not really show the benefits of "free market" capitalism. Wade indicates that we can consider Hong Kong as a *"special case or as a less successful variant of the authoritarian-capitalist state."* [Op. Cit., p. 333] Its success lies in the fact that it has access to the surplus value produced elsewhere in the world (particularly that from the workers under the dictatorship in China and from the stock market) which gives its economy a nice boost.

Given that everywhere cannot be such a service provider, it does not provide much of an indication of how "free market" capitalism would work in, say, the United States. And as there is in fact extensive (if informal) economic management and that the state owns all the land and subsidises rent and health care, how can it be even considered an example of "capitalism in action"?

## F.2 What do "anarcho"-capitalists mean by "freedom"?

For "anarcho"-capitalists, the concept of freedom is limited to the idea of "*freedom from*." For them, freedom means simply freedom from the "*initiation of force*," or the "*non-aggression against anyone's person and property*." [Murray Rothbard, **For a New Liberty**, p. 23] The notion that real freedom must combine both freedom "*to*" **and** freedom "*from*" is missing in their ideology, as is the social context of the so-called freedom they defend.

Before starting, it is useful to quote Alan Haworth when he notes that "*[i]n fact, it is surprising how little close attention the concept of freedom receives from libertarian writers. Once again **Anarchy, State, and Utopia** is a case in point. The word 'freedom' doesn't even appear in the index. The word 'liberty' appears, but only to refer the reader to the 'Wilt Chamberlain' passage. In a supposedly 'libertarian' work, this is more than surprising. It is truly remarkable.*" [**Anti-Libertarianism**, p. 95]

Why this is the case can be seen from how the "anarcho"-capitalist defines freedom.

In a right-libertarian or "anarcho"-capitalist society, freedom is considered to be a product of property. As Murray Rothbard puts it, "*the libertarian defines the concept of 'freedom' or 'liberty'. . . [as a] condition in which a person's ownership rights in his body and his legitimate material property rights are not invaded, are not aggressed against. . . . Freedom and unrestricted property rights go hand in hand.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p.41]

This definition has some problems, however. In such a society, one cannot (legitimately) do anything with or on another's property if the owner prohibits it. This means that an individual's only **guaranteed** freedom is determined by the amount of property that he or she owns. This has the consequence that someone with no property has no guaranteed freedom at all (beyond, of course, the freedom not to be murdered or otherwise harmed by the deliberate acts of others). In other words, a distribution of property is a distribution of freedom, as the right-libertarians themselves define it. It strikes anarchists as strange that an ideology that claims to be committed to promoting freedom entails the conclusion that some people should be more free than others. However, this is the logical implication of their view, which raises a serious doubt as to whether "anarcho"-capitalists are actually interested in freedom.

Looking at Rothbard's definition of "liberty" quoted above, we can see that freedom is actually no longer considered to be a fundamental, independent concept. Instead, freedom is a derivative of something more fundamental, namely the "*legitimate rights*" of an individual, which are identified as property rights. In other words, given that "anarcho"-capitalists and right libertarians in general consider the right to property as "absolute," it follows that freedom and property become one and the same. This suggests an alternative name for the right Libertarian, namely "**Propertarian**." And, needless to say, if we do not accept the right-libertarians' view of what constitutes "legitimate" "rights," then their claim to be

defenders of liberty is weak.

Another important implication of this "liberty as property" concept is that it produces a strangely alienated concept of freedom. Liberty, as we noted, is no longer considered absolute, but a derivative of property -- which has the important consequence that you can "sell" your liberty and still be considered free by the ideology. This concept of liberty (namely "liberty as property") is usually termed "self-ownership." But, to state the obvious, I do not "own" myself, as if were an object somehow separable from my subjectivity -- I **am** myself. However, the concept of "self-ownership" is handy for justifying various forms of domination and oppression -- for by agreeing (usually under the force of circumstances, we must note) to certain contracts, an individual can "sell" (or rent out) themselves to others (for example, when workers sell their labour power to capitalists on the "free market"). In effect, "self-ownership" becomes the means of justifying treating people as objects -- ironically, the very thing the concept was created to stop! As L. Susan Brown notes, "*[a]t the moment an individual 'sells' labour power to another, he/she loses self-determination and instead is treated as a subjectless instrument for the fulfilment of another's will.*" [**The Politics of Individualism**, p. 4]

Given that workers are paid to obey, you really have to wonder which planet Murray Rothbard is on when he argues that a person's "*labour service is alienable, but his will is not*" and that he [sic!] "*cannot alienate his will, more particularly his control over his own mind and body.*" [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 40, p. 135] He contrasts private property and self-ownership by arguing that "*[a]ll physical property owned by a person is alienable . . . I can give away or sell to another person my shoes, my house, my car, my money, etc. But there are certain vital things which, in natural fact and in the nature of man, are inalienable . . . [his] will and control over his own person are inalienable.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 134-5]

But "*labour services*" are unlike the private possessions Rothbard lists as being alienable. As we argued in section B.1 ("[Why do anarchists oppose hierarchy](#)") a person's "*labour services*" and "*will*" cannot be divided -- if you sell your labour services, you also have to give control of your body and mind to another person! If a worker does not obey the commands of her employer, she is fired. That Rothbard denies this indicates a total lack of common-sense. Perhaps Rothbard will argue that as the worker can quit at any time she does not alienate their will (this seems to be his case against slave contracts -- see [section F.2.6](#)). But this ignores the fact that between the signing and breaking of the contract and during work hours (and perhaps outside work hours, if the boss has mandatory drug testing or will fire workers who attend union or anarchist meetings or those who have an "unnatural" sexuality and so on) the worker **does** alienate his will and body. In the words of Rudolf Rocker, "*under the realities of the capitalist economic form . . . there can be no talk of a 'right over one's own person,' for that ends when one is compelled to submit to the economic dictation of another if he does not want to starve.*" [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 17]

Ironically, the rights of property (which are said to flow from an individual's self-ownership of themselves) becomes the means, under capitalism, by which self-ownership of non-property owners is denied. The foundational right (self-ownership) becomes denied by the derivative right (ownership of things). Under capitalism, a lack of property can be just as oppressive as a lack of legal rights because of

the relationships of domination and subjection this situation creates.

So Rothbard's argument (as well as being contradictory) misses the point (and the reality of capitalism). Yes, **if** we define freedom as *"the absence of coercion"* then the idea that wage labour does not restrict liberty is unavoidable, but such a definition is useless. This is because it hides structures of power and relations of domination and subordination. As Carole Pateman argues, *"the contract in which the worker allegedly sells his labour power is a contract in which, since he cannot be separated from his capacities, he sells command over the use of his body and himself. . . To sell command over the use of oneself for a specified period . . . is to be an unfree labourer."* [**The Sexual Contract**, p. 151]

In other words, contracts about property in the person inevitably create subordination. "Anarcho"-capitalism defines this source of unfreedom away, but it still exists and has a major impact on people's liberty. Therefore freedom is better described as "self-government" or "self-management" -- to be able to govern one's own actions (if alone) or to participate in the determination of joint activity (if part of a group). Freedom, to put it another way, is not an abstract legal concept, but the vital concrete possibility for every human being to bring to full development all their powers, capacities, and talents which nature has endowed them. A key aspect of this is to govern one's own actions when within associations (self-management). If we look at freedom this way, we see that coercion is condemned but so is hierarchy (and so is capitalism for during working hours, people are not free to make their own plans and have a say in what affects them. They are order takers, **not** free individuals).

It is because anarchists have recognised the authoritarian nature of capitalist firms that they have opposed wage labour and capitalist property rights along with the state. They have desired to replace institutions structured by subordination with institutions constituted by free relationships (based, in other words, on self-management) in **all** areas of life, including economic organisations. Hence Proudhon's argument that the *"workmen's associations . . . are full of hope both as a protest against the wage system, and as an affirmation of reciprocity"* and that their importance lies *"in their denial of the rule of capitalists, money lenders and governments."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, pp. 98-99]

Unlike anarchists, the "anarcho"-capitalist account of freedom allows an individual's freedom to be rented out to another while maintaining that the person is still free. It may seem strange that an ideology proclaiming its support for liberty sees nothing wrong with the alienation and denial of liberty but, in actual fact, it is unsurprising. After all, contract theory is a *"theoretical strategy that justifies subjection by presenting it as freedom"* and nothing more. Little wonder, then, that contract *"creates a relation of subordination"* and not of freedom [Carole Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 39, p. 59]

Any attempt to build an ethical framework starting from the abstract individual (as Rothbard does with his *"legitimate rights"* method) will result in domination and oppression between people, **not** freedom. Indeed, Rothbard provides an example of the dangers of idealist philosophy that Bakunin warned about when he argued that while *"[m]aterialism denies free will and ends in the establishment of liberty; idealism, in the name of human dignity, proclaims free will, and on the ruins of every liberty founds authority."* [**God and the State**, p. 48] This is the case with "anarcho"-capitalism can be seen from

Rothbard's wholehearted support for wage labour and the rules imposed by property owners on those who use, but do not own, their property. Rothbard, basing himself on abstract individualism, cannot help but justify authority over liberty.

Overall, we can see that the logic of the right-libertarian definition of "freedom" ends up negating itself, because it results in the creation and encouragement of **authority**, which is an **opposite** of freedom. For example, as Ayn Rand points out, *"man has to sustain his life by his own effort, the man who has no right to the product of his effort has no means to sustain his life. The man who produces while others dispose of his product, is a slave."* [The Ayn Rand Lexicon: Objectivism from A to Z, pp. 388-9] But, as was shown in [section C](#), capitalism is based on, as Proudhon put it, workers working *"for an entrepreneur who pays them and keeps their products,"* and so is a form of **theft**. Thus, by "libertarian" capitalism's **own** logic, capitalism is based not on freedom, but on (wage) slavery; for interest, profit and rent are derived from a worker's **unpaid** labour, i.e. *"others dispose of his [sic] product."*

And if a society **is** run on the wage- and profit-based system suggested by the "anarcho" and "libertarian" capitalists, freedom becomes a commodity. The more money you have, the more freedom you get. Then, since money is only available to those who earn it, Libertarianism is based on that classic saying *"work makes one free!"* (*Arbeit macht frei!*), which the Nazis placed on the gates of their concentration camps. Of course, since it is capitalism, this motto is somewhat different for those at the top. In this case it is *"other people's work makes one free!"* -- a truism in any society based on private property and the authority that stems from it.

Thus it is debatable that a libertarian or "anarcho" capitalist society would have less unfreedom or coercion in it than "actually existing capitalism." In contrast to anarchism, "anarcho"-capitalism, with its narrow definitions, restricts freedom to only a few aspects of social life and ignores domination and authority beyond those aspects. As Peter Marshall points out, the right-libertarian's *"definition of freedom is entirely negative. It calls for the absence of coercion but cannot guarantee the positive freedom of individual autonomy and independence."* [Demanding the Impossible, p. 564] By confining freedom to such a narrow range of human action, "anarcho"-capitalism is clearly **not** a form of anarchism. Real anarchists support freedom in every aspect of an individual's life.

## F.2.1 What are the implications of defining liberty in terms of (property) rights?

The change from defending liberty to defending (property) rights has important implications. For one thing, it allows right libertarians to imply that private property is similar to a "fact of nature," and so to conclude that the restrictions on freedom produced by it can be ignored. This can be seen in Robert Nozick's argument that decisions are voluntary if the limitations on one's actions are not caused by human action which infringe the rights of others. Thus, in a "pure" capitalist society the restrictions on freedom caused by wage slavery are not really restrictions because the worker voluntarily consents to the contract. The circumstances that drive a worker to make the contract are irrelevant because they are created by people exercising their rights and not violating other peoples' ones (see the section on



*"Voluntary Exchange"* in **Anarchy, State, and Utopia**, pp. 262-265).

This means that within a society "[w]hether a person's actions are voluntary depends on what limits his alternatives. If facts of nature do so, the actions are voluntary. (I may voluntarily walk to someplace I would prefer to fly to unaided)." [**Anarchy, State, and Utopia**, p. 262] Similarly, the results of voluntary actions and the transference of property can be considered alongside the "facts of nature" (they are, after all, the resultants of "natural rights"). This means that the circumstances created by the existence and use of property can be considered, in essence, as a "natural" fact and so the actions we take in response to these circumstances are therefore "voluntary" and we are "free" (Nozick presents the example [p. 263] of someone who marries the only available person -- all the more attractive people having already chosen others -- as a case of an action that is voluntary despite removal of all but the least attractive alternative through the legitimate actions of others. Needless to say, the example can be -- and is -- extended to workers on the labour market -- although, of course, you do not starve to death if you decide not to marry).

However, such an argument fails to notice that property is different from gravity or biology. Of course not being able to fly does not restrict freedom. Neither does not being able to jump 10 feet into the air. But unlike gravity (for example), private property has to be protected by laws and the police. No one stops you from flying, but laws and police forces must exist to ensure that capitalist property (and the owners' authority over it) is respected. The claim, therefore, that private property in general, and capitalism in particular, can be considered as "facts of nature," like gravity, ignores an important fact: namely that the people involved in an economy must accept the rules of its operation -- rules that, for example, allow contracts to be enforced; forbid using another's property without his or her consent ("theft," trespass, copyright infringement, etc.); prohibit "conspiracy," unlawful assembly, rioting, and so on; and create monopolies through regulation, licensing, charters, patents, etc. This means that capitalism has to include the mechanisms for deterring property crimes as well as mechanisms for compensation and punishment should such crimes be committed. In other words, capitalism is in fact far more than "voluntary bilateral exchange," because it **must** include the policing, arbitration, and legislating mechanisms required to ensure its operation. Hence, like the state, the capitalist market is a social institution, and the distributions of goods that result from its operation are therefore the distributions sanctioned by a capitalist society. As Benjamin Franklin pointed out, *"Private property . . . is a Creature of Society, and is subject to the Calls of that Society."*

Thus, to claim with Sir Isaiah Berlin (the main, modern, source of the concepts of "negative" and "positive" freedom -- although we must add that Berlin was not a right-Libertarian), that "[i]f my poverty were a kind of disease, which prevented me from buying bread . . . as lameness prevents me from running, this inability would not naturally be described as a lack of freedom" totally misses the point ["*Two Concepts of Liberty*", in **Four Essays on Liberty**, p. 123]. If you are lame, police officers do not come round to stop you running. They do not have to. However, they **are** required to protect property against the dispossessed and those who reject capitalist property rights.

This means that by using such concepts as "negative" liberty and ignoring the social nature of private property, right-libertarians are trying to turn the discussion away from liberty toward "biology" and

other facts of nature. And conveniently, by placing property rights alongside gravity and other natural laws, they also succeed in reducing debate even about rights.

Of course, coercion and restriction of liberty **can** be resisted, unlike "natural forces" like gravity. So if, as Berlin argues, "*negative*" freedom means that you "*lack political freedom only if you are prevented from attaining a goal by human beings,*" then capitalism is indeed based on such a lack, since property rights need to be enforced by human beings ("*I am prevented by others from doing what I could otherwise do*"). After all, as Proudhon long ago noted, the market is manmade, hence any constraint it imposes is the coercion of man by man and so economic laws are not as inevitable as natural ones [see Alan Ritter's **The Political Thought of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 122]. Or, to put it slightly differently, capitalism requires coercion in order to work, and hence, is **not** similar to a "fact of nature," regardless of Nozick's claims (i.e. property rights have to be defined and enforced by human beings, although the nature of the labour market resulting from capitalist property definitions is such that direct coercion is usually not needed). This implication is actually recognised by right-libertarians, because they argue that the rights-framework of society should be set up in one way rather than another. In other words, they recognise that society is not independent of human interaction, and so can be changed.

Perhaps, as seems the case, the "anarcho"-capitalist or right-Libertarian will claim that it is only **deliberate** acts which violate your (libertarian defined) rights by other humans beings that cause unfreedom ("*we define freedom . . . as the **absence of invasion** by another man of an man's person or property*" [Rothbard, **The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 41]) and so if no-one deliberately coerces you then you are free. In this way the workings of the capitalist market can be placed alongside the "facts of nature" and ignored as a source of unfreedom. However, a moments thought shows that this is not the case. Both deliberate and non-deliberate acts can leave individuals lacking freedom.

Let us assume (in an example paraphrased from Alan Haworth's excellent book **Anti-Libertarianism**, p. 49) that someone kidnaps you and places you down a deep (naturally formed) pit, miles from anyway, which is impossible to climb up. No one would deny that you are unfree. Let us further assume that another person walks by and accidentally falls into the pit with you.

According to right-libertarianism, while you are unfree (i.e. subject to deliberate coercion) your fellow pit-dweller is perfectly free for they have subject to the "facts of nature" and not human action (deliberate or otherwise). Or, perhaps, they "voluntarily choose" to stay in the pit, after all, it is "only" the "facts of nature" limiting their actions. But, obviously, both of you are in **exactly the same position**, have **exactly the same choices** and so are **equally** unfree! Thus a definition of "liberty" that maintains that only deliberate acts of others -- for example, coercion -- reduces freedom misses the point totally.

Why is this example important? Let us consider Murray Rothbard's analysis of the situation after the abolition of serfdom in Russia and slavery in America. He writes:

*"The **bodies** of the oppressed were freed, but the property which they had worked and eminently deserved to own, remained in the hands of their former oppressors. With*

*economic power thus remaining in their hands, the former lords soon found themselves virtual masters once more of what were now free tenants or farm labourers. The serfs and slaves had tasted freedom, but had been cruelly deprived of its fruits.* " [The Ethics of Liberty, p. 74]

However, contrast this with Rothbard's claims that if market forces ("voluntary exchanges") result in the creation of free tenants or labourers then these labourers and tenants are free (see, for example, **The Ethics of Liberty**, pp. 221-2 on why "economic power" within capitalism does not exist). But the labourers dispossessed by market forces are in **exactly** the same situation as the former serfs and slaves. Rothbard sees the obvious "*economic power*" in the later case, but denies it in the former. But the **conditions** of the people in question are identical and it is these conditions that horrify us. It is only his ideology that stops Rothbard drawing the obvious conclusion -- identical conditions produce identical social relationships and so if the formally "free" ex-serfs are subject to "*economic power*" and "*masters*" then so are the formally "free" labourers within capitalism! Both sets of workers may be formally free, but their circumstances are such that they are "free" to "consent" to sell their freedom to others (i.e. economic power produces relationships of domination and unfreedom between formally free individuals).

Thus Rothbard's definition of liberty in terms of rights fails to provide us with a realistic and viable understanding of freedom. Someone can be a virtual slave while still having her rights non-violated (conversely, someone can have their property rights violated and still be free; for example, the child who enters your backyard without your permission to get her ball hardly violates your liberty -- indeed, you would never know that she has entered your property unless you happened to see her do it). So the idea that freedom means non-aggression against person and their legitimate material property justifies extensive **non-freedom** for the working class. The non-violation of property rights does **not** imply freedom, as Rothbard's discussion of the former slaves shows. Anyone who, along with Rothbard, defines freedom "*as the absence of invasion by another man of any man's person or property*" in a deeply inequality society is supporting, and justifying, capitalist and landlord domination. As anarchists have long realised, in an unequal society, a contractarian starting point implies an absolutist conclusion.

Why is this? Simply because freedom is a result of **social** interaction, not the product of some isolated, abstract individual (Rothbard uses the model of Robinson Crusoe to construct his ideology). But as Bakunin argued, "*the freedom of the individual is a function of men in society, a necessary consequence of the collective development of mankind.*" He goes on to argue that "*man in isolation can have no awareness of his liberty . . . Liberty is therefore a feature not of isolation but of interaction, not of exclusion but rather of connection.*" [Selected Writings, p. 146, p. 147] Right Libertarians, by building their definition of freedom from the isolated person, end up by supporting restrictions of liberty due to a neglect of an adequate recognition of the actual interdependence of human beings, of the fact what each person does is effected by and affects others. People become aware of their humanity (liberty) in society, not outside it. It is the **social relationships** we take part in which determine how free we are and any definition of freedom which builds upon an individual without social ties is doomed to create relations of domination, not freedom, between individuals -- as Rothbard's theory does (to put it another way, voluntary association is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for freedom. Which is why anarchists

have always stressed the importance of equality -- see [section F.3](#) for details).

So while facts of nature can restrict your options and freedom, it is the circumstances within which they act and the options they limit that are important (a person trapped at the bottom of a pit is unfree as the options available are so few; the lame person is free because their available options are extensive). In the same manner, the facts of society can and do restrict your freedom because they are the products of human action and are defined and protected by human institutions, it is the circumstances within which individuals make their decisions and the social relationships these decisions produce that are important (the worker driven by poverty to accept a slave contract in a sweat shop is unfree because the circumstances he faces have limited his options and the relations he accepts are based upon hierarchy; the person who decides to join an anarchist commune is free because the commune is non-hierarchical and she has the option of joining another commune, working alone and so forth).

All in all, the right-Libertarian concept of freedom is lacking. For an ideology that takes the name "Libertarianism" it seems happy to ignore actual liberty and instead concentrate on an abstract form of liberty which ignores so many sources of unfreedom as to narrow the concept until it becomes little more than a justification for authoritarianism. This can be seen from right-Libertarian attitudes about private property and its effects on liberty (as discussed in the [next section](#)).

## F.2.2 How does private property affect freedom?

The right-libertarian does not address or even acknowledge that the (absolute) right of private property may lead to extensive control by property owners over those who use, but do not own, property (such as workers and tenants). Thus a free-market capitalist system leads to a very selective and class-based protection of "rights" and "freedoms." For example, under capitalism, the "freedom" of employers inevitably conflicts with the "freedom" of employees. When stockholders or their managers exercise their "freedom of enterprise" to decide how their company will operate, they violate their employee's right to decide how their labouring capacities will be utilised. In other words, under capitalism, the "property rights" of employers will conflict with and restrict the "human right" of employees to manage themselves. Capitalism allows the right of self-management only to the few, not to all. Or, alternatively, capitalism does not recognise certain human rights as **universal** which anarchism does.

This can be seen from Austrian Economist W. Duncan Reekie's defence of wage labour. While referring to "*intra-firm labour markets*" as "*hierarchies*", Reekie (in his best *ex cathedra* tone) states that "*[t]here is nothing authoritarian, dictatorial or exploitative in the relationship. Employees order employers to pay them amounts specified in the hiring contract just as much as employers order employees to abide by the terms of the contract.*" [**Markets, Entrepreneurs and Liberty**, p. 136, p. 137]. Given that "*the terms of contract*" involve the worker agreeing to obey the employers orders and that they will be fired if they do not, its pretty clear that the ordering that goes on in the "*intra-firm labour market*" is decidedly **one way**. Bosses have the power, workers are paid to obey. And this begs the question, **if** the employment contract creates a free worker, why must she abandon her liberty during work hours?

Reekie actually recognises this lack of freedom in a "round about" way when he notes that *"employees in a firm at any level in the hierarchy can exercise an entrepreneurial role. The area within which that role can be carried out increases the more authority the employee has."* [Op. Cit., p. 142] Which means workers **are** subject to control from above which restricts the activities they are allowed to do and so they are **not** free to act, make decisions, participate in the plans of the organisation, to create the future and so forth within working hours. And it is strange that while recognising the firm as a hierarchy, Reekie tries to deny that it is authoritarian or dictatorial -- as if you could have a hierarchy without authoritarian structures or an unelected person in authority who is not a dictator. His confusion is shared by Austrian guru Ludwig von Mises, who asserts that the *"entrepreneur and capitalist are not irresponsible autocrats"* because they are *"unconditionally subject to the sovereignty of the consumer"* while, **on the next page**, admitting there is a *"managerial hierarchy"* which contains *"the average subordinate employee."* [Human Action, p. 809 and p. 810] It does not enter his mind that the capitalist may be subject to some consumer control while being an autocrat to their subordinated employees. Again, we find the right-"libertarian" acknowledging that the capitalist managerial structure is a hierarchy and workers are subordinated while denying it is autocratic to the workers! Thus we have "free" workers within a relationship distinctly **lacking** freedom (in the sense of self-government) -- a strange paradox. Indeed, if your personal life were as closely monitored and regulated as the work life of millions of people across the world, you would rightly consider it oppression.

Perhaps Reekie (like most right-libertarians) will maintain that workers voluntarily agree ("consent") to be subject to the bosses dictatorship (he writes that *"each will only enter into the contractual agreement known as a firm if each believes he will be better off thereby. The firm is simply another example of mutually beneficial exchange"* [Op. Cit., p. 137]). However, this does not stop the relationship being authoritarian or dictatorial (and so exploitative as it is **highly** unlikely that those at the top will not abuse their power). And as we argue further in the [next section](#) (and also see sections [B.4](#), [F.3.1](#) and [F.10.2](#)), in a capitalist society workers have the option of finding a job or facing abject poverty and/or starvation.

Little wonder, then, that people "voluntarily" sell their labour and "consent" to authoritarian structures! They have little option to do otherwise. So, **within** the labour market, workers **can** and **do** seek out the best working conditions possible, but that does not mean that the final contract agreed is "freely" accepted and not due to the force of circumstances, that both parties have equal bargaining power when drawing up the contract or that the freedom of both parties is ensured. Which means to argue (as many right-libertarians do) that freedom cannot be restricted by wage labour because people enter into relationships they consider will lead to improvements over their initial situation totally misses the points. As the initial situation is not considered relevant, their argument fails. After all, agreeing to work in a sweatshop 14 hours a day **is** an improvement over starving to death -- but it does not mean that those who so agree are free when working there or actually **want** to be there. They are not and it is the circumstances, created and enforced by the law, that have ensured that they "consent" to such a regime (given the chance, they would desire to **change** that regime but cannot as this would violate their bosses property rights and they would be repressed for trying).

So the right-wing "libertarian" right is interested only in a narrow concept of freedom (rather than in "freedom" or "liberty" as such). This can be seen in the argument of Ayn Rand (a leading ideologue of

"libertarian" capitalism) that "**Freedom**, in a political context, means freedom from government coercion. It does **not** mean freedom from the landlord, or freedom from the employer, or freedom from the laws of nature which do not provide men with automatic prosperity. It means freedom from the coercive power of the state -- and nothing else!" [**Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal**, p. 192] By arguing in this way, right libertarians ignore the vast number of authoritarian social relationships that exist in capitalist society and, as Rand does here, imply that these social relationships are like "the laws of nature." However, if one looks at the world without prejudice but with an eye to maximising freedom, the major coercive institution is seen to be not the state but capitalist social relationships (as indicated in [section B.4](#)).

The right "libertarian," then, far from being a defender of freedom, is in fact a keen defender of certain forms of authority and domination. As Peter Kropotkin noted, the "*modern Individualism initiated by Herbert Spencer is, like the critical theory of Proudhon, a powerful indictment against the dangers and wrongs of government, but its practical solution of the social problem is miserable -- so miserable as to lead us to inquire if the talk of 'No force' be merely an excuse for supporting landlord and capitalist domination.*" [**Act For Yourselves**, p. 98]

To defend the "freedom" of property owners is to defend authority and privilege -- in other words, statism. So, in considering the concept of liberty as "freedom from," it is clear that by defending private property (as opposed to possession) the "anarcho"-capitalist is defending the power and authority of property owners to govern those who use "their" property. And also, we must note, defending all the petty tyrannies that make the work lives of so many people frustrating, stressful and unrewarding.

However, anarchism, by definition, is in favour of organisations and social relationships which are non-hierarchical and non-authoritarian. Otherwise, some people are more free than others. Failing to attack hierarchy leads to massive contradiction. For example, since the British Army is a volunteer one, it is an "anarchist" organisation! (see [next section](#) for a discussion on why the "anarcho"-capitalism concept of freedom also allows the state to appear "libertarian").

In other words, "full capitalist property rights" do not protect freedom, in fact they actively deny it. But this lack of freedom is only inevitable if we accept capitalist private property rights. If we reject them, we can try and create a world based on freedom in all aspects of life, rather than just in a few.

### **F.2.3 Can "anarcho"-capitalist theory justify the state?**

Ironically enough, "anarcho"-capitalist ideology actually allows the state to be justified along with capitalist hierarchy. This is because the reason why capitalist authority is acceptable to the "anarcho"-capitalist is because it is "voluntary" -- no one forces the worker to join or remain within a specific company (force of circumstances are irrelevant in this viewpoint). Thus capitalist domination is not really domination at all. But the same can be said of all democratic states as well. Few such states bar exit for its citizens -- they are free to leave at any time and join any other state that will have them (exactly as employees can with companies). Of course there **are** differences between the two kinds of

authority -- anarchists do not deny that -- but the similarities are all too clear.

The "anarcho"-capitalist could argue that changing jobs is easier than changing states and, sometimes, this is correct -- but not always. Yes, changing states does require the moving of home and possessions over great distances but so can changing job (indeed, if a worker has to move half-way across a country or even the world to get a job "anarcho"-capitalists would celebrate this as an example of the benefits of a "flexible" labour market). Yes, states often conscript citizens and send them into dangerous situations but bosses often force their employees to accept dangerous working environments on pain of firing. Yes, many states do restrict freedom of association and speech, but so do bosses. Yes, states tax their citizens but landlords and companies only let others use their property if they get money in return (i.e. rent or profits). Indeed, if the employee or tenant does not provide the employer or landlord with enough profits, they will quickly be shown the door. Of course employees can start their own companies but citizens can start their own state if they convince an existing state (the owner of a set of resources) to sell/give land to them. Setting up a company also requires existing owners to sell/give resources to those who need them. Of course, in a democratic state citizens can influence the nature of laws and orders they obey. In a capitalist company, this is not the case.

This means that, logically, "anarcho"-capitalism must consider a series of freely exitable states as "anarchist" and not a source of domination. If consent (not leaving) is what is required to make capitalist domination not domination then the same can be said of statist domination. Stephen L. Newman makes the same point:

*"When the price of exercising one's freedom is terribly high, what practical difference is there between the commands of the state and those issued by one's employer? . . . Though admittedly the circumstances are not identical, telling disgruntled empowers that they are always free to leave their jobs seems no different in principle from telling political dissidents that they are free to emigrate." [Liberalism at Wit's End, pp. 45-46]*

Murray Rothbard, in his own way, agrees:

*"If the State may be said too properly **own** its territory, then it is proper for it to make rules for everyone who presumes to live in that area. It can legitimately seize or control private property because there **is** no private property in its area, because it really owns the entire land surface. **So long** as the State permits its subjects to leave its territory, then, it can be said to act as does any other owner who sets down rules for people living on his property." [The Ethics of Liberty, p. 170]*

Rothbard's argues that this is **not** the case simply because the state did not acquire its property in a "*just*" manner and that it claims rights over virgin land (both of which violates Rothbard's "homesteading" theory of property -- see [section F.4.1](#) for details and a critique). Rothbard argues that this defence of statism (the state as property owner) is unrealistic and ahistoric, but his account of the origins of property is equally unrealistic and ahistoric and that does not stop him supporting capitalism. People in

glass houses should not throw stones!

Thus he claims that the state is evil and its claims to authority/power false simply because it acquired the resources it claims to own "*unjustly*" -- for example, by violence and coercion (see **The Ethics of Liberty**, pp. 170-1, for Rothbard's attempt to explain why the state should not be considered as the owner of land). And even **if** the state **was** the owner of its territory, it cannot appropriate virgin land (although, as he notes elsewhere, the "*vast*" US frontier no longer exists "*and there is no point crying over the fact*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 240]).

So what makes hierarchy legitimate for Rothbard is whether the property it derives from was acquired justly or unjustly. Which leads us to a few **very** important points.

Firstly, Rothbard is explicitly acknowledging the similarities between statism and capitalism. He is arguing that **if** the state had developed in a "*just*" way, then it is perfectly justifiable in governing ("*set [ting] down rules*") those who "consent" to live on its territory in **exactly** the same way a property owner does. In other words, private property can be considered as a "justly" created state! These similarities between property and statism have long been recognised by anarchists and that is why we reject private property along with the state (Proudhon did, after all, note that "*property is despotism*" and well as "*theft*"). But, according to Rothbard, something can look like a state (i.e. be a monopoly of decision making over an area) and act like a state (i.e. set down rules for people, govern them, impose a monopoly of force) but not be a state. But if it looks like a duck and sounds like a duck, it is a duck. Claiming that the origins of the thing are what counts is irrelevant -- for example, a cloned duck is just as much a duck as a naturally born one. A statist organisation is authoritarian whether it comes from "*just*" or "*unjust*" origins. Does transforming the ownership of the land from states to capitalists **really** make the relations of domination created by the dispossession of the many less authoritarian and unfree? Of course not.

Secondly, much property in "actually existing" capitalism is the product (directly or indirectly) of state laws and violence ("*the emergence of both agrarian and industrial capitalism in Britain [and elsewhere, we must add] . . . could not have got off the ground without resources to state violence -- legal or otherwise*" [Brian Morris, **Ecology & Anarchism**, p. 190]). If state claims of ownership are invalid due to their history, then so are many others (particularly those which claim to own land). As the initial creation was illegitimate, so are the transactions which have sprung from it. Thus if state claims of property rights are invalid, so are most (if not all) capitalist claims. If the laws of the state are illegitimate, so are the rules of the capitalist. If taxation is illegitimate, then so are rent, interest and profit. Rothbard's "historical" argument against the state can also be applied to private property and if the one is unjustified, then so is the other.

Thirdly, **if** the state had evolved "justly" then Rothbard would actually have nothing against it! A strange position for an anarchist to take. Logically this means that if a system of corporate states evolved from the workings of the capitalist market then the "anarcho"-capitalist would have nothing against it. This can be seen from "anarcho"-capitalist support for company towns even though they have correctly been



described as "*industrial feudalism*" (see [section F.6](#) for more on this).

Fourthly, Rothbard's argument implies that similar circumstances producing similar relationships of domination and unfreedom are somehow different if they are created by "*just*" and "*unjust*" means. Rothbard claims that because the property is "*justly*" acquired it means the authority a capitalist over his employees is totally different from that of a state over its subject. But such a claim is false -- both the subject/citizen and the employee are in a similar relationship of domination and authoritarianism. As we argued in [section F.2.2](#), how a person got into a situation is irrelevant when considering how free they are. Thus, the person who "consents" to be governed by another because all available resources are privately owned is in exactly the same situation as a person who has to join a state because all available resources are owned by one state or another. Both are unfree and are part of authoritarian relationships based upon domination.

And, lastly, while "anarcho"-capitalism may be a "just" society, it is definitely **not** a free one. It will be marked by extensive hierarchy, unfreedom and government, but these restrictions of freedom will be of a private nature. As Rothbard indicates, the property owner and the state create/share the same authoritarian relationships. If statism is unfree, then so is capitalism. And, we must add, how "just" is a system which undermines liberty. Can "justice" ever be met in a society in which one class has more power and freedom than another. If one party is in an inferior position, then they have little choice but to agree to the disadvantageous terms offered by the superior party (see [section F.3.1](#)). In such a situation, a "just" outcome will be unlikely as any contract agreed will be skewed to favour one side over the other.

The implications of these points are important. We can easily imagine a situation within "anarcho"-capitalism where a few companies/people start to buy up land and form company regions and towns. After all, this **has** happened continually throughout capitalism. Thus a "natural" process may develop where a few owners start to accumulate larger and larger tracks of land "justly". Such a process does not need to result in **one** company owning the world. It is likely that a few hundred, perhaps a few thousand, could do so. But this is not a cause for rejoicing -- after all the current "market" in "unjust" states also has a few hundred competitors in it. And even if there is a large multitude of property owners, the situation for the working class is exactly the same as the citizen under current statism! Does the fact that it is "justly" acquired property that faces the worker really change the fact she must submit to the government and rules of another to gain access to the means of life?

When faced with anarchist criticisms that **circumstances** force workers to accept wage slavery the "anarcho"-capitalist claims that these are to be considered as objective facts of nature and so wage labour is not domination. However, the same can be said of states -- we are born into a world where states claim to own all the available land. If states are replaced by individuals or groups of individuals does this change the essential nature of our dispossession? Of course not.

Rothbard argues that "[o]bviously, in a free society, Smith has the ultimate decision-making power over his own just property, Jones over his, etc." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 173] and, equally obviously, this ultimate-decision making power extends to those who **use**, but do not own, such property. But how "free" is a

free society where the majority have to sell their liberty to another in order to live? Rothbard (correctly) argues that the State *"uses its monopoly of force . . . to control, regulate, and coerce its hapless subjects. Often it pushes its way into controlling the morality and the very lives of its subjects."* [Op. Cit., p. 171] However he fails to note that employers do exactly the same thing to their employees. This, from an anarchist perspective, is unsurprising, for (after all) the employer is *"the ultimate decision-making power over his just property"* just as the state is over its "unjust" property. That similar forms of control and regulation develop is not a surprise given the similar hierarchical relations in both structures.

That there is a choice in available states does not make statism any less unjust and unfree. Similarly, just because we have a choice between employers does not make wage labour any less unjust or unfree. But trying to dismiss one form of domination as flowing from "just" property while attacking the other because it flows from "unjust" property is not seeing the wood for the trees. If one reduces liberty, so does the other. Whether the situation we are in resulted from "just" or "unjust" steps is irrelevant to the restrictions of freedom we face because of them (and as we argue in [section F.2.5](#), "unjust" situations can easily flow from "just" steps).

The "anarcho"-capitalist insistence that the voluntary nature of an association determines whether it is anarchistic is deeply flawed -- so flawed in fact that states and state-like structures (such as capitalist firms) can be considered anarchistic! In contrast, anarchists think that the hierarchical nature of the associations we join is equally as important as its voluntary nature when determining whether it is anarchistic or statist. However this option is not available to the "anarcho"-capitalist as it logically entails that capitalist companies are to be opposed along with the state as sources of domination, oppression and exploitation.

## F.2.4 But surely transactions on the market are voluntary?

Of course, it is usually maintained by "anarcho"-capitalists that no-one puts a gun to a worker's head to join a specific company. Yes, indeed, this is true -- workers can apply for any job they like. But the point is that the vast majority cannot avoid having to sell their liberty to others (self-employment and co-operatives **are** an option, but they account for less than 10% of the working population and are unlikely to spread due to the nature of capitalist market forces -- see sections [J.5.11](#) and [J.5.12](#) for details). And as Bob Black pointed out, right libertarians argue that *"'one can at least change jobs.' but you can't avoid having a job -- just as under statism one can at least change nationalities but you can't avoid subjection to one nation-state or another. But freedom means more than the right to change masters."* [The Libertarian as Conservative]

So why do workers agree to join a company? Because circumstances force them to do so - circumstances created, we must note, by **human** actions and institutions and not some abstract "fact of nature." And if the world that humans create by their activity is detrimental to what we should value most (individual liberty and individuality) then we should consider how to **change that world for the better**. Thus "circumstances" (current "objective reality") is a valid source of unfreedom and for human investigation and creative activity -- regardless of the claims of right-Libertarians.

Let us look at the circumstances created by capitalism. Capitalism is marked by a class of dispossessed labourers who have nothing to sell by their labour. They are legally barred from access to the means of life and so have little option but to take part in the labour market. As Alexander Berkman put it:

*"The law says your employer does not sell anything from you, because it is done with your consent. You have agreed to work for your boss for certain pay, he to have all that you produce . . .*

*"But did you really consent?"*

*"When the highway man holds his gun to your head, you turn your valuables over to him. You 'consent' all right, but you do so because you cannot help yourself, because you are **compelled** by his gun.*

*"Are you not **compelled** to work for an employer? Your need compels you just as the highwayman's gun. You must live. . . You can't work for yourself. . . The factories, machinery, and tools belong to the employing class, so you **must** hire yourself out to that class in order to work and live. Whatever you work at, whoever your employer may be, it is always comes to the same: you must work **for him**. You can't help yourself. You are **compelled**." [What is Communist Anarchism?, p. 9]*

Due to this class monopoly over the means of life, workers (usually) are at a disadvantage in terms of bargaining power -- there are more workers than jobs (see sections [B.4.3](#) and [F.10.2](#) for a discussion why this is the normal situation on the labour market).

As was indicated in section B.4 ([How does capitalism affect liberty?](#)), within capitalism there is no equality between owners and the dispossessed, and so property is a source of **power**. To claim that this power should be "left alone" or is "fair" is *"to the anarchists. . . preposterous. Once a State has been established, and most of the country's capital privatised, the threat of physical force is no longer necessary to coerce workers into accepting jobs, even with low pay and poor conditions. To use Ayn Rand's term, 'initial force' has **already taken place**, by those who now have capital against those who do not. . . . In other words, if a thief died and willed his 'ill-gotten gain' to his children, would the children have a right to the stolen property? Not legally. So if 'property is theft,' to borrow Proudhon's quip, and the fruit of exploited labour is simply legal theft, then the only factor giving the children of a deceased capitalist a right to inherit the 'booty' is the law, the State. As Bakunin wrote, 'Ghosts should not rule and oppress this world, which belongs only to the living'" [Jeff Draughn, **Between Anarchism and Libertarianism**].*

Or, in other words, right-Libertarianism fails to *"meet the charge that normal operations of the market systematically places an entire class of persons (wage earners) in circumstances that compel them to accept the terms and conditions of labour dictated by those who offer work. While it is true that*

*individuals are formally free to seek better jobs or withhold their labour in the hope of receiving higher wages, in the end their position in the market works against them; they cannot live if they do not find employment. When circumstances regularly bestow a relative disadvantage on one class of persons in their dealings with another class, members of the advantaged class have little need of coercive measures to get what they want.*" [Stephen L. Newman, **Liberalism at Wit's End**, p. 130]

To ignore the circumstances which drive people to seek out the most "beneficial exchange" is to blind yourself to the power relationships inherent within capitalism -- power relationships created by the unequal bargaining power of the parties involved (also see [section F.3.1](#)). And to argue that "consent" ensures freedom is false; if you are "consenting" to be join a dictatorial organisation, you "consent" **not** to be free (and to paraphrase Rousseau, a person who renounces freedom renounces being human).

Which is why circumstances are important -- if someone truly wants to join an authoritarian organisation, then so be it. It is their life. But if circumstances ensure their "consent" then they are not free. The danger is, of course, that people become **accustomed** to authoritarian relationships and end up viewing them as forms of freedom. This can be seen from the state, which the vast majority support and "consent" to. And this also applies to wage labour, which many workers today accept as a "necessary evil" (like the state) but, as we indicate in [section F.8.6](#), the first wave of workers viewed with horror as a form of (wage) slavery and did all that they could to avoid. In such situations all we can do is argue with them and convince them that certain forms of organisations (such as the state and capitalist firms) are an evil and urge them to change society to ensure their extinction.

So due to this lack of appreciation of circumstances (and the fact that people become accustomed to certain ways of life) "anarcho"-capitalism actively supports structures that restrict freedom for the many. And how is "anarcho"-capitalism **anarchist** if it generates extensive amounts of archy? It is for this reason that all anarchists support self-management within free association -- that way we maximise freedom both inside **and** outside organisations. But only stressing freedom outside organisations, "anarcho"-capitalism ends up denying freedom as such (after all, we spend most of our waking hours at work). If "anarcho"-capitalists **really** desired freedom, they would reject capitalism and become anarchists -- only in a libertarian socialist society would agreements to become a wage worker be truly voluntary as they would not be driven by circumstances to sell their liberty.

This means that while right-Libertarianism appears to make "choice" an ideal (which sounds good, liberating and positive) in practice it has become a "dismal politics," a politics of choice where most of the choices are bad. And, to state the obvious, the choices we are "free" to make are shaped by the differences in wealth and power in society (see [section F.3.1](#)) as well as such things as "isolation paradoxes" (see [section B.6](#)) and the laws and other human institutions that exist. If we ignore the context within which people make their choices then we glorify abstract processes at the expense of real people. And, as importantly, we must add that many of the choices we make under capitalism (shaped as they are by the circumstances within which they are made), such as employment contracts, result in our "choice" being narrowed to "love it or leave it" in the organisations we create/join as a result of these "free" choices.

This ideological blind spot flows from the "anarcho"-capitalist definition of "freedom" as "absence of coercion" -- as workers "freely consent" to joining a specific workplace, their freedom is unrestricted. But to defend **only** "freedom from" in a capitalist society means to defend the power and authority of the few against the attempts of the many to claim their freedom and rights. To requote Emma Goldman, *"'Rugged individualism' has meant all the 'individualism' for the masters . . . , in whose name political tyranny and social oppression are defended and held up as virtues' while every aspiration and attempt of man to gain freedom . . . is denounced as . . . evil in the name of that same individualism."* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 112]

In other words, its all fine and well saying (as right-libertarians do) that you aim to abolish force from human relationships but if you support an economic system which creates hierarchy (and so domination and oppression) by its very workings, "defensive" force will always be required to maintain and enforce that domination. Moreover, if one class has extensive power over another due to the systematic (and normal) workings of the market, any force used to defend that power is **automatically** "defensive". Thus to argue against the use of force and ignore the power relationships that exist within and shape a society (and so also shape the individuals within it) is to defend and justify capitalist and landlord domination and denounce any attempts to resist that domination as "initiation of force."

Anarchists, in contrast, oppose **hierarchy** (and so domination within relationships -- bar S&M personal relationships, which are a totally different thing altogether; they are truly voluntary and they also do not attempt to hide the power relationships involved by using economic jargon). This opposition, while also including opposition to the use of force against equals (for example, anarchists are opposed to forcing workers and peasants to join a self-managed commune or syndicate), also includes support for the attempts of those subject to domination to end it (for example, workers striking for union recognition are not "initiating force", they are fighting for their freedom).

In other words, apparently "voluntary" agreements can and do limit freedom and so the circumstances that drive people into them **must** be considered when deciding whether any such limitation is valid. By ignoring circumstances, "anarcho"-capitalism ends up by failing to deliver what it promises -- a society of free individuals -- and instead presents us with a society of masters and servants. The question is, what do we feel moved to insist that people enjoy? Formal, abstract (bourgeois) self-ownership ("freedom") or a more substantive control over one's life (i.e. autonomy)?

## **F.2.5 But surely circumstances are the result of liberty and so cannot be objected to?**

It is often argued by right-libertarians that the circumstances we face within capitalism are the result of individual decisions (i.e. individual liberty) and so we must accept them as the expressions of these acts (the most famous example of this argument is in Nozick's **Anarchy, State, and Utopia** pp. 161-163 where he maintains that *"liberty upsets patterns"*). This is because whatever situation evolves from a just situation by just (i.e. non-coercive steps) is also (by definition) just.

However, it is not apparent that adding just steps to a just situation will result in a just society. We will illustrate with a couple of banal examples. If you add chemicals which are non-combustible together you can create a new, combustible, chemical (i.e. X becomes not-X by adding new X to it). Similarly, if you have an odd number and add another odd number to it, it becomes even (again, X becomes not-X by adding a new X to it). So it **is** very possible to go from an just state to an unjust state by just step (and it is possible to remain in an unjust state by just acts; for example if we tried to implement "anarcho"-capitalism on the existing -- unjustly created -- situation of "actually existing" capitalism it would be like having an odd number and adding even numbers to it). In other words, the outcome of "just" steps can increase inequality within society and so ensure that some acquire an unacceptable amount of power over others, via their control over resources. Such an inequality of power would create an "unjust" situation where the major are free to sell their liberty to others due to inequality in power and resources on the "free" market.

Ignoring this objection, we could argue (as many "anarcho"-capitalists and right-libertarians do) that the unforeseen results of human action are fine unless we assume that these human actions are in themselves bad (i.e. that individual choice is evil).

Such an argument is false for three reasons.

First, when we make our choices the aggregate impact of these choices are unknown to us -- and not on offer when we make our choices. Thus we cannot be said to "choose" these outcomes, outcomes which we may consider deeply undesirable, and so the fact that these outcomes are the result of individual choices is besides the point (if we knew the outcome we could refrain from doing them). The choices themselves, therefore, do not validate the outcome as the outcome was not part of the choices when they were made (i.e. the means do not justify the ends). In other words, private acts often have important public consequences (and "bilateral exchanges" often involve externalities for third parties). Secondly, if the outcome of individual choices is to deny or restrict individual choice on a wider scale at a later stage, then we are hardly arguing that individual choice is a bad thing. We want to arrange it so that the decisions we make now do not result in them restricting our ability to make choices in important areas of life at a latter stage. Which means we are in favour of individual choices and so liberty, not against them. Thirdly, the unforeseen or unplanned results of individual actions are not necessarily a good thing. If the aggregate outcome of individual choices harms individuals then we have a right to modify the circumstances within which choices are made and/or the aggregate results of these choices.

An example will show what we mean (again drawn from Haworth's excellent **Anti-Libertarianism**, p. 35). Millions of people across the world bought deodorants which caused a hole to occur in the ozone layer surrounding the Earth. The resultant of these acts created a situation in which individuals and the eco-system they inhabited were in great danger. The actual acts themselves were by no means wrong, but the aggregate impact was. A similar argument can apply to any form of pollution. Now, unless the right-Libertarian argues that skin cancer or other forms of pollution related illness are fine, its clear that the resultant of individual acts can be harmful to individuals.

The right-Libertarian could argue that pollution is an "initiation of force" against an individual's property-rights in their person and so individuals can sue the polluters. But hierarchy also harms the individual (see [section B.1](#)) -- and so can be considered as an infringement of their "property-rights" (i.e. liberty, to get away from the insane property fetish of right-Libertarianism). The loss of autonomy can be just as harmful to an individual as lung cancer although very different in form. And the differences in wealth resulting from hierarchy is well known to have serious impacts on life-span and health.

As noted in [section F.2.1](#), the market is just as man-made as pollution. This means that the "circumstances" we face are due to aggregate of millions of individual acts and these acts occur within a specific framework of rights, institutions and ethics. Anarchists think that a transformation of our society and its rights and ideals is required so that the resultant of individual choices does not have the ironic effect of limiting individual choice (freedom) in many important ways (such as in work, for example).

In other words, the **circumstances** created by capitalist rights and institutions requires a **transformation** of these rights and institutions in such a way as to maximise individual choice for all -- namely, to abolish these rights and replace them with new ones (for example, replace property rights with use rights). Thus Nozick's claims that "*Z does choose voluntarily if the other individuals A through Y each acted voluntarily and within their rights*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 263] misses the point -- it is these rights that are in question (given that Nozick **assumes** these rights then his whole thesis is begging the question).

And we must add (before anyone points it out) that, yes, we are aware that many decisions will unavoidably limit current and future choices. For example, the decision to build a factory on a green-belt area will make it impossible for people to walk through the woods that are no longer there. But such "limitations" (if they can be called that) of choice are different from the limitations we are highlighting here, namely the lose of freedom that accompanies the circumstances created via exchange in the market. The human actions which build the factory modify reality but do not generate social relationships of domination between people in so doing. The human actions of market exchange, in contrast, modify the relative strengths of everyone in society and so has a distinct impact on the social relationships we "voluntarily" agree to create. Or, to put it another way, the decision to build on the green-belt site does "limit" choice in the abstract but it does **not** limit choice in the kind of relationships we form with other people nor create authoritarian relationships between people due to inequality influencing the content of the associations we form. However, the profits produced from using the factory increases inequality (and so market/economic power) and so weakens the position of the working class in respect to the capitalist class within society. This increased inequality will be reflected in the "free" contracts and working regimes that are created, with the weaker "trader" having to compromise far more than before.

So, to try and defend wage slavery and other forms of hierarchy by arguing that "circumstances" are created by individual liberty runs aground on its own logic. If the circumstances created by individual liberty results in pollution then the right-Libertarian will be the first to seek to change those circumstances. They recognise that the right to pollute while producing is secondary to our right to be healthy. Similarly, if the circumstances created by individual liberty results in hierarchy (pollution of the

mind and our relationships with others as opposed to the body, although it affects that to) then we are entitled to change these circumstances too and the means by which we get there (namely the institutional and rights framework of society). Our right to liberty is more important than the rights of property -- sadly, the right-Libertarian refuses to recognise this.

## F.2.6 Do Libertarian-capitalists support slavery?

Yes. It may come as a surprise to many people, but right-Libertarianism is one of the few political theories that justifies slavery. For example, Robert Nozick asks whether "*a free system would allow [the individual] to sell himself into slavery*" and he answers "*I believe that it would.*" [**Anarchy, State and Utopia**, p. 371] While some right-Libertarians do not agree with Nozick, there is no logical basis in their ideology for such disagreement.

The logic is simple, you cannot really own something unless you can sell it. Self-ownership is one of the cornerstones of laissez-faire capitalist ideology. Therefore, since you own yourself you can sell yourself.

(For Murray Rothbard's claims of the "*unenforceability, in libertarian theory, of voluntary slave contracts*" see **The Ethics of Liberty**, pp. 134-135 -- of course, **other** libertarian theorists claim the exact opposite so "*libertarian theory*" makes no such claims, but nevermind! Essentially, his point revolves around the assertion that a person "*cannot, in nature, sell himself into slavery and have this sale enforced - for this would mean that his future will over his own body was being surrendered in advance*" and that if a "*labourer remains totally subservient to his master's will voluntarily, he is not yet a slave since his submission is voluntary.*" [p. 40] However, as we noted in [section F.2](#), Rothbard emphasis on quitting fails to recognise that actual denial of will and control over ones own body that is explicit in wage labour. It is this failure that pro-slave contract "libertarians" stress -- as we will see, they consider the slave contract as an extended wage contract. Moreover, a modern slave contract would likely take the form of a "*performance bond*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 136] in which the slave agrees to perform X years labour or pay their master substantial damages. The threat of damages that enforces the contract and such a "contract" Rothbard does agree is enforceable -- along with "*conditional exchange*" [p. 141] which could be another way of creating slave contracts.)

The right-Libertarian J. Philmore argues there is a "*fundamental contradiction*" in a modern liberal society for the state to prohibit slave contracts. Lets, however, not do these arguers for slavery an injustice. They are arguing for a "*civilised form of contractual slavery*" (our emphasis). [J. Philmore, "*The Libertarian Case for Slavery*", **The Philosophical Forum**, xiv, 1982, p. 55, p. 58] Such a "civilised" form of slavery could occur when an individual would "agree" to sell themselves to themselves to another (as when a starving worker would "agree" to become a slave in return for food). In addition, the contract would be able to be broken under certain conditions (perhaps in return for breaking the contract, the former slave would have pay damages to his or her master for the labour their master would lose - a sizeable amount no doubt and such a payment could result in debt slavery, which is the most common form of "civilised" slavery. Such damages may be agreed in the contract as a "performance bond" or "conditional exchange").



So, right-Libertarians are talking about "civilised" slavery (or, in other words, civil slavery) and not forced slavery.

We must stress that this is no academic debate. "Voluntary" slavery has been a problem in many societies and still exists in many countries today (particularly third world ones where bonded labour -- i. e. where debt is used to enslave people -- is the most common form). With the rise of sweat shops and child labour in many "developed" countries such as the USA, "voluntary" slavery (perhaps via debt and bonded labour) may become common in all parts of the world -- an ironic (if not surprising) result of "freeing" the market and being indifferent to the actual freedom of those within it.

And it is interesting to note that even Murray Rothbard is not against the selling of humans. He argued that children are the property of their parents. They can (bar actually murdering them by violence) do whatever they please with them, even sell them on a "*flourishing free child market*." [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 102] Combined with a whole hearted support for child labour (after all, the child can leave its parents if it objects to working for them) such a "free child market" could easily become a "child slave market" -- with entrepreneurs making a healthy profit selling infants to other entrepreneurs who could make profits from the toil of "their" children (and such a process did occur in 19th century Britain). Unsurprisingly, Rothbard ignores the possible nasty aspects of such a market in human flesh (such as children being sold to work in factories, homes and brothels). And, of course, such a market could see women "specialising" in producing children for it (the use of child labour during the Industrial Revolution actually made it economically sensible for families to have more children) and, perhaps, gluts and scarcities of babies due to changing market conditions. But this is besides the point.

Of course, this theoretical justification for slavery at the heart of an ideology calling itself "libertarianism" is hard for many right-Libertarians to accept. Some of the "anarcho"-capitalist type argue that such contracts would be very hard to enforce in their system of capitalism. This attempt to get out of the contradiction fails simply because it ignores the nature of the capitalist market. If there is a demand for slave contracts to be enforced, then companies will develop to provide that "service" (and it would be interesting to see how two "protection" firms, one defending slave contracts and another not, could compromise and reach a peaceful agreement over whether slave contracts were valid). Thus we could see a so-called "anarchist" or "free" society producing companies whose specific purpose was to hunt down escaped slaves (i.e. individuals in slave contracts who have not paid damages to their owners for freedom). Of course, perhaps Rothbard would claim that such slave contracts would be "outlawed" under his "general libertarian law code" but this is a denial of market "freedom". If slave contracts **are** "banned" then surely this is paternalism, stopping individuals from contracting out their "labour services" to whom and however long they "desire". You cannot have it both ways.

So, ironically, an ideology proclaiming itself to support "liberty" ends up justifying and defending slavery. Indeed, for the right-libertarian the slave contract is an exemplification, not the denial, of the individual's liberty! How is this possible? How can slavery be supported as an expression of liberty? Simple, right-Libertarian support for slavery is a symptom of a **deeper** authoritarianism, namely their uncritical acceptance of contract theory. The central claim of contract theory is that contract is the means

to secure and enhance individual freedom. Slavery is the antithesis to freedom and so, in theory, contract and slavery must be mutually exclusive. However, as indicated above, some contract theorists (past and present) have included slave contracts among legitimate contracts. This suggests that contract theory cannot provide the theoretical support needed to secure and enhance individual freedom. Why is this?

As Carole Pateman argues, "*contract theory is primarily about a way of creating social relations constituted by subordination, not about exchange.*" [**The Sexual Contract**, p. 40] Rather than undermining subordination, contract theorists justify modern subjection - "*contract doctrine has proclaimed that subjection to a master - a boss, a husband - is freedom.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 146] The question central to contract theory (and so right-Libertarianism) is not "are people free" (as one would expect) but "are people free to subordinate themselves in any manner they please." A radically different question and one only fitting to someone who does not know what liberty means.

Anarchists argue that not all contracts are legitimate and no free individual can make a contract that denies his or her own freedom. If an individual is able to express themselves by making free agreements then those free agreements must also be based upon freedom internally as well. Any agreement that creates domination or hierarchy negates the assumptions underlying the agreement and makes itself null and void.

This is most easily seen in the extreme case of the slave contract. John Stuart Mill stated that such a contract would be "null and void." He argued that an individual may voluntarily choose to enter such a contract but in so doing "*he abdicates his liberty; he foregoes any future use of it beyond that single act. He therefore defeats, in his own case, the very purpose which is the justification of allowing him to dispose of himself. . . The principle of freedom cannot require that he should be free not to be free. It is not freedom, to be allowed to alienate his freedom.*" He adds that "*these reasons, the force of which is so conspicuous in this particular case, are evidently of far wider application.*" [cited by Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 171-2]

And it is such an application that defenders of capitalism fear (Mill did in fact apply these reasons wider and unsurprisingly became a supporter of a market syndicalist form of socialism). If we reject slave contracts as illegitimate then, logically, we must also reject **all** contracts that express qualities similar to slavery (i.e. deny freedom) including wage slavery.

The right Libertarian J. Philmore sees what is at stake and argues that "*contractual slavery [is] . . . [an] extension of the employer-employee contract.*" He asserts (correctly) that "*any thorough and decisive critique of voluntary slavery. . . would carry over to the employment contract. . . Such a critique would thus be a **reductio ad absurdum**.*" [Philmore, **Op. Cit.**, p. 55] In other words, the difference between wage labour and slavery is the time scale, a slave contract is "merely" an extended employment contract. It is rare to find a supporter of capitalism being so honest! (And as Carole Pateman notes, "*[t]here is a nice historical irony here. In the American South, slaves were emancipated and turned into wage labourers, and now American contractarians argue that all workers should have the opportunity to turn themselves into civil slaves.*" [**Ibid.**, p. 63]).

All this does not mean that we must reject free agreement. Far from it! Free agreement is **essential** for a society based upon individual dignity and liberty. There are a variety of forms of free agreement and anarchists support those based upon co-operation and self-management (i.e. individuals working together as equals). Anarchists desire to create relationships which reflect (and so express) the liberty that is the basis of free agreement. Capitalism creates relationships that deny liberty. The opposition between autonomy and subjection can only be maintained by modifying or rejecting contract theory, something that capitalism cannot do and so the right-wing Libertarian rejects autonomy in favour of subjection (and so rejects socialism in favour of capitalism).

The real contrast between anarchism and right-Libertarianism is best expressed in their respective opinions on slavery. Anarchism is based upon the individual whose individuality depends upon the maintenance of free relationships with other individuals. If individuals deny their capacities for self-government from themselves through a contract the individuals bring about a qualitative change in their relationship to others - freedom is turned into mastery and subordination. For the anarchist, slavery is thus the paradigm of what freedom is **not**, instead of an exemplification of what it is (as right-Libertarians state).

As Proudhon argued "*[i]f I were asked to answer the following question: What is slavery? and I should answer in one word, It is murder, my meaning would be understood at once. No extended argument would be required to show that the power to take from a man his thought, his will, his personality, is a power of life and death; and that to enslave a man is to kill him.*" [**What is Property?**, p. 37]

In contrast, the right-Libertarian effectively argues that "I support slavery because I believe in liberty." It is a sad reflection of the ethical and intellectual bankruptcy of our society that such an "argument" is actually taken seriously by (some) people. The concept of "slavery as freedom" is far too Orwellian to warrant a critique - we will leave it up to right Libertarians to corrupt our language and ethical standards with an attempt to prove it.

From the basic insight that slavery is the opposite of freedom, the anarchist rejection of authoritarian social relations quickly follows (the rejection that Philmore and other right-Libertarians fear):

*"Liberty is inviolable. I can neither sell nor alienate my liberty; every contract, every condition of a contract, which has in view the alienation or suspension of liberty, is null: the slave, when he plants his foot upon the soil of liberty, at that moment becomes a free man. . . Liberty is the original condition of man; to renounce liberty is to renounce the nature of man: after that, how could we perform the acts of man?"* [P.J. Proudhon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 67]

The employment contract (i.e. wage slavery) abrogates liberty. It is based upon inequality of power and "*exploitation is a consequence of the fact that the sale of labour power entails the worker's subordination.*" [Carole Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, P. 149] Hence Proudhon's (and Mill's) support of self-management and opposition to capitalism - any relationship that resembles slavery is illegitimate and no

contract that creates a relationship of subordination is valid. Thus in a truly anarchistic society, slave contracts would be unenforceable -- people in a truly free (i.e. non-capitalist) society would **never** tolerate such a horrible institution or consider it a valid agreement. If someone was silly enough to sign such a contract, they would simply have to say they now rejected it in order to be free -- such contracts are made to be broken and without the force of a law system (and private defence firms) to back it up, such contracts will stay broken.

The right-Libertarian support for slave contracts (and wage slavery) indicates that their ideology has little to do with liberty and far more to do with justifying property and the oppression and exploitation it produces. Their support and theoretical support for slavery indicates a deeper authoritarianism which negates their claims to be libertarians.

## F.2.7 But surely abolishing capitalism would restrict liberty?

Many "anarcho"-capitalists and other supporters of capitalism argue that it would be "authoritarian" to restrict the number of alternatives that people can choose between by abolishing capitalism. If workers become wage labourers, so it is argued, it is because they "value" other things more -- otherwise they would not agree to the exchange. But such an argument ignores that reality of capitalism.

By **maintaining** capitalist private property, the options available to people **are** restricted. In a fully developed capitalist economy the vast majority have the "option" of selling their labour or starving/living in poverty -- self-employed workers account for less than 10% of the working population. Usually, workers are at a disadvantage on the labour market due to the existence of unemployment and so accept wage labour because otherwise they would starve (see [section F.10.2](#) for a discussion on why this is the case). And as we argue in sections [J.5.11](#) and [J.5.12](#), even **if** the majority of the working population desired co-operative workplaces, a capitalist market will not provide them with that outcome due to the nature of the capitalist workplace (also see Juliet C. Schor's excellent book **The Overworked American** for a discussion of why workers desire for more free time is not reflected in the labour market). In other words, it is a myth to claim that wage labour exists or that workplaces are hierarchical because workers value other things -- they are hierarchical because bosses have more clout on the market than workers and, to use Schor's expression, workers end up wanting what they get rather than getting what they want.

Looking at the reality of capitalism we find that because of inequality in resources (protected by the full might of the legal system, we should note) those with property get to govern those without it during working hours (and beyond in many cases). If the supporters of capitalism were actually concerned about liberty (as opposed to property) that situation would be abhorrent to them -- after all, individuals can no longer exercise their ability to make decisions, choices, and are reduced to being order takers. If choice and liberty are the things we value, then the ability to make choices in all aspects of life automatically follows (including during work hours). However, the authoritarian relationships and the continual violation of autonomy wage labour implies are irrelevant to "anarcho"-capitalists (indeed, attempts to change this situation are denounced as violations of the autonomy of the property owner!).

By purely concentrating on the moment that a contract is signed they blind themselves to the restricts of liberty that wage contracts create.

Of course, anarchists have no desire to **ban** wage labour -- we aim to create a society within which people are not forced by circumstances to sell their liberty to others. In order to do this, anarchists propose a modification of property and property rights to ensure true freedom of choice (a freedom of choice denied to us by capitalism). As we have noted many times, "bilateral exchanges" can and do adversely effect the position of third parties if they result in the build-up of power/money in the hands of a few. And one of these adverse effects can be the restriction of workers options due to economic power. Therefore it is the supporter of capitalist who restricts options by supporting an economic system and rights framework that by their very workings reduce the options available to the majority, who then are "free to choose" between those that remain (see also [section B.4](#)). Anarchists, in contrast, desire to expand the available options by abolishing capitalist private property rights and removing inequalities in wealth and power that help restrict our options and liberties artificially.

So does an anarchist society have much to fear from the spread of wage labour within it? Probably not. If we look at societies such as the early United States or the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, for example, we find that, given the choice, most people preferred to work for themselves. Capitalists found it hard to find enough workers to employ and the amount of wages that had to be offered to hire workers were so high as to destroy any profit margins. Moreover, the mobility of workers and their "laziness" was frequently commented upon, with employers despairing at the fact workers would just work enough to make end meet and then disappear. Thus, left to the actions of the "free market," it is doubtful that wage labour would have spread. But it was not left to the "free market".

In response to these "problems", the capitalists turned to the state and enforced various restrictions on society (the most important being the land, tariff and money monopolies -- see sections [B.3](#) and [F.8](#)). In free competition between artisan and wage labour, wage labour only succeeded due to the use of state action to create the required circumstances to discipline the labour force and to accumulate enough capital to give capitalists an edge over artisan production (see [section F.8](#) for more details).

Thus an anarchist society would not have to fear the spreading of wage labour within it. This is simply because would-be capitalists (like those in the early United States) would have to offer such excellent conditions, workers' control and high wages as to make the possibility of extensive profits from workers' labour nearly impossible. Without the state to support them, they will not be able to accumulate enough capital to give them an advantage within a free society. Moreover, it is somewhat ironic to hear capitalists talking about anarchism denying choice when we oppose wage labour considering the fact workers were not given any choice when the capitalists used the state to develop wage labour in the first place!

## **F.2.8 Why should we reject the "anarcho"-capitalist definitions of freedom and justice?**

Simply because they lead to the creation of authoritarian social relationships and so to restrictions on liberty. A political theory which, when consistently followed, has evil or iniquitous consequences, is a bad theory.

For example, any theory that can justify slavery is obviously a bad theory - slavery does not cease to stink the moment it is seen to follow your theory. As right-Libertarians can justify slave contracts as a type of wage labour (see [section F.2.6](#)) as well as numerous other authoritarian social relationships, it is obviously a bad theory.

It is worth quoting Noam Chomsky at length on this subject:

*"Consider, for example, the 'entitlement theory of justice'. . . [a]ccording to this theory, a person has a right to whatever he has acquired by means that are just. If, by luck or labour or ingenuity, a person acquires such and such, then he is entitled to keep it and dispose of it as he wills, and a just society will not infringe on this right.*

*"One can easily determine where such a principle might lead. It is entirely possible that by legitimate means - say, luck supplemented by contractual arrangements 'freely undertaken' under pressure of need - one person might gain control of the necessities of life. Others are then free to sell themselves to this person as slaves, if he is willing to accept them. Otherwise, they are free to perish. Without extra question-begging conditions, the society is just.*

*"The argument has all the merits of a proof that  $2 + 2 = 5$ . . . Suppose that some concept of a 'just society' is advanced that fails to characterise the situation just described as unjust. . . Then one of two conclusions is in order. We may conclude that the concept is simply unimportant and of no interest as a guide to thought or action, since it fails to apply properly even in such an elementary case as this. Or we may conclude that the concept advanced is to be dismissed in that it fails to correspond to the pretheoretical notion that it intends to capture in clear cases. If our intuitive concept of justice is clear enough to rule social arrangements of the sort described as grossly unjust, then the sole interest of a demonstration that this outcome might be 'just' under a given 'theory of justice' lies in the inference by **reductio ad absurdum** to the conclusion that the theory is hopelessly inadequate. While it may capture some partial intuition regarding justice, it evidently neglects others.*

*"The real question to be raised about theories that fail so completely to capture the concept of justice in its significant and intuitive sense is why they arouse such interest. Why are they not simply dismissed out of hand on the grounds of this failure, which is striking in clear cases? Perhaps the answer is, in part, the one given by Edward Greenberg in a discussion of some recent work on the entitlement theory of justice. After reviewing empirical and conceptual shortcomings, he observes that such work 'plays an*

*important function in the process of . . . 'blaming the victim,' and of protecting property against egalitarian onslaughts by various non-propertied groups.' An ideological defence of privileges, exploitation, and private power will be welcomed, regardless of its merits.*

*"These matters are of no small importance to poor and oppressed people here and elsewhere."* [The Chomsky Reader, pp. 187-188]

It may be argued that the reductions in liberty associated with capitalism is not really an iniquitous outcome, but such an argument is hardly fitting for a theory proclaiming itself "libertarian." And the results of these authoritarian social relationships? To quote Adam Smith, under the capitalist division of labour the worker *"has no occasion to exert his understanding, or exercise his invention"* and *"he naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exercise and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become."* The worker's mind falls *"into that drowsy stupidity, which, in a civilised society, seems to benumb the understanding of almost all of the inferior [sic!] ranks of people."* [cited by Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 186]

Of course, it may be argued that these evil effects of capitalist authority relations on individuals are also not iniquitous (or that the very real domination of workers by bosses is not really domination) but that suggests a desire to sacrifice real individuals, their hopes and dreams and lives to an abstract concept of liberty, the accumulative effect of which would be to impoverish all our lives. The kind of relationships we create **within** the organisations we join are of as great an importance as their voluntary nature. Social relations **shape** the individual in many ways, restricting their freedom, their perceptions of what freedom is and what their interests actually are. This means that, in order not to be farcical, any relationships we create must reflect in their internal workings the critical evaluation and self-government that created them in the first place. Sadly capitalist individualism masks structures of power and relations of domination and subordination within seemingly "voluntary" associations -- it fails to note the relations of domination resulting from private property and so *"what has been called 'individualism' up to now has been only a foolish egoism which belittles the individual. Foolish because it was not individualism at all. It did not lead to what was established as a goal; that is the complete, broad, and most perfectly attainable development of individuality."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Selected Writings**, p. 297]

This right-Libertarian lack of concern for concrete individual freedom and individuality is a reflection of their support for "free markets" (or "economic liberty" as they sometimes phrase it). However, as Max Stirner noted, this fails to understand that *"[p]olitical liberty means that the polis, the State, is free; . . . not, therefore, that I am free of the State. . . It does not mean my liberty, but the liberty of a power that rules and subjugates me; it means that one of my despots . . . is free."* [The Ego and Its Own, p. 107] Thus the desire for "free markets" results in a blindness that while the market may be "free" the individuals within it may not be (as Stirner was well aware, *"[u]nder the regime of the commonality the labourers always fall into the hands of the possessors . . . of the capitalists, therefore."* [Op. Cit., p. 115])

In other words, right-libertarians give the greatest importance to an abstract concept of freedom and fail

to take into account the fact that real, concrete freedom is the outcome of self-managed activity, solidarity and voluntary co-operation. For liberty to be real it must exist in all aspects of our daily life and cannot be contracted away without seriously effecting our minds, bodies and lives. Thus, the right-Libertarian's *"defence of freedom is undermined by their insistence on the concept of negative liberty, which all too easily translates in experience as the negation of liberty."* [Stephan L. Newman, **Liberalism as Wit's End**, p. 161]

Thus right-Libertarian's fundamental fallacy is that "contract" does not result in the end of power or domination (particularly when the bargaining power or wealth of the would-be contractors is not equal). As Carole Pateman notes, *"[i]ronically, the contractarian ideal cannot encompass capitalist employment. Employment is not a continual series of discrete contracts between employer and worker, but . . . one contract in which a worker binds himself to enter an enterprise and follow the directions of the employer for the duration of the contract. As Huw Benyon has bluntly stated, 'workers are paid to obey.'"* [**The Sexual Contract**, p. 148] This means that *"the employment contract (like the marriage contract) is not an exchange; both contracts create social relations that endure over time - social relations of subordination."* [**Ibid.**]

Authority impoverishes us all and must, therefore, be combated wherever it appears. That is why anarchists oppose capitalism, so that there shall be *"no more government of man by man, by means of accumulation of capital."* [P-J Proudhon, cited by Woodcock in **Anarchism**, p. 110] If, as Murray Bookchin point it, *"the object of anarchism is to increase choice"* [**The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 70] then this applies both to when we are creating associations/relationships with others and when we are **within** these associations/relationships -- i.e. that they are consistent with the liberty of all, and that implies participation and self-management **not** hierarchy. "Anarcho"-capitalism fails to understand this essential point and by concentrating purely on the first condition for liberty ensures a society based upon domination, oppression and hierarchy and not freedom.

It is unsurprising, therefore, to find that the basic unit of analysis of the "anarcho"-capitalist/right-libertarian is the transaction (the "trade," the "contract"). The freedom of the individual is seen as revolving around an act, the contract, and **not** in our relations with others. All the social facts and mechanisms that precede, surround and result from the transaction are omitted. In particular, the social relations that result from the transaction are ignored (those, and the circumstances that make people contract, are the two unmentionables of right-libertarianism).

For anarchists it seems strange to concentrate on the moment that a contract is signed and ignore the far longer time the contract is active for (as we noted in [section A.2.14](#), if the worker is free when they sign a contract, slavery soon overtakes them). Yes, the voluntary nature of a decision is important, but so are the social relationships we experience due to those decisions.

For the anarchist, freedom is based upon the insight that other people, apart from (indeed, **because** of) having their own intrinsic value, also are "means to my end", that it is through their freedom that I gain my own -- so enriching my life. As Bakunin put it:



*"I who want to be free cannot be because all the men around me do not yet want to be free, and consequently they become tools of oppression against me."* [quoted by Errico Malatesta in **Anarchy**, p. 27]

Therefore anarchists argue that we must reject the right-Libertarian theories of freedom and justice because they end up supporting the denial of liberty as the expression of liberty. What this fails to recognise is that freedom is a product of social life and that (in Bakunin's words) *"[n]o man can achieve his own emancipation without at the same time working for the emancipation of all men around him. My freedom is the freedom of all since I am not truly free in thought and in fact, except when my freedom and my rights are confirmed and approved in the freedom and rights of all men who are my equals."* [**Ibid.**]

Other people give us the possibilities to develop our full human potentiality and thereby our freedom, so when we destroy the freedom of others we limit our own. *"To treat others and oneself as property,"* argues anarchist L. Susan Brown, *"objectifies the human individual, denies the unity of subject and object and is a negation of individual will . . . even the freedom gained by the other is compromised by this relationship, for to negate the will of another to achieve one's own freedom destroys the very freedom one sought in the first place."* [**The Politics of Individualism**, p. 3]

Fundamentally, it is for this reason that anarchists reject the right-Libertarian theories of freedom and justice -- it just does not ensure individual freedom or individuality.

## F.3 Why do anarcho"-capitalists generally place little or no value on "equality," and what do they mean by that term?

Murray Rothbard argues that *"the 'rightist' libertarian is not opposed to inequality."* [For a New Liberty, p. 47] In contrast, "leftist" libertarians oppose inequality because it has harmful effects on individual liberty.

Part of the reason "anarcho"-capitalism places little or no value on "equality" derives from their definition of that term. Murray Rothbard defines equality as:

*"A and B are 'equal' if they are identical to each other with respect to a given attribute... There is one and only one way, then, in which any two people can really be 'equal' in the fullest sense: they must be identical in **all** their attributes."*

He then points out the obvious fact that *"men are not uniform,. . . the species, mankind, is uniquely characterised by a high degree of variety, diversity, differentiation: in short, inequality."* [Egalitarianism as a Revolt against Nature and Other Essays, p. 4, p.5]

In others words, every individual is unique. Something no egalitarian has ever denied. On the basis of this amazing insight, he concludes that equality is impossible (except "equality of rights") and that the attempt to achieve "equality" is a "revolt against nature" -- as if any anarchist had ever advocated such a notion of equality as being identical!

And so, because we are all unique, the outcome of our actions will not be identical and so social inequality flows from natural differences and not due to the economic system we live under. Inequality of endowment implies inequality of outcome and so social inequality. As individual differences are a fact of nature, attempts to create a society based on "equality" (i.e. making everyone identical in terms of possessions and so forth) is impossible and "unnatural."

Before continuing, we must note that Rothbard is destroying language to make his point and that he is not the first to abuse language in this particular way. In George Orwell's 1984, the expression *"all men are created equal"* could be translated into Newspeak, but it would make as much sense as saying *"all men have red hair,"* an obvious falsehood (see *"The Principles of Newspeak"* Appendix). It's nice to know that "Mr. Libertarian" is stealing ideas from Big Brother, and for the same reason: to make critical thought impossible by restricting the meaning of words.

"Equality," in the context of political discussion, does not mean "identical," it usually means equality of rights, respect, worth, power and so forth. It does not imply treating everyone identically (for example,

expecting an eighty year old man to do identical work to an eighteen violates treating both with respect as unique individuals). For anarchists, as Alexander Berkman writes, *"equality does not mean an equal amount but equal opportunity. . . Do not make the mistake of identifying equality in liberty with the forced equality of the convict camp. True anarchist equality implies freedom, not quantity. It does not mean that every one must eat, drink, or wear the same things, do the same work, or live in the same manner. Far from it: the very reverse, in fact. Individual needs and tastes differ, as appetites differ. It is equal opportunity to satisfy them that constitutes true equality. Far from levelling, such equality opens the door for the greatest possible variety of activity and development. For human character is diverse, and only the repression of this free diversity results in levelling, in uniformity and sameness. Free opportunity and acting out your individuality means development of natural dissimilarities and variations. . . . Life in freedom, in anarchy will do more than liberate man merely from his present political and economic bondage. That will be only the first step, the preliminary to a truly human existence."* [**The ABC of Anarchism**, p. 25]

Thus anarchists reject the Rothbardian-Newspeak definition of equality as meaningless within political discussion. No two people are identical and so imposing "identical" equality between them would mean treating them as **unequals**, i.e. not having equal worth or giving them equal respect as befits them as human beings and fellow unique individuals.

So what should we make of Rothbard's claim? It is tempting just to quote Rousseau when he argued *"it is . . . useless to inquire whether there is any essential connection between the two inequalities [social and natural]; for this would be only asking, in other words, whether those who command are necessarily better than those who obey, and if strength of body or of mind, wisdom, or virtue are always found in particular individuals, in proportion to their power or wealth: a question fit perhaps to be discussed by slaves in the hearing of their masters, but highly unbecoming to reasonable and free men in search of the truth."* [**The Social Contract and Discourses**, p. 49] But a few more points should be raised.

The uniqueness of individuals has always existed but for the vast majority of human history we have lived in very egalitarian societies. If social inequality did, indeed, flow from natural inequalities then **all** societies would be marked by it. This is not the case. Indeed, taking a relatively recent example, many visitors to the early United States noted its egalitarian nature, something that soon changed with the rise of wage labour and industrial capitalism (a rise dependent upon state action, we must add, -- see section [F.8](#)). This implies that the society we live in (its rights framework, the social relationships it generates and so forth) has a far more of a decisive impact on inequality than individual differences. Thus certain rights frameworks will tend to magnify "natural" inequalities (assuming that is the source of the initial inequality, rather than, say, violence and force). As Noam Chomsky argues:

*"Presumably it is the case that in our 'real world' some combination of attributes is conducive to success in responding to 'the demands of the economic system' . . . One might suppose that some mixture of avarice, selfishness, lack of concern for others, aggressiveness, and similar characteristics play a part in getting ahead [in capitalism]. . .*

*Whatever the correct collection of attributes may be, we may ask what follows from the fact, if it is a fact, that some partially inherited combination of attributes tends to material success? All that follows . . . is a comment on our particular social and economic arrangements . . . The egalitarian might responds, in all such cases, that the social order should be changes so that the collection of attributes that tends to bring success no longer do so . . . " [The Chomsky Reader, p. 190]*

So, perhaps, if we change society then the social inequalities we see today would disappear. It is more than probable that natural difference has been long ago been replaced with **social** inequalities, especially inequalities of property (which will tend to increase, rather than decrease, inequality). And as we argue in section [F.8](#) these inequalities of property were initially the result of force, **not** differences in ability. Thus to claim that social inequality flows from natural differences is false as most social inequality has flown from violence and force. This initial inequality has been magnified by the framework of capitalist property rights and so the inequality within capitalism is far more dependent upon, say, the existence of wage labour, rather than "natural" differences between individuals.

If we look at capitalism, we see that in workplaces and across industries many, if not most, unique individuals receive identical wages for identical work (although this often is not the case for women and blacks, who receive less wages than male, white workers). Similarly, capitalists have deliberately introduced wage inequalities and hierarchies for no other reason than to divide (and so rule) the workforce (see section [D.10](#)). Thus, if we assume egalitarianism **is** a revolt against nature, then much of capitalist economic life is in such a revolt (and when it is not, the "natural" inequalities have been imposed artificially by those in power).

Thus "natural" differences do not necessarily result in inequality as such. Given a different social system, "natural" differences would be encouraged and celebrated far wider than they are under capitalism (where, as we argued in section [B.1](#), hierarchy ensures the crushing of individuality rather than its encouragement) without any change in social equality. The claim that "natural" differences generates social inequalities is question begging in the extreme -- it takes the rights framework of society as a given and ignores the initial source of inequality in property and power. Indeed, inequality of outcome or reward is more likely to be influenced by social conditions rather than individual differences (as would be the case in a society based on wage labour or other forms of exploitation).

Another reason for "anarcho"-capitalist lack of concern for equality is that they think that "*liberty upsets patterns*" (see section [F.2.5](#), for example). It is argued that equality can only be maintained by restricting individual freedom to make exchanges or by taxation of income. However, what this argument fails to acknowledge is that inequality also restricts individual freedom (see [next section](#), for example) and that the capitalist property rights framework is not the only one possible. After all, money is power and inequalities in terms of power easily result in restrictions of liberty and the transformation of the majority into order takers rather than free producers. In other words, once a certain level of inequality is reached, property does not promote, but actually conflicts with, the ends which render private property legitimate. Moreover, Nozick (in his "liberty upsets patterns" argument) "*has produced . . . an argument*

*for unrestricted private property using unrestricted private property, and thus he begs the question he tries to answer.*" [Andrew Kerhohan, "*Capitalism and Self-Ownership*", from **Capitalism**, p. 71] For example, a worker employed by a capitalist cannot freely exchange the machines or raw materials they have been provided with to use but Nozick does not class this distribution of "restricted" property rights as infringing liberty (nor does he argue that wage slavery itself restricts freedom, of course).

So in response to the claim that equality could only be maintained by continuously interfering with people's lives, anarchists would say that the inequalities produced by capitalist property rights also involve extensive and continuous interference with people's lives. After all, as Bob Black notes "*[y]our foreman or supervisor gives you more or-else orders in a week than the police do in a decade*" nevermind the other effects of inequality such as stress, ill health and so on [**Libertarian as Conservative**]. Thus claims that equality involves infringing liberty ignores the fact that inequality also infringes liberty. A reorganisation of society could effectively minimise inequalities by eliminating the major source of such inequalities (wage labour) by self-management (see section [I.5.12](#) for a discussion of "capitalistic acts" within an anarchist society). We have no desire to restrict free exchanges (after all, most anarchists desire to see the "gift economy" become a reality sooner or later) but we argue that free exchanges need not involve the unrestricted property rights Nozick assumes. As we argue in sections [F.2](#) and [F.3.1](#), inequality can easily led to the situation where self-ownership is used to justify its own negation and so unrestricted property rights may undermine the meaningful self-determination (what anarchists would usually call "freedom" rather than self-ownership) which many people intuitively understand by the term "self-ownership".

Thus, for anarchists, the "anarcho"-capitalist opposition to equality misses the point and is extremely question begging. Anarchists do not desire to make humanity "identical" (which would be impossible and a total denial of liberty **and** equality) but to make the social relationships between individuals equal in **power**. In other words, they desire a situation where people interact together without institutionalised power or hierarchy and are influenced by each other "naturally," in proportion to how the (individual) **differences** between (social) **equals** are applicable in a given context. To quote Michael Bakunin, "*[t]he greatest intelligence would not be equal to a comprehension of the whole. Thence results. . . the necessity of the division and association of labour. I receive and I give -- such is human life. Each directs and is directed in his turn. Therefore there is no fixed and constant authority, but a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination.*" [**God and the State**, p. 33]

Such an environment can only exist within self-managed associations, for capitalism (i.e. wage labour) creates very specific relations and institutions of authority. It is for this reason anarchists are socialists (i. e. opposed to wage labour, the existence of a proletariat or working class). In other words, anarchists support equality precisely **because** we recognise that everyone is unique. If we are serious about "equality of rights" or "equal freedom" then conditions must be such that people can enjoy these rights and liberties. If we assume the right to develop one's capacities to the fullest, for example, then inequality of resources and so power within society destroys that right simply because people do not have the means to freely exercise their capacities (they are subject to the authority of the boss, for

example, during work hours).

So, in direct contrast to anarchism, right-Libertarianism is unconcerned about any form of equality except "equality of rights". This blinds them to the realities of life; in particular, the impact of economic and social power on individuals within society and the social relationships of domination they create. Individuals may be "equal" before the law and in rights, but they may not be free due to the influence of social inequality, the relationships it creates and how it affects the law and the ability of the oppressed to use it. Because of this, all anarchists insist that equality is essential for freedom, including those in the Individualist Anarchist tradition the "anarcho"-capitalist tries to co-opt -- *"Spooner and Godwin insist that inequality corrupts freedom. Their anarchism is directed as much against inequality as against tyranny"* and *"[w]hile sympathetic to Spooner's individualist anarchism, they [Rothbard and David Friedman] fail to notice or conveniently overlook its egalitarian implications."* [Stephen L. Newman, **Liberalism at Wit's End**, p. 74, p. 76]

Why equality is important is discussed more fully in the [next section](#). Here we just stress that without social equality, individual freedom is so restricted that it becomes a mockery (essentially limiting freedom of the majority to choosing **which** employer will govern them rather than being free within and outside work).

Of course, by defining "equality" in such a restrictive manner, Rothbard's own ideology is proved to be nonsense. As L.A. Rollins notes, *"Libertarianism, the advocacy of 'free society' in which people enjoy 'equal freedom' and 'equal rights,' is actually a specific form of egalitarianism. As such, Libertarianism itself is a revolt against nature. If people, by their very biological nature, are unequal in all the attributes necessary to achieving, and preserving 'freedom' and 'rights'. . . then there is no way that people can enjoy 'equal freedom' or 'equal rights'. If a free society is conceived as a society of 'equal freedom,' then there ain't no such thing as 'a free society'."* [**The Myth of Natural Law**, p. 36]

Under capitalism, freedom is a commodity like everything else. The more money you have, the greater your freedom. "Equal" freedom, in the Newspeak-Rothbardian sense, **cannot** exist! As for "equality before the law", its clear that such a hope is always dashed against the rocks of wealth and market power (see [next section](#) for more on this). As far as rights go, of course, both the rich and the poor have an "equal right" to sleep under a bridge (assuming the bridge's owner agrees of course!); but the owner of the bridge and the homeless have **different** rights, and so they cannot be said to have "equal rights" in the Newspeak-Rothbardian sense either. Needless to say, poor and rich will not "equally" use the "right" to sleep under a bridge, either.

Bob Black observes in **The Libertarian as Conservative** that *"[t]he time of your life is the one commodity you can sell but never buy back. Murray Rothbard thinks egalitarianism is a revolt against nature, but his day is 24 hours long, just like everybody else's."*

By twisting the language of political debate, the vast differences in power in capitalist society can be "blamed" not on an unjust and authoritarian system but on "biology" (we are all unique individuals, after

all). Unlike genes (although biotechnology corporations are working on this, too!), human society **can** be changed, by the individuals who comprise it, to reflect the basic features we all share in common -- our humanity, our ability to think and feel, and our need for freedom.

### F.3.1 Why is this disregard for equality important?

Simply because a disregard for equality soon ends with liberty for the majority being negated in many important ways. Most "anarcho"-capitalists and right-Libertarians deny (or at best ignore) market power. Rothbard, for example, claims that economic power does not exist; what people call "*economic power*" is "*simply the right under freedom to refuse to make an exchange*" [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 222] and so the concept is meaningless.

However, the fact is that there are substantial power centres in society (and so are the source of hierarchical power and authoritarian social relations) which are **not the state**. The central fallacy of "anarcho"-capitalism is the (unstated) assumption that the various actors within an economy have relatively equal power. This assumption has been noted by many readers of their works. For example, Peter Marshall notes that "*anarcho-capitalists' like Murray Rothbard assume individuals would have equal bargaining power in a [capitalist] market-based society*" [**Demanding the Impossible**, p. 46] George Walford also makes this clear in his comments on David Friedman's **The Machinery of Freedom**:

*"The private ownership envisaged by the anarcho-capitalists would be very different from that which we know. It is hardly going too far to say that while the one is nasty, the other would be nice. In anarcho-capitalism there would be no National Insurance, no Social Security, no National Health Service and not even anything corresponding to the Poor Laws; there would be no public safety-nets at all. It would be a rigorously competitive society: work, beg or die. But as one reads on, learning that each individual would have to buy, personally, all goods and services needed, not only food, clothing and shelter but also education, medicine, sanitation, justice, police, all forms of security and insurance, even permission to use the streets (for these also would be privately owned), as one reads about all this a curious feature emerges: everybody always has enough money to buy all these things.*

*"There are no public casual wards or hospitals or hospices, but neither is there anybody dying in the streets. There is no public educational system but no uneducated children, no public police service but nobody unable to buy the services of an efficient security firm, no public law but nobody unable to buy the use of a private legal system. Neither is there anybody able to buy much more than anybody else; no person or group possesses economic power over others.*

*"No explanation is offered. The anarcho-capitalists simply take it for granted that in their favoured society, although it possesses no machinery for restraining competition (for this*

*would need to exercise authority over the competitors and it is an **anarcho**- capitalist society) competition would not be carried to the point where anybody actually suffered from it. While proclaiming their system to be a competitive one, in which private interest rules unchecked, they show it operating as a co-operative one, in which no person or group profits at the cost of another." [On the Capitalist Anarchists]*

This assumption of (relative) equality comes to the fore in Murray Rothbard's "Homesteading" concept of property (discussed in section [F.4.1](#)). "Homesteading" paints a picture of individuals and families doing into the wilderness to make a home for themselves, fighting against the elements and so forth. It does **not** invoke the idea of transnational corporations employing tens of thousands of people or a population without land, resources and selling their labour to others. Indeed, Rothbard argues that economic power does not exist (at least under capitalism; as we saw in section [F.2.1](#) he does make -- highly illogical -- exceptions). Similarly, David Friedman's example of a pro-death penalty and anti-death penalty "defence" firm coming to an agreement (see section [F.6.3](#)) assumes that the firms have equal bargaining powers and resources -- if not, then the bargaining process would be very one-sided and the smaller company would think twice before taking on the larger one in battle (the likely outcome if they cannot come to an agreement on this issue) and so compromise.

However, the right-libertarian denial of market power is unsurprising. The necessity, not the redundancy, of equality is required if the inherent problems of contract are not to become too obvious. If some individuals **are** assumed to have significantly more power than others, and if they are always self-interested, then a contract that creates equal partners is impossible -- the pact will establish an association of masters and servants. Needless to say, the strong will present the contract as being to the advantage of both: the strong no longer have to labour (and become rich, i.e. even stronger) and the weak receive an income and so do not starve.

If freedom is considered as a function of ownership then it is very clear that individuals lacking property (outside their own body, of course) loses effective control over their own person and labour (which was, lets not forget, the basis of their equal natural rights). When ones bargaining power is weak (which is typically the case in the labour market) exchanges tend to magnify inequalities of wealth and power over time rather than working towards an equalisation.

In other words, "contract" need not replace power if the bargaining position and wealth of the would-be contractors are not equal (for, if the bargainers had equal power it is doubtful they would agree to sell control of their liberty/time to another). This means that "power" and "market" are not antithetical terms. While, in an abstract sense, all market relations are voluntary in practice this is not the case within a capitalist market. For example, a large company has a comparative advantage over small ones and communities which will definitely shape the outcome of any contract. For example, a large company or rich person will have access to more funds and so stretch out litigations and strikes until their opponents resources are exhausted. Or, if a local company is polluting the environment, the local community may put up with the damage caused out of fear that the industry (which it depends upon) would relocate to another area. If members of the community **did** sue, then the company would be merely exercising its



property rights when it threatened to move to another location. In such circumstances, the community would "freely" consent to its conditions or face massive economic and social disruption. And, similarly, *"the landlords' agents who threaten to discharge agricultural workers and tenants who failed to vote the reactionary ticket"* in the 1936 Spanish election were just exercising their legitimate property rights when they threatened working people and their families with economic uncertainty and distress. [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 260]

If we take the labour market, it is clear that the "buyers" and "sellers" of labour power are rarely on an equal footing (if they were, then capitalism would soon go into crisis -- see section [F.10.2](#)). In fact, competition *"in labour markets is typically skewed in favour of employers: it is a buyer's market. And in a buyer's, it is the sellers who compromise."* [Juliet B. Schor, **The Overworked American**, p. 129] Thus the ability to refuse an exchange weights most heavily on one class than another and so ensures that "free exchange" works to ensure the domination (and so exploitation) of one party by the other.

Inequality in the market ensures that the decisions of the majority of within it are shaped in accordance with that needs of the powerful, not the needs of all. It was for this reason that the Individual Anarchist J. K. Ingalls opposed Henry George's proposal of nationalising the land. Ingalls was well aware that the rich could outbid the poor for leases on land and so the dispossession of the working classes would continue.

The market, therefore, does not end power or unfreedom -- they are still there, but in different forms. And for an exchange to be truly voluntary, both parties must have equal power to accept, reject, or influence its terms. Unfortunately, these conditions are rarely met on the labour market or within the capitalist market in general. Thus Rothbard's argument that economic power does not exist fails to acknowledge that the rich can out-bid the poor for resources and that a corporation generally has greater ability to refuse a contract (with an individual, union or community) than vice versa (and that the impact of such a refusal is such that it will encourage the others involved to "compromise" far sooner). And in such circumstances, formally free individuals will have to "consent" to be unfree in order to survive.

As Max Stirner pointed out in the 1840s, free competition *"is not 'free,' because I lack the **things** for competition."* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 262] Due to this basic inequality of wealth (of "things") we find that *"[u]nder the **regime** of the commonality the labourers always fall into the hands of the possessors . . . of the capitalists, therefore. The labourer cannot **realise** on his labour to the extent of the value that it has for the customer."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 115] Its interesting to note that even Stirner recognises that capitalism results in exploitation. And we may add that value the labourer does not "*realise*" goes into the hands of the capitalists, who invest it in more "things" and which consolidates and increases their advantage in "free" competition.

To quote Stephan L. Newman:

*"Another disquieting aspect of the libertarians' refusal to acknowledge power in the market is their failure to confront the tension between freedom and autonomy. . . Wage*

*labour under capitalism is, of course, formally free labour. No one is forced to work at gun point. Economic circumstance, however, often has the effect of force; it compels the relatively poor to accept work under conditions dictated by owners and managers. The individual worker retains freedom [i.e. negative liberty] but loses autonomy [positive liberty]."* [**Liberalism at Wit's End**, pp. 122-123]

(As an aside, we should point out that the full Stirner quote cited above is "[u]nder the **regime** of the commonality the labourers always fall into the hands of the possessors, of those who have at their disposal some bit of the state domains (and everything possessible in State domain belongs to the State and is only a fief of the individual), especially money and land; of the capitalists, therefore. The labourer cannot **realise** on his labour to the extent of the value that it has for the customer."

It could be argued that we misrepresenting Stirner by truncating the quote, but we feel that such a claim this is incorrect. Its clear from his book that Stirner is considering the "minimal" state ("*The State is a - commoners' State . . . It protects man . . . according to whether the rights entrusted to him by the State are enjoyed and managed in accordance with the will, that is, laws, of the State.*" The State "*looks on indifferently as one grows poor and the other rich, unruffled by this alternation. As **individuals** they are really equal before its face.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 115, p. 252]). As "anarcho"-capitalists consider their system to be one of rights and laws (particularly property rights), we feel that its fair to generalise Stirner's comments into capitalism **as such** as opposed to "minimum state" capitalism. If we replace "State" by "libertarian law code" you will see what we mean. We have included this aside before any right-libertarians claim that we are misrepresenting Stirner' argument.)

If we consider "equality before the law" it is obvious that this also has limitations in an (materially) unequal society. Brian Morris notes that for Ayn Rand, "*[u]nder capitalism . . . politics (state) and economics (capitalism) are separated . . . This, of course, is pure ideology, for Rand's justification of the state is that it 'protects' private property, that is, it supports and upholds the economic power of capitalists by coercive means.*" [**Ecology & Anarchism**, p. 189] The same can be said of "anarcho"-capitalism and its "protection agencies" and "general libertarian law code." If within a society a few own all the resources and the majority are dispossessed, then any law code which protects private property **automatically** empowers the owning class. Workers will **always** be initiating force if act against the code and so "equality before the law" reinforces inequality of power and wealth.

This means that a system of property rights protects the liberties of some people in a way which gives them an unacceptable degree of power over others. And this cannot be met merely by reaffirming the rights in question, we have to assess the relative importance of various kinds of liberty and other values we how dear.

Therefore right-libertarian disregard for equality is important because it allows "anarcho"-capitalism to ignore many important restrictions of freedom in society. In addition, it allows them to brush over the negative effects of their system by painting an unreal picture of a capitalist society without vast extremes of wealth and power (indeed, they often construe capitalist society in terms of an ideal -- namely artisan

production -- that is really **pre**-capitalist and whose social basis has been eroded by capitalist development). Inequality shapes the decisions we have available and what ones we make:

*"An 'incentive' is always available in conditions of substantial social inequality that ensure that the 'weak' enter into a contract. When social inequality prevails, questions arises about what counts as voluntary entry into a contract . . . Men and women . . . are now juridically free and equal citizens, but, in unequal social conditions, the possibility cannot be ruled out that some or many contracts create relationships that bear uncomfortable resemblances to a slave contract."* [Carole Pateman, **The Sexual Contract**, p. 62]

This ideological confusion of right-libertarianism can also be seen from their opposition to taxation. On the one hand, they argue that taxation is wrong because it takes money from those who "earn" it and gives it to the poor. On the other hand, "free market" capitalism is assumed to be a more equal society! If taxation takes from the rich and gives to the poor, how will "anarcho"-capitalism be more egalitarian? That equalisation mechanism would be gone (of course, it could be claimed that all great riches are purely the result of state intervention skewing the "free market" but that places all their "rags to riches" stories in a strange position). Thus we have a problem, either we have relative equality or we do not. Either we have riches, and so market power, or we do not. And its clear from the likes of Rothbard, "anarcho"-capitalism will not be without its millionaires (there is, after all, apparently nothing un-libertarian about *"organisation, hierarchy, wage-work, granting of funds by libertarian millionaires, and a libertarian party"*). And so we are left with market power and so extensive unfreedom.

Thus, for a ideology that denounces egalitarianism as a *"revolt against nature"* it is pretty funny that they paint a picture of "anarcho"-capitalism as a society of (relative) equals. In other words, their propaganda is based on something that has never existed, and never will, namely an egalitarian capitalist society.

### **F.3.2 But what about "anarcho"-capitalist support for charity?**

Yes, while being blind to impact of inequality in terms of economic and social power and influence, most right-libertarians **do** argue that the very poor could depend on charity in their system. But such a recognition of poverty does not reflect an awareness of the need for equality or the impact of inequality on the agreements we make. Quite the reverse in fact, as the existence of extensive inequality is assumed -- after all, in a society of relative equals, poverty would not exist, nor would charity be needed.

Ignoring the fact that their ideology hardly promotes a charitable perspective, we will raise four points. Firstly, charity will not be enough to countermand the existence and impact of vast inequalities of wealth (and so power). Secondly, it will be likely that charities will be concerned with "improving" the moral quality of the poor and so will divide them into the "deserving" (i.e. obedient) and "undeserving" (i.e. rebellious) poor. Charity will be forthcoming to the former, those who agree to busy-bodies sticking their noses into their lives. In this way charity could become another tool of economic and social power

(see Oscar Wilde's **The Soul of Man Under Socialism** for more on charity). Thirdly, it is unlikely that charity will be able to replace all the social spending conducted by the state -- to do so would require a ten-fold increase in charitable donations (and given that most right-libertarians denounce the government for making them pay taxes to help the poor, it seems unlikely that they will turn round and **increase** the amount they give). And, lastly, charity is an implicate recognition that, under capitalism, no one has the right of life -- its a privilege you have to pay for. That in itself is enough to reject the charity option. And, of course, in a system designed to secure the life and liberty of each person, how can it be deemed acceptable to leave the life and protection of even one individual to the charitable whims of others? (Perhaps it will be argued that individual's have the right to life, but not a right to be a parasite. This ignores the fact some people **cannot** work -- babies and some handicapped people -- and that, in a functioning capitalist economy, many people cannot find work all the time. Is it this recognition of that babies cannot work that prompts many right-libertarians to turn them into property? Of course, rich folk who have never done a days work in their lives are never classed as parasites, even if they inherited all their money). All things considered, little wonder that Proudhon argued that:

*"Even charitable institutions serve the ends of those in authority marvellously well.*

*"Charity is the strongest chain by which privilege and the Government, bound to protect them, holds down the lower classes. With charity, sweeter to the heart of men, more intelligible to the poor man than the abstruse laws of Political Economy, one may dispense with justice." [The General Idea of the Revolution, pp. 69-70]*

As noted, the right-libertarian (passing) acknowledgement of poverty does not mean that they recognise the existence of market power. They never ask themselves how can someone be free if their social situation is such that they are drowning in a sea of usury and have to sell their labour (and so liberty) to survive.

## D.8 What causes militarism and what are its effects?

There are two main causes of capitalist militarism. Firstly, there is the need to contain the domestic enemy - the oppressed and exploited sections of the population. The other, as noted in the section on imperialism, is that a strong military is necessary in order for a ruling class to pursue an aggressive and expansionist foreign policy. For most developed capitalist nations, this kind of foreign policy becomes more and more important because of economic forces, i.e. in order to provide outlets for its goods and to prevent the system from collapsing by expanding the market continually outward. This outward expansion of, and so competition between, capital needs military force to protect its interests (particularly those invested in other countries) and give it added clout in the economic jungle of the world market.

Capitalist militarism also serves several other purposes and has a number of effects. First, it promotes the development of a specially favoured group of companies involved in the production of armaments or armament related products ("defence" contractors), who have a direct interest in the maximum expansion of military production. Since this group is particularly wealthy, it exerts great pressure on government to pursue the type of state intervention and, often, the aggressive foreign policies it wants.

This "special relationship" between state and Big Business also has the advantage that it allows the ordinary citizen to pay for industrial Research and Development. Government subsidies provide an important way for companies to fund their research and development at taxpayer expense, which often yields "spin-offs" with great commercial potential as consumer products (e.g. computers). Needless to say, all the profits go to the defence contractors and to the commercial companies who buy licences to patented technologies from them, rather than being shared with the public which funded the R&D that made the profits possible.

It is necessary to provide some details to indicate the size and impact of military spending on the US economy:

*"Since 1945. . . there have been new industries sparking investment and employment . . . In most of them, basic research and technological progress were closely linked to the expanding military sector. The major innovation in the 1950s was electronics . . . [which] increased its output 15 percent per year. It was of critical importance in workplace automation, with the federal government providing the bulk of the research and development (R&D) dollars for military-orientated purposes. Infrared instrumentation, pressure and temperature measuring equipment, medical electronics, and thermoelectric energy conversion all benefited from military R&D. By the 1960s indirect and direct military demand accounted for as much as 70 percent of the total output of the electronics industry. Feedbacks also developed between electronics and aircraft, the second growth*

*industry of the 1950s. By 1960 . . . [i]ts annual investment outlays were 5.3 times larger than their 1947-49 level, and over 90 percent of its output went to the military. Synthetics (plastics and fibers) was another growth industry owing much of its development to military-related projects. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, military-related R&D, including space, accounted for 40 to 50 percent of total public and private R&D spending and at least 85% of federal government share." [Richard B. Du Boff, **Accumulation and Power**, pp. 103-4]*

Not only this, government spending on road building (initially justified using defence concerns) also gave a massive boost to private capital (and, in the process, totally transformed America into a land fit for car and oil corporations). The cumulative impact of the 1944, 1956 and 1968 Federal Highway Acts "allowed \$70 billion to be spent on the interstates without [the money] passing through the congressional appropriations board." The 1956 Act "[i]n effect wrote into law the 1932 National Highway Users Conference strategy of G[eneral] M[otors] chairman Alfred P. Sloan to channel gasoline and other motor vehicle-related excise taxes into highway construction." GM also illegally bought-up and effectively destroyed public transit companies across America, so reducing competition against private car ownership. The net effect of this state intervention was that by 1963-66 "one in every six business enterprise was directly dependent on the manufacture, distribution, servicing, and the use of motor vehicles." The impact of this process is still evident today -- both in terms of ecological destruction and in the fact that automobile and oil companies are still dominate the top twenty of the Fortune 500. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 102]

This system, which can be called military Keynesianism, has three advantages over socially-based state intervention. Firstly, unlike social programmes, military intervention does not improve the situation (and thus, hopes) of the majority, who can continue to be marginalised by the system, suffer the discipline of the labour market and feel the threat of unemployment. Secondly, it acts like welfare for the rich, ensuring that while the many are subject to market forces, the few can escape that fate - while singing the praises of the "free market". And, thirdly, it does not compete with private capital.

Because of the connection between militarism and imperialism, it was natural after World War II that America should become the world's leading military state at the same time that it was becoming the world's leading economic power, and that strong ties developed between government, business, and the armed forces. American "military capitalism" is described in detail below, but the remarks also apply to a number of other "advanced" capitalist states.

In his farewell address, President Eisenhower warned of the danger posed to individual liberties and democratic processes by the "**military-industrial complex**," which might, he cautioned, seek to keep the economy in a state of continual war-readiness simply because it is good business. This echoed the warning which had been made earlier by sociologist C. Wright Mills (in **The Power Elite**, 1956), who pointed out that since the end of World War II the military had become enlarged and decisive to the shape of the entire American economy, and that US capitalism had in fact become a military capitalism. This situation has not substantially changed since Mills wrote, for it is still the case that all US military officers have grown up in the atmosphere of the post-war military-industrial alliance and have been

explicitly educated and trained to carry it on. So, despite recent cuts in the US defence budget, American capitalism remains military capitalism, with a huge armaments industry and defence contractors still among the most powerful of political entities.

## D.8.1 Will militarism change with the apparent end of the Cold War?

Many politicians seemed to think so in the early nineties, asserting that a "*peace dividend*" was at hand. Since the Gulf War, however, Americans have heard little more about it. Although it's true that some fat was trimmed from the defence budget, both economic and political pressures have tended to keep the basic military-industrial complex intact, insuring a state of global war-readiness and continuing production of ever more advanced weapons systems into the foreseeable future.

Since it's having more and more trouble dominating the world economically, America now claims superpower status largely on the basis of its military superiority. Therefore the US won't be likely to renounce this superiority willingly-- especially since the prospect of recapturing world economic superiority appears to depend in part on her ability to bully other nations into granting economic concessions and privileges, as in the past. Hence the US public is being bombarded with propaganda designed to show that an ongoing US military presence is necessary in every corner of the planet.

For example, after the Gulf War the draft of a government White Paper was released in which it was argued that the US must maintain its status as the world's strongest military power and not hesitate to act unilaterally if UN approval for future military actions is not forthcoming. Although then President Bush, under election-year political pressures, denied that he personally held such views, the document reflected the thinking of powerful authoritarian forces in government -- thinking that has a way of becoming public policy through secret National Security Directives (see section D.9.2 -- [What is "Invisible government"?](#)).

For these reasons it would not be wise to bet on a deep and sustained American demilitarisation. It is true that troop strength is being cut back in response to Soviet withdrawals from Eastern Europe; but these cutbacks are also prompted by the development of automated weapons systems which reduce the number of soldiers needed to win battles, as demonstrated in the Persian Gulf.

Although there may appear to be no urgent need for huge military budgets now that the Soviet threat is gone, the US has found it impossible to kick its forty-year addiction to militarism. As Noam Chomsky points out in many of his works, the "*Pentagon System*," in which the public is forced to subsidise research and development of high tech industry through subsidies to defence contractors, is a covert substitute in the US for the overt industrial planning policies of other "advanced" capitalist nations, like Germany and Japan. US defence businesses, which are among the biggest lobbyists, cannot afford to lose this "corporate welfare." Moreover, continued corporate downsizing and high levels of unemployment will produce strong pressure to maintain defence industries simply in order to keep

people working.

Despite some recent modest trimming of defence budgets, the demands of US military capitalism still take priority over the needs of the people. For example, Holly Sklar points out that Washington, Detroit, and Philadelphia have higher infant death rates than Jamaica or Costa Rica and that Black America as a whole has a higher infant mortality rate than Nigeria; yet the US still spends less public funds on education than on the military, and more on military bands than on the National Endowment for the Arts [*"Brave New World Order,"* in Cynthia Peters, ed., **Collateral Damage**, 1992, pp. 3-46]. But of course, politicians continue to maintain that education and social services must be cut back even further because there is "no money" to fund them.

A serious problem at this point, however, is that the collapse of the Soviet Union leaves the Pentagon in desperate need of a sufficiently dangerous and demonic enemy to justify continued military spending in the style to which it's accustomed. Saddam Hussein was temporarily helpful, but he's not enough of a menace to warrant the robust defence budgets of yore now that his military machine has been smashed. There are some indications, however, that the US government has its sights on Iran.

The main point in favour of targeting Iran is that the American public still craves revenge for the 1979 hostage humiliation, the Lebanon bombing, the Iran-Contra scandal, and other outrages, and can thus be relied on to support a war of retribution. Hence it would not be surprising to hear much more in the future about a possible Iranian nuclear threat and about the dangers of Iranian influence in the Moslem republics of the ex-Soviet empire.

In the wake of the Persian Gulf War, the United States has quietly been building a network of defence alliances reminiscent of the Eisenhower years after World War II, so that America may now be called upon to police disturbances all over the Arab World. Sending troops to Somalia appears to have been designed to help accustom Americans to such a role.

Besides Iran, unfriendly regimes in North Korea, Cuba, and Libya, as well as communist guerrilla groups in various South American nations, also hold great promise as future testing grounds for new weapons systems. And of course there is the recent troop deployments to Haiti and Bosnia, which provide the Pentagon with more arguments for continued high levels of defence spending. In a nutshell, then, the trend toward increasing militarism is not likely to be checked by the present military "downsizing," which will merely produce a leaner and more efficient fighting machine.



## D.9 What is the relationship between wealth polarisation and authoritarian government?

We have previously noted the recent increase in the rate of wealth polarisation, with its erosion of working-class living standards. This process has been referred to by Noam Chomsky as "*Third-Worldisation*." It is appearing in a particularly acute form in the US -- the "richest" industrialised nation which also has the highest level of poverty, since it is the most polarised -- but the process can be seen in other "advanced" industrial nations as well, particularly in the UK.

Third World governments are typically authoritarian, since harsh measures are required to suppress rebellions among their impoverished and discontented masses. Hence "Third-Worldisation" implies not only economic polarisation but also increasingly authoritarian governments. As Philip Slater puts it, a large, educated, and alert "middle class" (i.e. average income earners) has always been the backbone of democracy, and anything that concentrates wealth tends to weaken democratic institutions [**A Dream Deferred**, p. 68].

If this is true, then along with increasing wealth polarisation in the US we should expect to see signs of growing authoritarianism. This hypothesis is confirmed by numerous facts, including the following: continuing growth of an "imperial presidency" (concentration of political power); extralegal operations by the executive branch (e.g. the Iran-Contra scandal, the Grenada and Panama invasions); skyrocketing incarceration rates; more official secrecy and censorship; the rise of the Far Right; more police and prisons; FBI requests for massive wiretapping capability; and so on. Public support for draconian measures to deal with crime reflect the increasingly authoritarian mood of citizens beginning to panic in the face of an ongoing social breakdown, which has been brought about, quite simply, by ruling-class greed that has gotten out of hand -- a fact that is carefully obscured by the media.

One might think that representative democracy and constitutionally guaranteed freedoms would make an authoritarian government impossible in the United States and other liberal democratic nations with similar constitutional "protections" for civil rights. In reality, however, the declaration of a "national emergency" would allow the central government to ignore constitutional guarantees with impunity and set up what Hannah Arendt calls "invisible government" -- mechanisms allowing an administration to circumvent constitutional structures while leaving them nominally in place (see section [D.9.2](#)).

In this regard it is important to remember that the Nazis created a "shadow government" in Germany even as the "democratic" Weimar constitution continued to operate in theory. Hitler at first implemented his programmes through the constitution, using existing government agencies and departments. Later he set up Nazi Party bureaus that duplicated the functions of the Weimar government, allowing the latter to remain in place but without power, while the Nazi bureaus (especially the SS, and of course Hitler himself) held the actual power. The Communist Party in Russia created a similar invisible government after the Bolshevik revolution, leaving the revolutionary constitution as well as the government

bureaucracy in place while Communist Party agencies and the General Secretary wielded the real power [See Marilyn French, **Beyond Power**, p. 349].

If the drift toward social breakdown continues in the "advanced" industrial nations, it's not difficult to conceive of voters electing overtly authoritarian, right-wing administrations campaigning on "law-and-order" platforms. In the face of widespread rioting, looting, and mayhem (especially if it spilled over from the ghettos and threatened the suburbs), reactionary hysteria could propel authoritarian types into both the executive and legislative branches of government. The "middle classes" (i.e. professionals, small business people and so on) would then support charismatic martial-style leaders who promised to restore law and order, particularly if they were men with impressive military or police credentials.

Once elected, and with the support of willing legislatures and courts, authoritarian administrations could easily create much more extensive mechanisms of invisible government than already exist, giving the executive branch virtually dictatorial powers. Such administrations could also vastly increase government control of the media, implement martial law, escalate foreign militarism, further expand the funding and scope of the police, national guard units, secret police and foreign intelligence agencies, and authorise more widespread surveillance of citizens as well as the infiltration of dissident political groups. Random searches and seizures, curfews, government control of all organised meetings, harassment or outright banning of groups that disagreed with or attempted to block government policies, and the imprisonment of political dissidents and others judged to be dangerous to "national security" would then become routine.

These developments would not occur all at once, but so gradually, imperceptibly, and logically -- given the need to maintain "law and order" -- that most people would not even be aware that an authoritarian take-over was underway. Indeed, it is already underway in the US (see Bertram Gross, **Friendly Fascism**, South End Press, 1989).

In the following subsections we will examine some of the symptoms of growing authoritarianism listed above, again referring primarily to the example of the United States. We are including these sections in the FAQ because the disturbing trends canvassed here give the anarchist programme of social reconstruction more urgency than would otherwise be the case. For if radical and dissident groups are muzzled -- as always happens under authoritarian rule -- that programme will be much more difficult to achieve.

## **D.9.1 Why does political power become concentrated under capitalism?**

Under capitalism, political power tends to become concentrated in the executive branch of government, along with a corresponding decline in the effectiveness of parliamentary institutions. As Paul Sweezy points out, parliaments grew out of the struggle of capitalists against the power of centralised monarchies during the early modern period, and hence the function of parliaments has always been to check and control the exercise of executive power. For this reason, *"parliaments flourished and reached*

*the peak of their prestige in the period of competitive capitalism when the functions of the state, particularly in the economic sphere, were reduced to a minimum.*" [**Theory of Capitalist Development**, p. 310]

As capitalism develops, however, the ruling class must seek to expand its capital through foreign investments, which leads to imperialism, which in turn leads to a tightening of class lines and increasingly severe social conflict, as we have seen earlier (see D.5.2). As this happens, legislatures become battlegrounds of contending parties, divided by divergent class and group interests, which reduces their capacity for positive action. And at the same time, the ruling class increasingly needs a strong centralised state that can protect its interests in foreign countries as well as solve difficult and complex economic problems. *"Under the circumstances, parliament is forced to give up one after another of its cherished prerogatives and to see built up under its very eyes the kind of centralised and uncontrolled authority against which, in its youth, it had fought so hard and so well."* [**Ibid.**, p. 319]

This process can be seen clearly in the history of the United States. Since World War II, power has become centralised in the hands of the president to such an extent that scholars now refer to an "imperial presidency," following Arthur Schlesinger's 1973 book of that title.

Contemporary US presidents' appropriation of congressional authority, especially in matters relating to national security, has paralleled the rise of the United States as the world's strongest and most imperialistic military power. In the increasingly dangerous and interdependent world of the 20th century, the perceived need for a leader who can act quickly and decisively, without possibly disastrous obstruction by Congress, has provided an impetus for ever greater concentration of power in the White House.

This concentration has taken place in both foreign and domestic policy, but it has been catalysed above all by a series of foreign policy decisions in which modern US presidents have seized the most vital of all government powers, the power to make war. And as they have continued to commit troops to war without congressional authorisation or public debate, their unilateral policy-making has spilled over into domestic affairs as well.

In the atmosphere of omnipresent crisis that developed in the fifties, the United States appointed itself guardian of the "free world" against the Red Menace. This placed unprecedented military resources under the control of the President. At the same time, the Eisenhower Administration established a system of pacts and treaties with nations all over the globe, making it difficult for Congress to limit the President's deployment of troops according to the requirements of treaty obligations and national security, both of which were left to presidential judgement. The CIA, a secretive agency accountable to Congress only after the fact, was made the primary instrument of US intervention in the internal affairs of other nations for national security reasons.

With President Johnson's massive deployment of troops to Vietnam, the scope of presidential war-making power took a giant leap forward. Unlike Truman's earlier decision to commit troops in Korea

without prior congressional approval, the UN had not issued any resolutions to legitimate US involvement in Vietnam. In justifying the President's decision, the State Department implied that in the interdependent world of the twentieth century, warfare anywhere on the globe could constitute an attack on the United States which might require immediate response, and hence that the Commander-in-Chief was authorised to take "defensive" war measures without congressional approval or UN authorisation.

Following Vietnam, the presidency was further strengthened by the creation of an all-volunteer military, which is less subject to rebellions in the face of popular opposition to a foreign war than a conscripted force. With their control over the armed forces more secure, presidents since Nixon have been liberated for a much wider range of foreign adventures. The collapse of the Soviet military threat now makes it easier than ever for the President to pursue military options in striving to achieve foreign policy objectives, as the Persian Gulf conflict clearly showed. United States involvement there would have been much more difficult during the Cold War, with the Soviet Union supporting Iraq.

It is sometimes argued that Watergate fatally weakened the power of the US presidency, but this is not actually the case. Michael Lind lists several reasons why [in *"The Case for Congressional Power: the Out-of-Control Presidency," The New Republic*, Aug. 14, 1995]. First, the President can still wage war at will, without consulting Congress. Second, thanks to precedents set by Bush and Clinton, important economic treaties (like GATT and NAFTA) can be rammed through Congress as "fast-track" legislation, which limits the time allowed for debate and forbids amendments. Third, thanks to Jimmy Carter, who reformed the Senior Executive Service to give the White House more control over career bureaucrats, and Ronald Reagan, who politicised the upper levels of the executive branch to an unprecedented degree, presidents can now pack government with their spoilsmen and reward partisan bureaucrats. Fourth, thanks to George Bush, presidents now have a powerful new technique to enhance presidential prerogatives and erode the intent of Congress even further -- namely, signing laws while announcing that they will not obey them. Fifth, thanks also to Bush, yet another new instrument of arbitrary presidential power has been created: the "tsar," a presidential appointee with vague, sweeping charges that overlap with or supersede the powers of department heads.

As Lind also points out, the White House staff that has ballooned since World War II seems close to becoming an extra-constitutional "fourth branch" of government. The creation of presidential "tsars" whose powers overlap or supersede those of department heads is reminiscent of the creation of shadow governments by Hitler and Stalin (see also section D.9.2 -- [What is "Invisible government"?](#)).

Besides the reasons noted above, another cause of increasing political centralisation under capitalism is that industrialisation forces masses of people into alienated wage slavery, breaking their bonds to other people, to the land, and to tradition, which in turn encourages strong central governments to assume the role of surrogate parent and to provide direction for their citizens in political, intellectual, moral, and even spiritual matters [see Hannah Arendt, **The Origins of Totalitarianism**, 1968]. And as Marilyn French emphasises [in **Beyond Power**], the growing concentration of political power in the capitalist state can also be attributed to the form of the corporation, which is a microcosm of the authoritarian state, since it is based on centralised authority, bureaucratic hierarchy, antidemocratic controls, and lack

of individual initiative and autonomy. Thus the millions of people who work for large corporations tend automatically to develop the psychological traits needed to survive and "succeed" under authoritarian rule: notably, obedience, conformity, efficiency, subservience, and fear of responsibility. The political system naturally tends to reflect the psychological conditions created at the workplace, where most people spend about half their time.

Reviewing such trends, Ralph Miliband concludes that "*[h]owever strident the rhetoric of democracy and popular sovereignty may be, and despite the 'populist' overtones which politics must now incorporate, the trend is toward the ever-greater appropriation of power at the top.*" [**Divided Societies**, Oxford, 1989]

## D.9.2. What is "invisible government"?

We've already briefly noted the phenomenon of "invisible government" or "shadow government" (see section [D.9](#)), which occurs when an administration is able to bypass or weaken official government agencies or institutions to implement policies that are not officially permitted. In the US, the Reagan Administration's Iran-Contra affair is an example. During that episode the National Security Council, an arm of the executive branch, secretly funded the Contras, a mercenary counterinsurgency force in Central America, in direct violation of the Boland Amendment which Congress had passed for the specific purpose of prohibiting such funding. The fact that investigators could not prove the President's authorisation or even knowledge of the operation is a tribute to the presidential "deniability" its planners took care to build into it.

Other recent cases of invisible government in the United States involve the weakening of official government agencies to the point where they can no longer effectively carry out their mandate. Reagan's tenure in the White House again provides a number of examples. The Environmental Protection Agency, for instance, was for all practical purposes neutralised when employees dedicated to genuine environmental protection were removed and replaced with people loyal to corporate polluters. Evidence suggests that the Department of the Interior under Reagan-appointee James Watt was similarly co-opted. Such detours around the law are deliberate policy tools that allow presidents to exercise much more actual power than they appear to have on paper.

One of the most potent methods of invisible government in the US is the President's authority to determine foreign and domestic policy through National Security Directives that are kept secret from Congress and the American people. Such NSDs cover a virtually unlimited field of actions, shaping policy that may be radically different from what is stated publicly by the White House and involving such matters as interference with First Amendment rights, initiation of activities that could lead to war, escalation of military conflicts, and even the commitment of billions of dollars in loan guarantees -- all without congressional approval or even knowledge.

According to congressional researchers, past administrations have used national security orders to intensify the war in Vietnam, send US commandos to Africa, and bribe foreign governments. The

Reagan Administration wrote more than 320 secret directives on everything from the future of Micronesia to ways to keep the government running after a nuclear holocaust. Jeffrey Richelson, a leading scholar on US intelligence, says that the Bush Administration had written more than 100 NSDs as of early 1992 on subjects ranging from the drug wars to nuclear weaponry to support for guerrillas in Afghanistan to politicians in Panama. Although the subjects of such orders have been discovered by diligent reporters and researchers, none of the texts has been declassified or released to Congress. Indeed, the Bush Administration consistently refused to release even **unclassified** NSDs!

On October 31, 1989, nine months before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, President Bush signed NSD-26, ordering US agencies to expand political and economic ties with Iraq, giving Iraq access to US financial aid involving a billion-dollar loan guarantee as well as military technology and foodstuffs later sold for cash. Members of Congress, concerned that policy decisions involving billion-dollar commitments of funds should be made jointly with the legislature, dispatched investigators in 1991 to obtain a list of the secret directives. The White House refused to co-operate, ordering the directives kept secret "*because they deal with national security.*" Iraq's default on the loans it obtained through NSD-26 means that American taxpayers are footing the billion-dollar bill.

The underlying authoritarianism of politicians is often belied by their words. For instance, even as Reagan claimed to favour diminished centralisation he was calling for a radical increase in his control of the budget and for extended CIA activities inside the country -- with less congressional surveillance -- both of which served to increase centralised power [Tom Farrer, "*The Making of Reaganism*," New York Review of Books, Jan 21, 1982, cited in Marilyn French, **Beyond Power**, p. 346]. President Clinton's recent use of an Executive Order to bail out Mexico from its debt crisis after Congress failed to appropriate the money falls right into the authoritarian tradition of running the country by fiat.

Perhaps the most disturbing revelation to emerge from the Iran-Contra affair was the Reagan administration's contingency plan for imposing martial law. Alfonso Chardy, a reporter for the **Miami Herald**, revealed in July 1987 that Lt. Col. Oliver North, while serving on the National Security Council's staff, had worked with the Federal Emergency Management Agency on a plan to suspend the Bill of Rights by imposing martial law in the event of "*national opposition to a US military invasion abroad.*" This martial law directive was still in effect in 1988 [Richard O. Curry, ed., **Freedom at Risk: Secrecy, Censorship, and Repression in the 1980s**, Temple University Press, 1988].

Former US Attorney General Edwin Meese declared that the single most important factor in implementing martial law would be "*advance intelligence gathering to facilitate internment of the leaders of civil disturbances*" [**Ibid.**, p. 28}. As discussed in B.16.5, during the 1980s the FBI greatly increased its surveillance of individuals and groups judged to be potentially "subversive," thus providing the Administration with a convenient list of people who would be subject to immediate internment during civil disturbances. The Omnibus Counter-terrorism Bill now being debated in the US Congress would give the President virtually dictatorial powers, by allowing him to imprison and bankrupt dissidents by declaring their organisations "terrorist."

## D.9.3 Why are incarceration rates rising?

A large prison population is another characteristic of authoritarian regimes. Hence the burgeoning US incarceration rate during the past decade, coupled with the recent rapid growth of the prison "industry" must be regarded as further evidence of a drift toward authoritarian government, as one would expect given the phenomenon of "Third-Worldisation."

Prison inmates in the US are predominantly poor, and the sentences handed out to people without social prestige or the resources to defend themselves are much harsher than those received by people with higher incomes who are charged with the same crimes. Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics show that the median incomes of male prisoners before sentencing is about one-third that of the general population. Median incomes of inmates are even lower if the relatively few (and more-affluent) white-collar criminals are not included in the calculations.

Since the poor are disproportionately from minorities, the prison population is also disproportionately minority. By 1992, the American authorities were imprisoning black men at a rate five times higher than the old apartheid regime had done at its worst in South Africa, and there were more prisoners of Mexican descent in the US than in all of Mexico [Phil Wilayto, "*Prisons and Capitalist Restructuring*," **Workers' World**, January 15, 1995].

Michael Specter reports that more than 90 percent of all the offences committed by prison inmates are crimes against property ["*Community Corrections*," **The Nation**, March 13, 1982]. In an era where the richest one percent of the population owns more property than the bottom 90 percent combined, it's hardly a surprise that those at the very bottom should try to recoup illegally some of the maldistributed wealth they are unable to obtain legally.

In the 1980s the United States created mandatory sentences for dozens of drug offences, expanded capital punishment, and greatly increased the powers of police and prosecutors. The result was a doubling of the prison population from 1985 to 1994, according to a report recently issued by the US Department of Justice. Yet the overall crime rate in the U.S. has remained almost constant during the past twenty years, according to the same report. Indeed, the rate dropped 15 percent from 1980 to 1984, yet the number of prisoners increased 43 percent during that same period. The crime rate then increased by 14 percent from 1985 to 1989, while the number of prisoners grew by 52 percent.

Although the growth of the US prison population has been swollen out of proportion to the crime rate by new drug sentencing laws, drug use has not decreased. Repressive measures are clearly not working, as anyone can see, yet they're still favoured over social programmes, which continue to be scaled back. For example, a recently passed crime law in the US commits billions of dollars for more police and prisons, while at the same time the new Republican Congress eliminates family planning clinics, school lunch programmes, summer youth jobs programmes, etc. Prison construction has become a high-growth industry, one of the few "bright" spots in the American economy, attracting much investment by Wall Street vultures.

## D.9.4 Why is government secrecy and surveillance of citizens on the increase?

Authoritarian governments are characterised by fully developed secret police forces, extensive government surveillance of civilians, a high level of official secrecy and censorship, and an elaborate system of state coercion to intimidate and silence dissenters. All of these phenomena have existed in the US for at least eighty years, but since World War II they have taken more extreme forms, especially during the 1980s. In this section we will examine the operations of the secret police.

The creation of an elaborate US "national security" apparatus has come about gradually since 1945 through congressional enactments, numerous executive orders and national security directives, and a series of Supreme Court decisions that have eroded First Amendment rights. The policies of the Reagan administration, however, reflected radical departures from the past, as revealed not only by their comprehensive scope but by their institutionalisation of secrecy, censorship, and repression in ways that will be difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate. As Richard Curry points out, the Reagan administration's success stems *"from major structural and technological changes that have occurred in American society during the twentieth century -- especially the emergence of the modern bureaucratic State and the invention of sophisticated electronic devices that make surveillance possible in new and insidious ways."* [Curry, **Op. Cit.**, p. 4]

The FBI has used "countersubversive" surveillance techniques and kept lists of people and groups judged to be potential national security threats since the days of the Red Scare in the 1920s. Such activities were expanded in the late 1930s when Franklin Roosevelt instructed the FBI to gather information about Fascist and Communist activities in the US and to conduct investigations into possible espionage and sabotage. FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover interpreted these directives as authorising open-ended inquiries into a very broad category of potential "subversives"; and by repeatedly misinforming a succession of careless or indifferent presidents and attorneys general about the precise scope of Roosevelt's directives, Hoover managed for more than 30 years to elicit tacit executive approval for continuous FBI investigations into an ever-expanding class of political dissidents [Geoffrey R. Stone, *"The Reagan Administration, the First Amendment, and FBI Domestic Security Investigations,"* in Curry, **Ibid.**].

The advent of the Cold War, ongoing conflicts with the Soviet Union, and fears of the *"international Communist conspiracy"* provided justification not only for covert CIA operations and American military intervention in countries all over the globe, but also contributed to the FBI's rationale for expanding its domestic surveillance activities.

Thus in 1957, without authorisation from Congress or any president, Hoover launched a highly secret operation called COINTELPRO:

*"From 1957 to 1974, the bureau opened investigative files on more than half a million 'subversive'*



*Americans. In the course of these investigations, the bureau, in the name of 'national security,' engaged in widespread wire-tapping, bugging, mail-openings, and break-ins. Even more insidious was the bureau's extensive use of informers and undercover operative to infiltrate and report on the activities and membership of 'subversive' political associations ranging from the Socialist Workers Party to the NAACP to the Medical Committee for Human Rights to a Milwaukee Boy Scout troop." [Stone, **Ibid.**, p. 274].*

But COINTELPRO involved much more than just investigation and surveillance. It was used to discredit, weaken, and ultimately destroy the New Left and Black radical movements of the sixties and early seventies, i.e. to silence the major sources of political dissent and opposition.

The FBI fomented violence through the use of agents provocateurs and destroyed the credibility of movement leaders by framing them, bringing false charges against them, distributing offensive materials published in their name, spreading false rumours, sabotaging equipment, stealing money, and other dirty tricks. By such means the Bureau exacerbated internal frictions within movements, turning members against each other as well as other groups.

Government documents show the FBI and police involved in creating acrimonious disputes which ultimately led to the break-up of such groups as Students for a Democratic Society, the Black Panther Party, and the Liberation News Service. The Bureau also played a part in the failure of such groups to form alliances across racial, class, and regional lines. The FBI is implicated in the assassination of Malcolm X, who was killed in a "factional dispute" that the Bureau bragged of having "developed" in the Nation of Islam, and of Martin Luther King, Jr., who was the target of an elaborate FBI plot to drive him to suicide before he was conveniently killed by a sniper. Other radicals were portrayed as criminals, adulterers, or government agents, while still others were murdered in phoney "shoot-outs" where the only shooting was done by the police.

These activities finally came to public attention because of the Watergate investigations, congressional hearings, and information obtained under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). In response to the revelations of FBI abuse, Attorney General Edward Levi in 1976 set forth a set of public guidelines governing the initiation and scope of the bureau's domestic security investigations, severely restricting its ability to investigate political dissidents.

The Levi guidelines, however, proved to be only a temporary reversal of the trend. Although throughout his presidency Ronald Reagan professed to be against the increase of state power in regard to domestic policy, he in fact expanded the power of the national bureaucracy for "national security" purposes in systematic and unprecedented ways. One of the most significant of these was his immediate elimination of the safeguards against FBI abuse that the Levi guidelines had been designed to prevent. This was accomplished through two interrelated executive branch initiatives: Executive Order 12333, issued in 1981, and Attorney General William French Smith's guidelines, which replaced Levi's in 1983.

The Smith guidelines permitted the FBI to launch domestic security investigations if the facts

"*reasonably indicated*" that groups or individuals were involved in criminal activity. More importantly, however, the new guidelines also authorised the FBI to "*anticipate or prevent crime.*" As a result, the FBI could now investigate groups or individuals whose statements "*advocated*" criminal activity or indicated an **apparent intent** to engage in crime, particularly crimes of violence.

As Curry notes, the language of the Smith guidelines provided FBI officials with sufficient interpretative latitude to investigate virtually any group or individual it chose to target, including political activists who opposed the administration's foreign policy. Not surprisingly, under the new guidelines the Bureau immediately began investigating a wide variety of political dissidents, quickly making up for the time it had lost since 1976. Congressional sources show that in 1985 alone the FBI conducted 96 investigations of groups and individuals opposed to the Reagan Administration's Central American policies, including religious organisations who expressed solidarity with Central American refugees.

The Smith guidelines only allowed the Bureau to investigate dissidents. Now, however, there is a far greater threat to the US Bill of Rights waiting in the wings: the so-called Omnibus Counter-Terrorism Bill. If passed, this bill would allow the President, on his own initiative and by his own definition, to declare any person or organisation "terrorist."

Section 301(c)6 states that these presidential rulings will be considered as conclusive and cannot be appealed in court. The Attorney General would also be handed new enforcement powers, e.g. suspects would be considered guilty unless proven innocent, and the source or nature of the evidence brought against suspects would not have to be revealed if the Justice Department claimed a "national security" interest in suppressing such facts, as of course it would. Suspects could also be held without bail and deported for any reason if they were visiting aliens. Resident aliens would be entitled to a hearing, but could nevertheless be deported even if no crime were proven! US citizens could be put in jail for up to ten years and pay a \$250,000 fine if declared guilty.

An equally scary provision of the Counter-Terrorism Bill is Section 603, which subsumes all "terrorist" crimes under the RICO (Racketeer-Influenced Criminal Organisation) civil asset forfeiture statutes. Thus anyone merely accused of "interfering" or "impeding" or "threatening" a current or former federal employee could have all their property seized under "conspiracy to commit terrorism" charges. Some in Congress now want to designate all local gun-related charges as federal terrorist crimes. Obviously the Counter-Terrorism Bill would simply add to the abuses that are already widespread in drug cases under the seizure and forfeiture laws. This is hardly surprising, since Federal and state agencies and local police are encouraged to make seizures and get to keep the property for their own use, and since anonymous informants who make charges leading to seizures are entitled to part of the property seized.

If this bill passes, it is certain to be used against the Left, as COINTELPRO was in the past. For it will greatly increase the size and funding of the FBI and give it the power to engage in "anti-terrorist" activities all over the country, without judicial oversight. The mind reels at the ability this bill would give the government to suppress dissidents or critics of capitalism, who have historically been the favourite targets of FBI abuses. For example, if an agent provocateur were to bring an illegal stick of

dynamite to a peaceful meeting of philosophical anarchists, he could later report everyone at the meeting to the government on charges of conspiracy to commit a terrorist act. The agent could even blow something up with the dynamite and claim that other members knew of the plan. Everyone in the group could then have all their property seized and be jailed for up to ten years!

Even if the Counter-Terrorism Bill doesn't pass in its present form, the fact that a draconian measure like this is even being considered says volumes about the direction in which the US -- and by implication the other "advanced" capitalist states -- are headed.

## D.9.5 But doesn't authoritarian government always involve censorship?

Yes. And central governments have been quietly increasing their power over the media for the past several decades. Monopolistic control of mass communications may not be readily evident in nominally democratic societies, where there seem to be many different sources of information. Yet on closer inspection it turns out that virtually all the major media -- those that reach the vast majority of people -- promulgate essentially the same neocapitalist world view. This is because the so-called "free" press is owned by a handful of capitalistic media conglomerates. Such uniformity insures that any facts, concepts, or opinions that clash with or tend to discredit the fundamental principles of that world view are unlikely to reach a wide audience (see section [D.3](#)).

There are numerous ties between government, news magazines, and newspapers. Corporate interests dominate television and radio; and for reasons described earlier, the interests of major corporations largely coincide with those of the government. The tendency in recent years has been toward the absorption of small independent print media, especially newspapers, by conglomerates that derive their major profits from such industries as steel, oil, and telephone equipment. As Marilyn French notes, the effect of these conglomerates' control *"is to warn communications media away from anything that might be disturbing, and toward a bland, best-of-all-possible-worlds point of view. Although people have a wide range of reading and viewing material to choose from, the majority of it offers the same kinds of distraction -- fads and fashions, surface glitter -- or tranquillisation: all problems are solvable, no serious injustice or evil is permitted to continue"* [French, **Op. Cit.**, p. 350]. In other words, people are granted ever-increasing access to an ever-decreasing range of "acceptable" ideas.

These trends represent an unofficial and unsystematic form of censorship. In the United States, however, the federal government has been extending official and systematic forms of censorship as well. Again, the Reagan Administration proceeded furthest in this regard. In 1983 alone, more than 28,000 speeches, articles, and books written by government employees were submitted to government censors for clearance. The Reagan government even set a precedent for restricting information that is not classified. This it accomplished by passing laws requiring all government employees with security clearances to sign Standard Form 189, which allows them to be prosecuted for divulging not only classified information but that which is "nonclassified but classifiable." The latter is a deliberately vague, Catch-22 category that has sufficient interpretative latitude to allow for the harassment of most would-be whistle-

blowers [Curry, **Op. Cit.**].

The United States Information Agency (USIA), which sends scholars overseas as part of its AMPARTS programme of educational and cultural exchanges, has attempted to screen the political opinions of scholars it selects for foreign speaking engagements. In 1983 the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Operations criticised USIA officials for "*violating the letter and spirit of its charter*" in choosing its AMPARTS speakers on the basis of "*partisan political ideology*."

In early 1984 the USIA's policies became a national scandal when the **Washington Post** revealed that since late 1981 the USIA had been compiling a blacklist containing not only the names of prominent academics but of national figures, including Coretta Scott King, Congressman Jack Brooks, and former Senator Gary Hart. Under the Immigration, Naturalisation, and Nationality Act (known as "the McCarran Act") foreign nationals have been denied entry into the United States because of their political and ideological beliefs. Among the most notable among the thousands who have been so denied are Nobel Prize-winning authors Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Czeslaw Milosz, as well as author Carlos Fuentes, playwright Dario Fo, actress Franca Rame, novelist Doris Lessing, NATO Deputy Supreme Commander Nino Pasti, renowned Canadian writer Farley Mowat, American-born feminist writer Margaret Randall, and Hortensia Allende, widow of the former Socialist president of Chile, Salvador Allende.

In perhaps the most disturbing censorship development in recent years, the Reagan Administration used the powers of the Trading with the Enemy Act to place an embargo on magazines and newspapers from Cuba, North Vietnam, and Albania (but not China or the ex-Soviet Union), and confiscated certain Iranian books purchased by television journalists abroad. These materials were not embargoed because they contained American secrets, but simply because it was thought they might contain information the Administration did not want Americans to know [French, **Op. Cit.**, p. 433].

Official censorship was also highly evident during the recent Persian Gulf massacre. In this one-sided conflict, the government not only severely curtailed the press's access to information about the war, restricting reporters to escorted "press pools," but to a large extent turned the major news media into compliant instruments of Administration propaganda. This was accomplished by creating competition between the TV networks and news services for the limited number of slots in the pools, thus making news departments dependent on the government's good will and turning news anchors into cheerleaders for the US-led slaughter.

Reporting on the Gulf War was also directly censored by the military, by news and photo agencies, or by both. For instance, when award-winning journalist Jon Alpert, a longtime NBC stringer, "*came back from Iraq with spectacular videotape of Basra [Iraq's second largest city, population 800,000] and other areas of Iraq devastated by US bombing, NBC president Michael Gartner not only ordered that the footage not be aired but forbade Alpert from working for the network in the future*" [Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, **Extra, Special Issue on the Gulf War**, 1991, p. 15].

As John R. Macarthur has documented, congressional approval for the war might not have been forthcoming without a huge preliminary propaganda and disinformation campaign designed to demonise Saddam Hussein and his troops. The centrepiece of this campaign -- the now infamous story of Iraqi soldiers allegedly ripping premature Kuwaiti babies from their incubators and leaving them to die on the cold hospital floor -- was a total fabrication masterminded by an American public relations firm funded by the Kuwaiti government-in-exile and eagerly disseminated by the Administration with the help of a credulous and uncritical news establishment [John R. Macarthur, **Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War**, Hill & Wang, 1992; also, John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton, **Toxic Sludge is Good For You! Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry**, Common Courage Press, 1995].

These trends toward a system of official and unofficial censorship do not bode well for future freedom of speech and of the press. For they establish precedents for muzzling, intimidating, and co-opting the primary sources of public information -- precedents that can be invoked whenever an administration finds it convenient. This is just one more piece of evidence that late capitalism is leading inexorably toward authoritarian government.

## D.9.6 What does the Right want?

In his book **Post-Conservative America** Kevin Phillips, one of the most knowledgeable and serious conservative ideologues, discusses the possibility of fundamental alterations that he regards as desirable in the US government. His proposals leave no doubt about the direction in which the Right wishes to proceed. *"Governmental power is too diffused to make difficult and necessary economic and technical decisions,"* Phillips maintains. *"[A]ccordingly, the nature of that power must be re-thought. Power at the federal level must be augmented, and lodged for the most part in the executive branch"* [p. 218].

In the model state Phillips describes, Congress would be reduced to a mere tool of a presidency grown even more "imperial" than it already is, with congressional leaders serving in the Cabinet and the two-party system merged into a single-party coalition. Before we dismiss this idea as impossible to implement, let's remember that the distinction between the two major parties has already been virtually obliterated, as each is controlled by the corporate elite, albeit by different factions within it.

Despite many tactical disagreements, virtually all members of this elite share a basic set of principles, attitudes, ideals, and values. Whether Democrat or Republican, most of them have graduated from the same Ivy League schools, belong to the same exclusive social clubs, serve on the same interlocking boards of directors of the same major corporations, and send their children to the same private boarding schools [See G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America Now?* 1983; C. Wright Mills, **The Power Elite**, 1956]. Perhaps most importantly, they share the same psychology, which means that they have the same priorities and interests: namely, those of corporate America.

Hence there's actually only one party already -- the Business Party -- which wears two different masks to hide its real face from the public. Similar remarks apply to the liberal democratic regimes in the rest of

the advanced capitalist states. The absence of a true opposition party, which itself is a main characteristic of authoritarian regimes, is thus an accomplished fact already, and has been so for many years.

Besides the merging of the major political parties, other forces are leading inexorably toward the scenario described by Phillips. For instance, the power of the executive branch continues to grow because the authority of Congress has been progressively weakened by scandals, partisan bickering, gridlock, and ongoing revelations of legislative corruption. Indeed, bribe-taking, influence-peddling, check-bouncing, conflicts of interest, shady deals, sex scandals, and general incompetence now seem almost routine on Capitol Hill. Unless something is done to restore congressional respectability, the climate will remain conducive to a further consolidation of power in the presidency.

Phillips assures us that all the changes he envisions can be accomplished without altering the Constitution. Such marvels are indeed possible. The Emperor Augustus centralised all real power in his own hands without disbanding the Roman Senate or the Roman Republic; Hitler implemented his Nazi programmes while leaving the Weimar constitution intact; Stalin ruled under the revolutionary constitution which was theoretically democratic.

The facts cited here as evidence for the gradual authoritarianisation of the United States have been canvassed before by others, sometimes accompanied by warnings of impending dictatorship. So far such warnings have proven to be premature. What is especially alarming today, however, is that the many signs of growing authoritarianism examined above are now coinciding with the symptoms of a social breakdown -- a "coincidence" which in the past has heralded the approach of tyranny.

Fully authoritarian regimes in the US and other First World nations would represent far more than a mere threat to citizens' civil liberties and their hopes for a better society. For authoritarian regimes tend to be associated with reckless military adventurism led by autocratic heads of state. Thus, in a nuclear world in which Europe and Japan followed the US lead toward authoritarian government, the likelihood of nuclear aggression by irresponsible politicians would continue to grow. In that case, the former anxieties of the Cold War would seem mild by comparison. Hence the urgency of the anarchist programme of anti-authoritarianism, political decentralisation, and grassroots democracy -- the only real antidotes to the disturbing trends described above.

As an aside we should note that many naysayers and ruling class apologists often deny the growing authoritarianism as "paranoia" or "conspiracy theorising." The common retort is "but if things are as bad as you say, how come the government lets you write this seditious FAQ?"

The reason we can write this work unmolested is testimony to the lack of power possessed by the public at large, in the existing political culture--that is, countercultural movements needn't be a concern to the government until they become broader-based and capable of challenging the existing economic order--only then is it "necessary" for the repressive, authoritarian forces to work on undermining the movement.

So long as there is no effective organising and no threat to the interests of the ruling elite, people are permitted to say whatever they want. This creates the illusion that the society is open to all ideas, when, in fact, it isn't. But, as the decimation of the Wobblies and anarchist movement after the First World War first illustrated, the government will seek to eradicate any movement that poses a significant threat.

The proper application of spin to dissident ideology can make it seem that **any** alternatives to the present system "just wouldn't work" or "are utopian", even when such alternatives are in the self-interest of the population at large. This ideological pruning creates the misperception in people's minds that radical theories haven't been successfully implemented because they are inherently flawed--and naturally, the current authoritarian ideology is portrayed as the only "sane" course of action for people to follow.

For example, most Americans reject socialism outright, without any understanding or even willingness to understand what socialism is really about. This isn't because (libertarian) socialism is wrong; it's a direct result of capitalist propagandising of the past 70 years (and its assertion that "socialism" equals Stalinism).

Extending this attitude to the people themselves, authoritarians (with generous help from the corporate press) paint dissidents as "crackpots" and "extremists," while representing themselves as reasonable "moderates", regardless of the relative positions they are advocating. In this way, a community opposing a toxic waste incinerator in their area can be lambasted in the press as the bad guys, when what is really happening is a local community is practising democracy, daring to challenge the corporate/government authoritarians!

In the Third World, dissenters are typically violently murdered and tossed into unmarked mass graves; here, in the First World, more subtle subversion must take place. The "invisible hand" of advanced capitalist authoritarian societies is no less effective; the end result is the same, if the methodology differs--the elimination of alternatives to the present socio-economic order.

## H.5 What is vanguardism and why do anarchists reject it?

Many socialists follow the ideas of Lenin and, in particular, his ideas on vanguard parties. These ideas were expounded by Lenin in his (in)famous work, **What is to be Done?**, which is considered as one of the important books in the development of Bolshevism.

The core of these ideas is the concept of "*vanguardism*," or the "*vanguard party*." According to this perspective, socialists need to organise together in a party, based on the principles of "*democratic centralism*," which aims to gain a decisive influence in the class struggle. The ultimate aim of such a party is revolution and its seizure of power. Its short term aim is to gather into it all "*class conscious*" workers into a "*efficient*" and "*effective*" party, alongside members of other classes who consider themselves as revolutionary Marxists. The party would be strictly centralised, with all members expected to submit to party decisions, speak in one voice and act in one way. Without this "*vanguard*," injecting its politics into the working class (who, it is argued, can only reach trade union consciousness by its own efforts), a revolution is impossible.

Lenin laid the foundation of this kind of party in his book **What is to be Done?** and the vision of the "*vanguard*" party was explicitly formalised in the Communist International. As Lenin put it, "*Bolshevism has created the ideological and tactical foundations of a Third International . . . Bolshevism can serve as a model of tactics for all.*" [Collected Works, vol. 28, p. 292-3] Using the Russian Communist Party as its model, Bolshevik ideas on party organisation were raised as a model for revolutionaries across the world. Since then, the various followers of Leninism and its offshoots like Trotskyism have organised themselves in this manner (with varying success).

The wisdom of applying an organisational model that had been developed in the semi-feudal conditions of Tsarist Russia to **every** country, regardless of its level of development, has been questioned by anarchists from the start. After all, could it not be wiser to build upon the revolutionary tendencies which had developed in specific countries rather than import a new model which had been created for, and shaped by, radically different social, political and economic conditions? The wisdom of applying the vanguard model is not questioned on these (essentially materialist) points by those who subscribe to it. While revolutionary workers in the advanced capitalist nations subscribed to anarchist and syndicalist ideas, this tradition is rejected in favour of one developed by, in the main, bourgeois intellectuals in a nation which was still primarily feudal and absolutist. The lessons learned from years of struggle in actual capitalist societies were simply rejected in favour of those from a party operating under Tsarism. While most supporters of vanguardism will admit that conditions now are different than in Tsarist Russia, they still subscribe to organisational method developed in that context and justify it, ironically enough, because of its "success" in the totally different conditions that prevailed in Russia in the early 20th Century! And Leninists claim to be materialists! Perhaps the reason why Bolshevism rejected the materialist approach was because most of the revolutionary movements in advanced capitalist countries



were explicitly anti-parliamentarian, direct actionist, decentralist, federalist and influenced by libertarian ideas? This materialist analysis was a key aspect of the council-communist critique of Lenin's **Left-Wing Communism**, for example (see Herman Gorter's **Open Letter to Comrade Lenin** for one excellent reply to Bolshevik arguments, tactics and assumptions).

However, this attempt to squeeze every working class movement into **one** "officially approved" model dates back to Marx and Engels. Faced with any working class movement which did **not** subscribe to their vision of what they should be doing (namely organised in political parties to take part in "political action," i.e. standing in bourgeois elections) they simply labelled it as the product of non-proletarian "sects." They went so far as to gerrymander the 1872 conference of the First International to make acceptance of "political action" mandatory on all sections in an attempt to destroy anarchist influence in it.

So this section of our FAQ will explain why anarchists reject this model. In our view, the whole concept of a "*vanguard party*" is fundamentally anti-socialist. Rather than present an effective and efficient means of achieving revolution, the Leninist model is elitist, hierarchical and highly inefficient in achieving a socialist society. At best, these parties play a harmful effect in the class struggle by alienating activists and militants with their organisational principles and manipulative tactics within popular structures and groups. At worse, these parties can seize power and create a new form of class society (a state capitalist one) in which the working class is oppressed by new bosses (namely, the party hierarchy and its appointees). As we discuss in [section H.5.9](#), their "efficiency" is a false economy.

However, before discussing why anarchists reject "vanguardism" we need to stress a few points. Firstly, anarchists recognise the obvious fact that the working class is divided in terms of political consciousness. Secondly, from this fact most anarchists recognise the need to organise together to spread our ideas as well as taking part in, influencing and learning from the class struggle. As such, anarchists have long been aware of the need for revolutionaries to organise **as revolutionaries**. Thirdly, anarchists are well aware of the importance of revolutionary minorities playing an inspiring and "leading" role in the class struggle. We do not reject the need for revolutionaries to "*give a lead*" in struggles, we reject the idea of institutionalised leadership and the creation of a leader/led hierarchy implicit (and sometimes no so implicit) in vanguardism.

As such, we do not oppose "*vanguardism*" for these reasons. So when Leninists like Tony Cliff argue that it is "*unevenness in the class [which] makes the party necessary*," anarchists reply that "*unevenness in the class*" makes it essential that revolutionaries organise together to influence the class but that organisation does not and need not take the form of a vanguard party. [Tony Cliff, **Lenin**, vol. 2, p. 149] This is because we reject the concept and practice for three reasons.

Firstly, and most importantly, anarchists reject the underlying assumption of vanguardism. As we discuss in the [next section](#), vanguardism is based on the argument that "*socialist consciousness*" has to be introduced into the working class from outside. We argue that not only is this position empirically false, it is fundamentally anti-socialist in nature. This is because it logically denies that the emancipation

of the working class is the task of the working class itself. Moreover, it serves to justify elite rule. Some Leninists, embarrassed by the obvious anti-socialist nature of this concept, try and argue that Lenin (and so Leninism) does not hold this position. As we prove in [section H.5.4](#), such claims are false.

Secondly, there is the question of organisational structure. Vanguard parties are based on the principle of "*democratic centralism*" (see [section H.5.5](#)). Anarchists argue that such parties, while centralised, are not, in fact, democratic nor can they be. As such, the "*revolutionary*" or "*socialist*" party is no such thing as it reflects the structure of the capitalist system it claims to oppose. We discuss this in sections [H.5.6](#) and [H.5.10](#).

Lastly, anarchists argue that such parties are, despite the claims of their supporters, not actually very efficient or effective in the revolutionary sense of the word. At best, they hinder the class struggle by being slow to respond to rapidly changing situations. At worse, they are "efficient" in shaping both the revolution and the post-revolutionary society in a hierarchical fashion, so re-creating class rule. We discuss this aspect of vanguardism in [section H.5.9](#).

So these are key aspects of the anarchist critique of vanguardism, which we discuss in more depth in the following sections. It is a bit artificial to divide these issues into different sections because they are all related. The role of the party implies a specific form of organisation (as Lenin himself stressed), the form of the party influences its effectiveness. However, it is for ease of presentation we divide up our discussion so.

## H.5.1 Why are vanguard parties anti-socialist?

The reason why vanguard parties are anti-socialist is simply because of the role assigned to them by Lenin, which he thought was vital. Simply put, without the party, no revolution would be possible. As Lenin put it in 1900, "*[i]solated from Social-Democracy, the working class movement becomes petty and inevitably becomes bourgeois.*" [**Collected Works**, vol. 4, p. 368]

In **What is to be Done?**, he expands on this position:

*"Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers **only from without**, that is, only outside of the economic struggle, outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships between **all** the various classes and strata and the state and the government -- the sphere of the interrelations between **all** the various classes."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 112]

Thus the role of the party is to inject socialist politics into a class incapable of developing them itself.

Lenin is at pains to stress the Marxist orthodoxy of his claims and quotes the "*profoundly true and*

*important*" comments of Karl Kautsky on the subject. [Op. Cit., p. 81] Kautsky, considered the "pope" of Social-Democracy, stated that it was *"absolutely untrue"* that *"socialist consciousness"* was a *"necessary and direct result of the proletarian class struggle."* Rather, *"socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other . . . Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge . . . The vehicles of science are not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia: it was on the minds of some members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians who, in their turn, introduced it into the proletarian class struggle."* Kautsky stressed that *"socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without."* [quoted by Lenin, Op. Cit., pp. 81-2]

Lenin, as is obvious, wholeheartedly agreed with this position (any attempt to claim that he did not or later rejected it is nonsense, as we prove in [section H.5.4](#)). Lenin, with his usual modesty, claimed to speak on behalf of the workers when he wrote that *"intellectuals must talk to us, and tell us more about what we do not know and what we can never learn from our factory and 'economic' experience, that is, you must give us political knowledge."* [Op. Cit., p. 108] Thus we have Lenin painting a picture of a working class incapable of developing "political knowledge" or *"socialist consciousness"* by its own efforts and so is reliant on members of the party, themselves either radical elements of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie or educated by them, to provide it with such knowledge.

The obvious implication of this argument is that the working class cannot liberate itself by its own efforts. After all, if the working class cannot develop its own political theory by its own efforts then it cannot conceive of transforming society and, at best, can see only the need to work within capitalism for reforms to improve its position in society. Without the radical bourgeois to provide the working class with "socialist" ideas, a socialist movement, let alone society, is impossible. A class whose members cannot develop political knowledge by its own actions cannot emancipate itself. It is, by necessity, dependent on others to shape and form its movements. To quote Trotsky's telling analogy on the respective roles of party and class, leaders and led:

*"Without a guiding organisation, the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston. But nevertheless, what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam."* [History of the Russian Revolution, vol. 1, p. 17]

While Trotsky's mechanistic analogy may be considered as somewhat crude, it does expose the underlying assumptions of Bolshevism. After all, did not Lenin argue that the working class could not develop *"socialist consciousness"* by themselves and that it had to be introduced from without? How can you expect steam to create a piston? You cannot. Thus we have a blind, elemental force incapable of conscious thought being guided by a creation of science, the piston (which, of course, is a product of the work of the *"vehicles of science,"* namely the **bourgeois intelligentsia**). In the Leninist perspective, if revolutions are the locomotives of history (to use Marx's words) then the masses are the steam, the party the locomotive and the leaders the train driver. The idea of a future society being constructed democratically from below by the workers themselves rather than through occasionally elected leaders

seems to have passed Bolshevism past. This is unsurprising, given that the Bolsheviks saw the workers in terms of blindly moving steam in a box, something incapable of being creative unless an outside force gave them direction (instructions).

Cornelius Castoriadis provides a good critique of the implications of the Leninist position:

*"No positive content, nothing new capable of providing the foundation for the reconstruction of society could arise out of a mere awareness of poverty. From the experience of life under capitalism the proletariat could derive no new principles either for organising this new society or for orientating it in another direction. Under such conditions, the proletarian revolution becomes . . . a simple reflex revolt against hunger. It is impossible to see how socialist society could ever be the result of such a reflex . . . Their situation forces them to suffer the consequences of capitalism's contradictions, but in no way does it lead them to discover its causes. An acquaintance with these causes comes not from experiencing the production process but from theoretical knowledge . . . This knowledge may be accessible to individual workers, but not to the proletariat **qua** proletariat. Driven by its revolt against poverty, but incapable of self-direction since its experiences does not give it a privileged viewpoint on reality, the proletariat according to this outlook, can only be an infantry in the service of a general staff of specialists. These specialists **know** (from considerations that the proletariat as such does not have access to) what is going wrong with present-day society and how it must be modified. The traditional view of the economy and its revolutionary perspective can only found, and actually throughout history has only founded, a **bureaucratic politics** . . . [W]hat we have outlined are the consequences that follow objectively from this theory. And they have been affirmed in an ever clearer fashion within the actual historical movement of Marxism, culminating in Stalinism."* [Social and Political Writings, vol. 2, pp. 257-8]

Thus we have a privileged position for the party and a perspective which can (and did) justify party dictatorship **over** the proletariat. Given the perspective that the working class cannot formulate its own "ideology" by its own efforts, of its incapacity to move beyond "*trade union consciousness*" independently of the party, the clear implication is that the party could in no way be bound by the predominant views of the working class. As the party embodies "*socialist consciousness*" (and this arises outside the working class and its struggles) then opposition of the working class to the party signifies a failure of the class to resist alien influences. As Lenin put it:

*"Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses of the workers in the process of their movement, **the only choice is: either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course . . . Hence, to belittle socialist ideology in any way, to deviate from it in the slightest degree means strengthening bourgeois ideology. There is a lot of talk about spontaneity, but the spontaneous development of the labour movement leads to its becoming subordinated to bourgeois ideology . . . Hence our task, the task of Social-Democracy, is to combat spontaneity, to divert the labour movement from its spontaneous, trade unionist striving to go under the wing of the***

*bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social-Democracy.*" [Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 82-3]

The implications of this argument became clear once the Bolsheviks seized power. As a justification for party dictatorship, you would be hard pressed to find any better. If the working class revolts against the ruling party, then we have a "*spontaneous*" development which, inevitably, is an expression of bourgeois ideology. As the party represents socialist consciousness, any deviation in working class support for it simply meant that the working class was being "*subordinated*" to the bourgeoisie. This meant, obviously, that to "*belittle*" the "*role*" of the party by questioning its rule meant to "*strengthen bourgeois ideology*" and when workers spontaneously went on strike or protested against the party's rule, the party had to "*combat*" these strivings in order to maintain working class rule! As the "*masses of the workers*" cannot develop an "*independent ideology*," the workers are rejecting socialist ideology in favour of bourgeois ideology. The party, in order to defend the "*the revolution*" (even the "*rule of the workers*") has to impose its will onto the class, to "*combat spontaneity*."

As we saw in [section H.1.2](#), none of the leading Bolsheviks were shy about drawing these conclusions once in power and faced with working class revolt against their rule. Indeed, they raised the idea that the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*" was also, in fact, the "*dictatorship of the party*" and, as we discuss in [section H.3.8](#) integrated this into their theory of the state. Thus, Leninist ideology implies that "*workers' power*" exists independently of the workers. This means that the sight of the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*" (i.e. the Bolshevik government) repressing the proletariat, who cannot develop socialist consciousness by themselves, is to be expected.

This elitist perspective of the party, the idea that it and it alone possesses knowledge can be seen from the resolution of the Communist International on the role of the party. It stated that "*the working class without an independent political party is a body without a head.*" [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 1, p. 194] This use of biological analogies says more about Bolshevism than its authors intended. After all, it suggests a division of labour which is unchangeable. Can the hands evolve to do their own thinking? Of course not. Thus, yet again, we have an image of the class as unthinking brute force.

The implications of this model can be drawn from Victor Serge's comments from 1919. As he put it, the party "*is in a sense the nervous system of the class. Simultaneously the consciousness and the active, physical organisation of the dispersed forces of the proletariat, which are often ignorant of themselves and often remain latent or express themselves contradictorily.*" And the masses, what is their role? Well, the party is "*supported by the entire working population,*" although, strangely enough, "*it maintains its unique situation in dictatorial fashion.*" He admits "*the energies which have just triumphed . . . exist outside*" the party and that "*they constitute its strength only because it represents them knowingly.*" Thus the workers are "[*b*ehind" the communists, "*sympathising instinctively with the party and carrying out the menial tasks required by the revolution.*" [**Revolution in Danger**, p. 67, p. 66 and p. 6] Can we be surprised that the workers have the "*menial tasks*" to perform when the party is the conscious element? Equally, can we be surprised that this situation is maintained "*in dictatorial fashion*"? It was precisely

this kind of social division of labour between manual and mental labour which helped cause the Russian revolution in the first place!

As the Cohen-Bendit brothers argue, the *"Leninist belief that the workers cannot spontaneously go beyond the level of trade union consciousness is tantamount to beheading the proletariat, and then insinuating the Party as the head . . . Lenin was wrong, and in fact, in Russia the Party was forced to decapitate the workers' movement with the help of the political police and the Red Army under the brilliant leadership of Trotsky and Lenin."* [**Obsolute Communism**, pp. 194-5]

As well as explaining the subsequent embrace of party dictatorship **over** the working class, vanguardism also explains the notorious inefficiency of Leninist parties faced with revolutionary situations we discuss in [section H.5.8](#). After all, basing themselves on the perspective that all spontaneous movements are inherently bourgeois they could not help but be opposed to autonomous class struggle and the organisations and tactics it generates. James C. Scott, in his excellent discussion of the roots and flaws in Lenin's ideas on the party, makes the obvious point that since, for Lenin, *"authentic, revolutionary class consciousness could never develop autonomously within the working class, it followed that that the actual political outlook of workers was always a threat to the vanguard party."* [**Seeing like a State**, p. 155] As Maurice Brinton argues, the *"Bolshevik cadres saw their role as the leadership of the revolution. Any movement not initiated by them or independent of their control could only evoke their suspicion."* These developments, of course, did not occur by chance or accidentally. As Brinton notes, *"a given ideological premise (the preordained hegemony of the Party) led necessarily to certain conclusions in practice."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. xi and p. xii]

Bakunin expressed the implications of the vanguardist perspective extremely well. It is worthwhile quoting him at length:

*"Idealists of all sorts, metaphysicians, positivists, those who uphold the priority of science over life, the doctrinaire revolutionists -- all of them champion with equal zeal although differing in their argumentation, the idea of the State and State power, seeing in them, quite logically from their point of view, the only salvation of society. **Quite logically**, I say, having take as their basis the tenet -- a fallacious tenet in our opinion -- that thought is prior to life, and abstract theory is prior to social practice, and that therefore sociological science must become the starting point for social upheavals and social reconstruction -- they necessarily arrived at the conclusion that since thought, theory, and science are, for the present at least, the property of only a very few people, those few should direct social life; and that on the morrow of the Revolution the new social organisation should be set up not by the free integration of workers' associations, villages, communes, and regions from below upward, conforming to the needs and instincts of the people, but solely by the dictatorial power of this learned minority, allegedly expressing the general will of the people."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 283-4]

The idea that *"socialist consciousness"* can exist independently of the working class and its struggle

suggests exactly the perspective Bakunin was critiquing. For vanguardism, the abstract theory of socialism exists prior to the class struggle and exists waiting to be brought to the masses by the educated few. The net effect is, as we have argued, to lay the ground for party dictatorship. The basic idea of vanguardism, namely that the working class is incapable of developing "*socialist consciousness*" by its own efforts, contradicts the socialist maxim that "*the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself.*" Thus the concept is fundamentally anti-socialist, a justification for elite rule and the continuation of class society in new, party approved, ways.

## H.5.2 Have vanguardist assumptions been validated?

As discussed in the [last section](#), Lenin claimed that workers can only reach a "*trade union consciousness*" by their own efforts. Anarchists argued that such an assertion is empirically false. The history of the labour movement is marked by revolts and struggles which went far further than just seeking reforms and revolutionary theories derived from such experiences.

As such, the category of the "*economic struggle*" corresponds to no known social reality. Every "*economic*" struggle is "*political*" in some sense and those involved can, and do, learn political lessons from them. As Kropotkin noted in the 1880s, there "*is almost no serious strike which occurs together with the appearance of troops, the exchange of blows and some acts of revolt. Here they fight with the troops; there they march on the factories . . . Thanks to government intervention the rebel against the factory becomes the rebel against the State.*" [quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism**, p. 256] If history shows anything, it shows that workers are more than capable of going beyond "*trade union consciousness.*" The Paris Commune, the 1848 revolts and, ironically enough, the 1905 and 1917 Russian Revolutions show that the masses are capable of revolutionary struggles in which the self-proclaimed "*vanguard*" of socialists spend most of their time trying to catch up with them!

These last two examples, the Russian Revolutions, also help to discredit Lenin's argument that the workers cannot develop socialist consciousness alone due to the power of bourgeois ideology. This, according to Lenin, required the bourgeois intelligentsia to import "*socialist*" ideology from outside the movement. Lenin's argument is flawed. Simply put, if the working class is subjected to bourgeois influences, then so are the "*professional*" revolutionaries within the party. Indeed, the strength of such influences on the "professionals" of revolution **must** be higher as they are not part of proletarian life. After all, if social being determines consciousness than if a revolutionary is no longer part of the working class, then they no longer are rooted in the social conditions which generate socialist theory and action. Rootless and no longer connected with collective labour and working class life, the "*professional*" revolutionary is more likely to be influenced by the social milieu he or she now is part of (i.e. a bourgeois, or at best petit-bourgeois, environment). This may explain the terrible performance of such "vanguards" in revolutionary situations (see [section H.5.8](#)).

This tendency for the "*professional*" revolutionary and intellectuals to be subject to the bourgeois influences which Lenin subscribes solely to the working class can continually be seen from the history

of the Bolshevik party. For example, as Trotsky himself notes:

*"It should not be forgotten that the political machine of the Bolshevik Party was predominantly made up of the intelligentsia, which was petty bourgeois in its origin and conditions of life and Marxist in its ideas and in its relations with the proletariat. Workers who turned professional revolutionists joined this set with great eagerness and lost their identity in it. The peculiar social structure of the Party machine and its authority over the proletariat (neither of which is accidental but dictated by strict historical necessity) were more than once the cause of the Party's vacillation and finally became the source of its degeneration . . . In most cases they lacked independent daily contact with the labouring masses as well as a comprehensive understanding of the historical process. They thus left themselves exposed to the influence of alien classes."* [Stalin, vol. 1, pp. 297-8]

He pointed to the example of the First World War, when, *"even the Bolshevik party did not at once find its way in the labyrinth of war. As a general rule, the confusion was most pervasive and lasted longest amongst the Party's higher-ups, who came in direct contact with bourgeois public opinion."* Thus the professional revolutionaries *"were largely affected by compromisist tendencies, which emanated from bourgeois circles, while the rank and file Bolshevik workingmen displayed far greater stability resisting the patriotic hysteria that had swept the country."* [Op. Cit., p. 248 and p. 298] It should be noted that he is repeating earlier comments from his **History of the Russian Revolution** when he argued that the *"immense intellectual backsliding of the upper stratum of the Bolsheviks during the war"* was caused by *"isolation from the masses and isolation from those abroad -- that is primarily from Lenin."* [vol. 3, p. 134] As we discuss in the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#), even Trotsky had to admit that during 1917 the working class was far more revolutionary than the party and the party more revolutionary than the *"party machine"* of *"professional revolutionaries."*

Ironically enough, Lenin himself recognised this aspect of the intellectuals after he had praised their role in bringing "revolutionary" consciousness to the working class in his 1904 work **One Step Forward, Two Steps Back**. He argued that it was now the *"presence of large numbers of radical intellectuals in the ranks . . . [which] has made . . . the existence of opportunism, produced by their mentality, inevitable."* [contained in Robert V. Daniels, **A Documentary History of Communism**, vol. 1, p. 25] According to Lenin's new philosophy, the working class simply needs to have been through the *"schooling of the factory"* in order to give the intelligentsia lessons in political discipline, the very same intelligentsia which up until then had played the leading role in the Party and had given political consciousness to the working class. In his words:

*"The factory, which seems only a bogey to some, represents that highest form of capitalist co-operation which has united and disciplined the proletariat, taught it to organise . . . And it is precisely Marxism, the ideology of the proletariat trained by capitalism, that has taught . . . unstable intellectuals to distinguish between the factory as a means of exploitation (discipline based on fear of starvation) and the factory as a means of organisation (discipline based on collective work . . .). The discipline and organisation*



*which come so hard to the bourgeois intellectual are especially easily acquired by the proletariat just because of this factory 'schooling.'*" [Op. Cit., p. 24]

Lenin's analogy is, of course, flawed. The factory is a "means of exploitation" because its "means of organisation" is top-down and hierarchical. The "collective work" which the workers are subjected to is organised by the boss and the "discipline" is that of the barracks, not that of free individuals. In fact, the "schooling" for revolutionaries is **not** the factory, but the class struggle. As such, healthy and positive discipline is generated by the struggle against the way the workplace is organised under capitalism. Factory discipline, in other words, is completely different from the discipline required for social struggle or revolution. Thus the workers become revolutionary in so far as they reject the hierarchical discipline of the workplace and develop the self-discipline required to fight that discipline.

A key task of anarchism is encourage working class revolt against this type of discipline, particularly in the capitalist workplace. The "discipline" Lenin praises simply replaces human thought and association with the following of orders and hierarchy. Thus anarchism aims to undermine capitalist (imposed and brutalising) discipline in favour of solidarity, the "discipline" of free association and agreement based on the community of struggle and the political consciousness and revolutionary enthusiasm that struggle creates. To the factory discipline Lenin argues for, anarchists argue for the discipline produced in workplace struggles and conflicts against that hierarchical discipline. Thus, for anarchists, the model of the factory can never be the model for a revolutionary organisation any more than Lenin's vision of society as "one big workplace" could be our vision of socialism (see [section H.3.1](#)). Ultimately, the factory exists to reproduce hierarchical social relationships and class society just as much as it exists to produce goods.

It should be noted that Lenin's argument does not contradict his earlier arguments. The proletariat and intellectual have complementary jobs in the party. The proletariat is to give lessons in political discipline to the intellectuals as they have been through the process of factory (i.e. hierarchical) discipline. The role of the intellectuals as providers of "political consciousness" is the same and so they give political lessons to the workers.

Moreover, his vision of the vanguard party is basically the same as in **What is to Be Done?**. This can be seen from his comments that his opponent (the leading Menshevik Martov) "*wants to lump together organised and unorganised elements in the Party, those who submit to direction and those who do not, the advanced and the incorrigibly backward.*" He stressed that the "*division of labour under the direction of a centre evokes from him [the intellectual] a tragicomical outcry against people being transformed into 'wheels and cogs'*" [Op. Cit., p. 21 and p. 24] Thus there is the same division of labour as in the capitalist factory, with the boss ("the centre") having the power to direct the workers (who "*submit to direction*"). Thus we have a "revolutionary" party organised in a **capitalist** manner, with the same "*division of labour*" between order givers and order takers.

## H.5.3 Why does vanguardism imply party power?

As we discussed in [section H.5.1](#), anarchists argue that the assumptions of vanguardism leads to party rule over the working class. Needless to say, followers of Lenin disagree that the idea that vanguardism results in such an outcome. For example, Chris Harman of the British Socialist Workers Party argues the opposite case in his essay "*Party and Class.*" However, his own argument suggests the elitist conclusions we have draw from Lenin's.

Harman argues that there are two ways to look at the revolutionary party, the Leninist way and the traditional social-democratic way (as represented by the likes of Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg in 1903-5). "*The latter,*" he argues, "*was thought of as a party of the whole [working] class . . . All the tendencies within the class had to be represented within it. Any split within it was to be conceived of as a split within the class. Centralisation, although recognised as necessary, was feared as a centralisation over and against the spontaneous activity of the class. Yet it was precisely in this kind of party that the 'autocratic' tendencies warned against by Luxemburg were to develop most. For within it the confusion of member and sympathiser, the massive apparatus needed to hold together a mass of only half-politicised members in a series of social activities, led to a toning down of political debate, a lack of political seriousness, which in turn reduced the ability of the members to make independent political evaluations and increased the need for apparatus-induced involvement.*" [**Party and Class**, p. 32]

Thus, the lumping together into one organisation all those who consider themselves as "*socialist*" and agree with the party's aims creates in a mass which results in "*autocratic*" tendencies within the party organisation. As such, it is important to remember that "*the Party, as the vanguard of the working class, must not be confused with the entire class.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 22] For this reason, the party must be organised in a specific manner which reflect his Leninist assumptions:

*"The alternative [to the vanguard party] is the 'marsh' -- where elements motivated by scientific precision are so mixed up with those who are irremediably confused as to prevent any decisive action, effectively allowing the most backward to lead."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 30]

The problem for Harman is now how to explain how the proletariat can become the ruling class if this is true. He argues that "*the party is not the embryo of the workers' state -- the workers' council is. The working class as a whole will be involved in the organisations that constitute the state, the most backward as well as the most progressive elements.*" As such, the "*function of the party is not to be the state.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 33] Thus, the implication is that the working class will take an active part in the decision making process during the revolution (although the level of this "*involvement*" is unspecified, probably for good reasons as we explain). If this **is** the case, then the problem of the mass party reappears, but in a new form (we must also note that this problem must have also appearing in 1917, when the Bolshevik party opened its doors to become a mass party).

As the "*organisations that constitute the state*" are made up of the working class "*as a whole,*" then, obviously, they cannot be expected to wield power (i.e. directly manage the revolution from below). If they did, then the party would be "*mixed up*" with the "*irremediably confused*" and so could not lead (as

we discuss in [section H.5.5](#), Lenin links "*opportunism*" to "*primitive*" democracy, i.e. self-management, within the party). Hence the need for party power. Which, of course, explains Lenin's 1920 comments that an organisation embracing the whole working class cannot exercise the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*" and that a "*vanguard*" is required to do so (see [section H.1.2](#) for details). Of course, Harman does not explain how the "*irremediably confused*" are able to judge that the party is the best representative of its interests. Surely if someone is competent enough to pick their ruler, they must also be competent enough to manage their own affairs directly? Equally, if the "*irremediably confused*" vote against the party once it is in power, what happens? Will the party submit to the "*leadership*" of what it considers "*the most backward*"? If the Bolsheviks are anything to go by, the answer has to be no.

Ironically, he argues that it "*is worth noting that in Russia a real victory of the apparatus over the party required precisely the bringing into the party hundreds of thousands of 'sympathisers,' a dilution of the 'party' by the 'class.'*" . . . *The Leninist party does not suffer from this tendency to bureaucratic control precisely because it restricts its membership to those willing to be serious and disciplined enough to take **political** and **theoretical** issues as their starting point, and to subordinate all their activities to those.*" [Op. Cit., p. 33] Yet, in order to have a socialist revolution, the working class as a whole must participate in the process and that implies self-management. Thus the decision making organisations will be based on the party being "*mixed up*" with the "*irremediably confused*" as if they were part of a non-Leninist party.

From Harman's own assumptions, this by necessity results in an "autocratic" regime within the new "*workers' state*." This was implicitly recognised by the Bolsheviks when they stressed that the function of the party was to become the government, the head of the state. Lenin and Trotsky continually stressed this fact, urging that the party "*assume power*," that the Bolsheviks "*can and **must** take state power into their own hands*." Indeed, "*take over full state power alone*." [Lenin, **Selected Works**, vol. 2, p. 329, p. 328 and p. 352] Thus, while the working class "*as a whole*" will be "*involved in the organisations that constitute the state*," the party (in practice, its leadership) will hold power (see [section H.3.8](#) for a further discussion of this Bolshevik position). And for Trotsky, this substitution of the party for the class was inevitable:

*"We have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of our party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the clarity of its theoretical vision and its strong revolutionary organisation that the party has afforded to the Soviets the possibility of becoming transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class. It is quite natural that, in the period in which history brings up those interests . . . the Communists have become the recognised representatives of the working class as a whole."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 109]

He notes that within the state, *"the last word belongs to the Central Committee of the party."* [Op. Cit., p. 107] In 1937, he repeats this argument, explicitly linking the *"objective necessity"* of the *"revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party"* to the *"heterogeneity of the revolutionary class, the necessity for a selected vanguard in order to assure the victory."* Stressed the *"dictatorship of a party,"* he argued that *"[a]bstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the 'dictatorship' of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions."* [Writings 1936-37, pp. 513-4]

This means that given Harman's own assumptions, autocratic rule by the party is inevitable. Ironically, he argues that *"to be a 'vanguard' is not the same as to substitute one's own desires, or policies or interests, for those of the class."* He stresses that an *"organisation that is concerned with participating in the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism by the working class cannot conceive of substituting itself for the organs of the direct rule of that class."* [Op. Cit., p. 33 and p. 34] However, the logic of his argument suggests otherwise. Simply put, his arguments against a broad party organisation are also applicable to self-management during the class struggle and revolution. The rank and file party members are *"mixed up"* in the class. This leads to party members becoming subject to bourgeois influences. This necessitates the power of the higher bodies over the lower (see [section H.5.5](#)). The highest party organ, the central committee, must rule over the party machine, which in turn rules over the party members, who, in turn, rule over the workers. This logical chain was, ironically enough, recognised by Trotsky in 1904 in his polemic against Lenin. He argued:

*"The organisation of the party substitutes itself for the party as a whole; then the central committee substitutes itself for the organisation; and finally the 'dictator' substitutes himself for the central committee."* [quoted by Harman, Op. Cit., p. 22]

Obviously once in power in 1920 this substitution was less of a concern for him than in 1904! Which, however, does not deny the insight Trotsky showed in 1904 about the dangers inherent in the Bolshevik assumptions on working class spontaneity and how revolutionary ideas develop. Dangers which he, ironically, helped provide empirical evidence for.

This false picture of the party (and its role) explains the progression of the Bolshevik party after 1917. As the soviets organised all workers, we have the problem that the party (with its *"scientific"* knowledge) is swamped by the class. The task of the party is to *"persuade, not coerce these [workers] into accepting its lead"* and, as Lenin made clear, for it to take political power. [Harman, Op. Cit., p. 34] Once in power, the decisions of the party are in constant danger of being overthrown by the working class, which necessitates a state run with *"iron discipline"* (and the necessary means of coercion) by the party. With the disempowering of the mass organisations by the party, the party itself becomes a substitute for popular democracy as being a party member is the only way to influence policy. As the party grows, the influx of new members *"dilutes"* the organisation, necessitating a similar growth of centralised power at the top of the organisation. This eliminates the substitute for proletarian democracy which had developed within the party (which explains the banning of factions within the Bolshevik party

in 1921). Slowly but surely, power concentrates into fewer and fewer hands, which, ironically enough, necessitates a bureaucracy to feed the party leaders information and execute its will. Isolated from all, the party inevitably degenerates and Stalinism results.

We are sure that many Trotskyists will object to our analysis, arguing that we ignore the problems facing the Russian Revolution in our discussion. Harman argues that it was *"not the form of the party that produces party as opposed to soviet rule, but the decimation of the working class"* that occurred during the Russian Revolution. [Op. Cit., p. 37] This is false. As noted, Lenin was always explicit that about the fact that the Bolsheviks sought party rule ("full state power") and that their rule **was** working class rule. As such, we have the first, most basic, substitution of party power for workers power. Secondly, as we discuss in [section 6](#) of the appendix on "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)", the Bolshevik party had been gerrymandering and disbanding soviets before the start of the Civil War, so proving that it cannot be held accountable for this process of substitution. Thirdly, Leninists are meant to know that civil war is inevitable during a revolution. To blame the inevitable for the degeneration of the revolution is hardly convincing (particularly as the degeneration started before the civil war broke out).

Unsurprisingly, anarchists reject the underlying basis of this progression, the idea that the working class, by its own efforts, is incapable of developing beyond a *"trade union consciousness."* The actions of the working class itself condemned these attitudes as outdated and simply wrong long before Lenin's infamous comments were put on paper. In every struggle, the working class has created its own organisations to co-ordinate its struggle (to use Trotsky's analogy, the steam creates its own piston and constantly has). In the process of struggle, the working class changes its perspectives. This process is uneven in both quantity and quality, but it does happen. As such, anarchists do not think that **all** working class people will, at the same time, spontaneously become anarchists. If they did, we would be in an anarchist society today!

As we argued in sections [J.3](#) and [H.2.10](#), anarchists acknowledge that political development within the working class is uneven. The difference between anarchism and Leninism is how we see socialist ideas developing. In every class struggle there is a radical minority which takes the lead and many of this minority develop revolutionary conclusions from their experiences. As such, members of the working class develop their own revolutionary theory and it does not need bourgeois intellectuals to inject it into them.

Anarchists go on to argue that this minority (along with any members of other classes who have broken with their background and become libertarians) should organise and work together. The role of this revolutionary organisation is to co-ordinate revolutionary activity, discuss and revise ideas and help others draw the same conclusions as they have from their own, and others, experiences. The aim of such a group is, by word and deed, to assist the working class in its struggles and to draw out and clarify the libertarian aspects of this struggle. It seeks to abolish the rigid division between leaders and led which is the hallmark of class society by drawing the vast majority of the working class into social struggle and revolutionary politics by encouraging their direct management of the class struggle. Only this participation and the political discussion it generates will allow revolutionary ideas to become

widespread.

In other words, anarchists argue that precisely **because** of political differences ("unevenness") we need the fullest possible democracy and freedom to discuss issues and reach agreements. Only by discussion and self-activity can the political perspectives of those in struggle develop and change. In other words, the fact Bolshevism uses to justify its support for party power is the strongest argument against it.

Our differences with vanguardism could not be more clear.

## H.5.4 Did Lenin abandon vanguardism?

As discussed in [section H.5.1](#), vanguardism rests on the premise that the working class cannot emancipate itself. As such, the ideas of Lenin as expounded in **What is to be Done?** contradicts the key idea of Marx that the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself. Thus the paradox of Leninism. On the one hand, it subscribes to an ideology allegedly based on working class self-liberation. On the other, the founder of that school wrote an obviously influential work whose premise not only logically implies that they cannot, it also provides the perfect rationale for party dictatorship over the working class (and as the history of Leninism in power showed, this underlying premise was much stronger than any democratic-sounding rhetoric -- see "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)").

It is for this reason that many Leninists are somewhat embarrassed by Lenin's argument in **What is to be Done?**. Hence we see Chris Harman writing that *"the real theoretical basis for his [Lenin's] argument on the party is not that the working class is incapable on its own of coming to theoretical socialist consciousness . . . The real basis for his argument is that the level of consciousness in the working class is never uniform."* [**Party and Class**, pp. 25-6] In other words, Harman changes the focus of the question away from the point explicitly and repeatedly stated by Lenin that the working class was incapable on its own of coming to theoretical socialist consciousness and that he was simply repeating Marxist orthodoxy when he did.

Harman bases his revision on Lenin's later comments regarding his book, namely that he sought to *"straighten matters out"* by *"pull[ing] in the other direction"* to the *"extreme"* which the *"economists"* had went to. He repeated this in 1907 (see below). While Lenin may have been right to attack the *"economists,"* his argument that socialist consciousness comes to the working class only *"from without"* is not a case of going too far in the other direction; it is wrong. Simply put, you do not attack ideas you disagree with arguing an equally false set of ideas. This suggests that Harman's attempt to downplay Lenin's elitist position is flawed. Simply put, the *"real theoretical basis"* of the argument was precisely the issue Lenin himself raised, namely the incapacity of the working class to achieve socialist consciousness by itself. It is probably the elitist conclusions of this argument which drives Harman to try and change the focus to another issue, namely the political unevenness within the working class.

Some go to even more extreme lengths, denying that Lenin even held such a position. For example, Hal Draper argues at length that Lenin did not, in fact, hold the opinions he actually expressed in his book! While Draper covers many aspects of what he calls the *"Myth of Lenin's 'Concept of The Party,'" in his essay of the same name, we will concentrate on the key idea, namely that socialist ideas are developed outside the class struggle by the radical intelligentsia and introduced into the working class from without. Here, as argued in [section H.5.1](#), is the root of the anti-socialist basis of Leninism.*

So what does Draper say? On the one hand, he denies that Lenin held this theory (he states that it is a *"virtually non-existent theory"* and *"non-existent after WITBD"*). He argues that those who hold the position that Lenin actually meant what he said in his book *"never quote anything other than WITBD,"* and states that this is a *"curious fact"* (a fact we will disprove shortly). Draper argues as follows: *"Did Lenin put this theory forward even in WITBD? Not exactly."* He then notes that Lenin *"had just read this theory in the most prestigious theoretical organ of Marxism of the whole international socialist movement"* and it had been *"put forward in an important article by the leading Marxist authority,"* Karl Kautsky. Draper notes that *"Lenin first paraphrased Kautsky"* and then *"quoted a long passage from Kautsky's article."*

This much, of course, is well known by anyone who has read Lenin's book. By paraphrasing and quoting Kautsky as he does, Lenin is showing his agreement with Kautsky's argument. Indeed, Lenin states before quoting Kautsky that his comments are *"profoundly true and important"* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 79] As such, by explicitly and obviously agreeing with Kautsky, it can be said that it also becomes Lenin's theory as well! Over time, particularly after Kautsky had been labelled a *"renegade"* by Lenin, Kautsky's star waned and Lenin's rose. Little wonder the argument became associated with Lenin rather than the discredited Kautsky. Draper then speculates that *"it is curious . . . that no one has sought to prove that by launching this theory . . . Kautsky was laying the basis for the demon of totalitarianism."* A simple reason exists for this, namely the fact that Kautsky, unlike Lenin, was never the head of a one-party dictatorship and justified this system politically. Indeed, Kautsky attacked the Bolsheviks for this, which caused Lenin to label him a *"renegade."* Kautsky, in this sense, can be considered as being inconsistent with his political assumptions, unlike Lenin who took his assumptions to their logical conclusions.

How, after showing the obvious fact that *"the crucial 'Leninist' theory was really Kautsky's,"* he then wonders *"[d]id Lenin, in WITBD, adopt Kautsky's theory?"* He answers his own question with an astounding *"Again, not exactly!"* Clearly, quoting approvingly of a theory and stating it is *"profoundly true"* does not, in fact, make you a supporter of it! What evidence does Draper present for his amazing answer? Well, Draper argued that Lenin *"tried to get maximum mileage out of it against the right wing; this was the point of his quoting it. If it did something for Kautsky's polemic, he no doubt figured that it would do something for his."* Or, to present a more simple and obvious explanation, Lenin **agreed** with Kautsky's *"profoundly true"* argument!

Aware of this possibility, Draper tries to combat it. *"Certainly,"* he argues, *"this young man Lenin was not (yet) so brash as to attack his 'pope' or correct him overtly. But there was obviously a feeling of*

*discomfort. While showing some modesty and attempting to avoid the appearance of a head-on criticism, the fact is that Lenin inserted two longish footnotes rejecting (or if you wish, amending) precisely what was worst about the Kautsky theory on the role of the proletariat." So, here we have Lenin quoting Kautsky to prove his own argument (and noting that Kautsky's words were "profoundly true and important"!) but "feeling discomfort" over what he has just approvingly quoted! Incredible!*

So how does Lenin "amend" Kautsky's "profoundly true and important" argument? In two ways, according to Draper. Firstly, in a footnote which "was appended right after the Kautsky passage" Lenin quoted. Draper argued that it "was specifically formulated to undermine and weaken the theoretical content of Kautsky's position. It began: 'This does not mean, of course, that the workers have no part in creating such an ideology.' But this was exactly what Kautsky did mean and say. In the guise of offering a caution, Lenin was proposing a modified view. 'They [the workers] take part, however,' Lenin's footnote continued, 'not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians, as Proudhons and Weitlings; in other words, they take part only when they are able . . .' In short, Lenin was reminding the reader that Kautsky's sweeping statements were not even 100% true historically; he pointed to exceptions." Yes, Lenin **did** point to exceptions **in order to refute objections to Kautsky's argument before they were raised!** It is clear that Lenin is **not** refuting Kautsky. He is agreeing with him and raising possible counter-examples in order to refute potential objections based on them. Thus Proudhon adds to socialist ideology in so far as he is a "socialist theoretician" and not a worker! How clear can you be? As Lenin continues, people like Proudhon "take part only to the extent that they are able, more or less, to acquire the knowledge of their age and advance that knowledge." In other words, insofar as they learn from the "vehicles of science." Neither Kautsky or Lenin denied that it was possible for workers to acquire such knowledge and pass it on. However this does **not** mean that they thought workers, as part of their daily life and struggle **as workers**, could develop "socialist theory." Thus Lenin's footnote reiterates Kautsky's argument rather than, as Draper hopes, refutes it.

Draper turns to another footnote, which he notes "was not directly tied to the Kautsky article, but discussed the 'spontaneity of the socialist idea. 'It is often said,' Lenin began, 'that the working class spontaneously gravitates towards socialism. This is perfectly true in the sense that socialist theory reveals the causes of the misery of the working class ... and for that reason the workers are able to assimilate it so easily,' but he reminded that this process itself was not subordinated to mere spontaneity. 'The working class spontaneously gravitates towards socialism; nevertheless, ... bourgeois ideology spontaneously imposes itself upon the working class to a still greater degree.'" Draper argues that this "was obviously written to modify and recast the Kautsky theory, without coming out and saying that the Master was wrong." So, here we have Lenin approvingly quoting Kautsky in the main text while, at the same time, providing a footnote to show that, in fact, he did not agree with what he has just quoted! Truly amazing -- and easily refuted. After all, the footnote stresses that workers appreciate socialist theory "**provided**, however, that this theory does not step aside for spontaneity and **provided** it subordinates spontaneity to itself." In other words, workers "assimilate" socialist theory only when socialist theory does not adjust itself to the "spontaneous" forces at work in the class struggle. Thus, rather than refuting Kautsky by the backdoor, Lenin in this footnote still agrees with him. Socialism does not develop, as Kautsky stressed, from the class struggle but rather has to be injected into it. This means, by necessity, the theory "subordinates spontaneity to itself."



Draper argues that this "*modification*" simply meant that there "*are several things that happen 'spontaneously,' and what will win out is not decided only by spontaneity*" but as can be seen, this is not the case. Only when "*spontaneity*" is subordinated to the theory (i.e. the party) can socialism be won, a totally different position. As such, when Draper asserts that "*[a]ll that was clear at this point was that Lenin was justifiably dissatisfied with the formulation of Kautsky's theory,*" he is simply expressing wishful thinking. This footnote, like the first one, continues the argument developed by Lenin in the main text and in no way is in contradiction to it. As is obvious.

Draper argues that the key problem is that critics of Lenin "*run two different questions together: (a) What was, historically, the **initial** role of intellectuals in the beginnings of the socialist movement, and (b) what **is** - and above all, what should be - the role of bourgeois intellectuals in a working-class party today.*" He argues that Kautsky did not believe that "*if it can be shown that intellectuals historically played a certain initiatory role, they **must** and **should** continue to play the same role now and forever. It does not follow; as the working class matured, it tended to throw off leading strings.*" However, this is unconvincing. After all, if socialist consciousness cannot be generated by the working class by its own struggles then this is applicable now and in the future. Thus workers who join the socialist movement will be repeating the party ideology, as developed by intellectuals in the past. If they **do** develop new theory, it would be, as Lenin stressed, "*not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians*" and so socialist consciousness still does not derive from their own class experiences. This places the party in a privileged position vis-à-vis the working class and so the elitism remains.

Ironically, Draper agrees with Kautsky and Lenin as regards the claim that socialism does not develop out of the class struggle. As he put it, "*[a]s a matter of fact, in the International of 1902 no one really had any doubts about the historical facts concerning the beginnings of the movement.*" The question is, "*[b]ut what followed from those facts?*" To which he argues that Marx and Engels "*concluded, from the same facts and subsequent experiences, that the movement had to be sternly warned against the influence of bourgeois intellectuals inside the party.*" (We wonder if Marx and Engels included themselves in the list of "*bourgeois intellectuals*" the workers had to be "*sternly warned*" about?) Thus, amusingly enough, Draper argues that Marx, Engels, Kautsky and Lenin all held to the "*same facts*" that socialist consciousness developed outside the experiences of the working classes!

Draper, after rewriting history somewhat in his laborious and hardly convincing arguments, states that it "*is a curious fact that no one has ever found this alleged theory anywhere else in Lenin's voluminous writings, not before and not after [What is to be Done?]. It never appeared in Lenin again. No Leninologist has ever quoted such a theory from any other place in Lenin.*" However, as this theory was the orthodox Marxist position, Lenin had no real need to reiterate this argument continuously. After all, he had quoted the acknowledged leader of Marxism on the subject explicitly to show the orthodoxy of his argument and the "*non-Marxist*" base of those he argued against. Once the debate had been won and orthodox Marxism triumphant, why repeat the argument again? As we will see below, this was exactly the position Lenin **did** take in 1907 when he wrote an introduction to a book which contained **What is to Be Done?**.

In contradiction to Draper's claim, Lenin **did** return to this matter. In October 1905 he wrote an a short article in praise of an article by Stalin on this very subject. Stalin had sought to explain Lenin's ideas to the Georgian Social-Democracy and, like Lenin, had sought to root the argument in Marxist orthodoxy (partly to justify the argument, partly to expose the Menshevik opposition as being "non-Marxists"). Stalin argues along similar lines to Lenin:

*"the question now is: who works out, who is able to work out this socialist consciousness (i.e. scientific socialism)? Kautsky says, and I repeat his idea, that the masses of proletarians, as long as they remain proletarians, have neither the time nor the opportunity to work out socialist consciousness . . . The vehicles of science are the intellectuals . . . who have both the time and opportunity to put themselves in the van of science and workout socialist consciousness. Clearly, socialist consciousness is worked out by a few Social-Democratic intellectuals who posses the time and opportunity to do so."* [Collected Works, vol. 1, p. 164]

Stalin stresses the Marxist orthodoxy by stating Social-Democracy *"comes in and introduces socialist consciousness into the working class movement. This is what Kautsky has in mind when he says 'socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without.'"* [Op. Cit., pp. 164-5] That Stalin is simply repeating Lenin's and Kautsky's arguments is clear, as is the fact it was considered the orthodox position within social-democracy.

If Draper is right, then Lenin would have taken the opportunity to attack Stalin's article and express the alternative viewpoint Draper is convinced he held. However, Lenin put pen to paper to **praise** Stalin's work, noting *"the splendid way in which the problem of the celebrated 'introduction of a consciousness from without' had been posed."* Lenin explicitly agrees with Stalin's summary of his argument. He argues that *"social being determines consciousness . . . Socialist consciousness corresponds to the position of the proletariat"* and then quotes Stalin: *"Who can and does evolve this consciousness (scientific socialism)?"* and answers (again approvingly quoting Stalin) that *"its 'evolution' is a matter for a few Social-Democratic intellectuals who posses the necessary means and time."* Lenin does argue that Social-Democracy meets *"an instinctive **urge** towards socialism"* when it *"comes to the proletariat with the message of socialism,"* but this does not counter the main argument that the working class cannot develop socialist consciousness by it own efforts and the, by necessity, elitist and hierarchical politics that flow from this position. [Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 9, p. 388]

That Lenin did not reject his early formulations can also be seen from in his introduction to the pamphlet *"Twelve Years"* which contained **What is to be Done?**. Rather than explaining the false nature of that work's more infamous arguments, Lenin in fact defended them. For example, as regards the question of professional revolutionaries, he argued that the statements of his opponents now *"look ridiculous"* as *"today the idea of an organisation of professional revolutionaries has **already** scored a complete victory,"* a victory which *"would have been impossible if this idea had not been pushed to the **forefront** at the time."* He noted that his work had *"vanquished Economism . . . and finally **created** this organisation."* On the question of socialist consciousness, he simply reiterates the Marxist orthodoxy of his position, noting that its *"formulation of the relationship between spontaneity and political*

*consciousness was agreed upon by all the Iskra editors . . . Consequently, there could be no question of any difference in principle between the draft Party programme and **What is to be Done?** on this issue."* So while Lenin argues that he had "*straighten out what had been twisted by the Economists,*" he did not correct his early arguments. [**Collected Works**, vol. 13, p. 101, p. 102 and p. 107]

Looking at Lenin's arguments at the Communist International on the question of the party we see an obvious return to the ideas of **What is to be Done?**. Here we have a similar legal/illegal duality, strict centralism, strong hierarchy and the vision of the party as the "*head*" of the working class (i.e. its consciousness). In **Left-Wing Communism**, Lenin mocks those who reject the idea that dictatorship by the party is the same as that of the class.

Ultimately, the whole rationale for the kind of wishful thinking that Draper inflicts on us is flawed. As noted above, you do not combat what you think is an incorrect position with one which you consider as also being wrong or do not agree with! You counter what you consider as an incorrect position with one you consider correct and agree with. As Lenin, in WITBD, explicitly did. This means that later attempts by his followers to downplay the ideas raised in Lenin's book are unconvincing. Moreover, as he was simply repeating Social-Democratic orthodoxy it seems doubly unconvincing.

Clearly, Draper is wrong. Lenin did, as indicated above, actually mean what he said in **What is to be Done?**. The fact that Lenin quoted Kautsky simply shows that this position was the orthodox Social-Democratic one, held by the mainstream of the party. Given that Leninism was (and still is) a "*radical*" offshoot of this movement, this should come as no surprise. However, Draper's comments remind us how religious many forms of Marxism are. After all, why do we need facts when we have the true faith?

## H.5.5 What is "*democratic centralism*"?

As noted above, anarchists oppose vanguardism for three reasons, one of which is the way it recommends how revolutionaries should organise to influence the class struggle.

So how is a "vanguard" party organised? To quote the Communist International's 1920 resolution on the role of the Communist Party in the revolution, the party must have a "*centralised political apparatus*" and "*must be organised on the basis of iron proletarian centralism.*" This, of course, suggests a top-down structure internally, which the resolution explicitly calls for. In its words, "*Communist cells of every kind must be subordinate to one another as precisely as possible in a strict hierarchy.*" [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 1, p. 193, p. 198 and p. 199] Therefore, the vanguard party is organised in a centralised, top-down way. However, this is not all, as well as being "*centralised,*" the party is also meant to be democratic, hence the expression "*democratic centralism.*" On this the resolution states:

*"The Communist Party must be organised on the basis of democratic centralism. The most important principle of democratic centralism is election of the higher party organs by the lowest, the fact that all instructions by a superior body are unconditionally and*

*necessarily binding on lower ones, and existence of a strong central party leadership whose authority over all leading party comrades in the period between one party congress and the next is universally accepted.*" [Op. Cit., p. 198]

For Lenin, speaking in the same year, democratic centralism meant *"only that representatives from the localities meet and elect a responsible body which must then govern . . . Democratic centralism consists in the Congress checking on the Central Committee, removing it and electing a new one."* [quoted by Robert Service, **The Bolshevik Party in Revolution**, p. 131] Thus, *"democratic centralism"* is inherently top-down, although the *"higher"* party organs are, in principle, elected by the *"lower."* Without this, of course, there would be no *"democratic"* aspect to the party. The real question is whether such democracy is effective, a topic we will return to. However, the key point is that the central committee is the active element, the one whose decisions are implemented and so the focus of the structure is in the *"centralism"* rather than the *"democratic"* part of the formula.

As we noted in [section H.2.14](#), the Communist Party was expected to have a dual structure, one legal and the other illegal. The resolution states that *"[i]n countries where the bourgeoisie . . . is still in power, the Communist parties must learn to combine legal and illegal activity in a planned way. However, the legal work must be placed under the actual control of the illegal party at all times."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 1, p. 198-9] It goes without saying that the illegal structure is the real power in the party and that it cannot be expected to be as democratic as the legal party, which in turn would be less that democratic as the illegal would have the real power within the organisation.

All this has clear parallels with Lenin's infamous work, **What is to be done?**. In that work Lenin argues for *"a powerful and strictly secret organisation, which concentrates in its hands all the threads of secret activities, an organisation which of necessity must be a centralised organisation."* This call for centralisation is not totally dependent on secrecy, though. As he notes, *"specialisation necessarily presupposes centralisation, and in its turn imperatively calls for it."* Such a centralised organisation would need leaders and Lenin argues that *"no movement can be durable without a stable organisation of leaders to maintain continuity."* As such, *"the organisation must consist chiefly of persons engaged in revolutionary activities as a profession."* Thus, we have a centralised organisation which is managed by specialists, by *"professional revolutionaries."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 158, p. 153, p. 147 and p. 148]

This does not mean that these *"professional revolutionaries"* all come from the bourgeoisie or petit bourgeoisie. According to Lenin:

*"A workingman agitator who is at all talented and 'promising' must not be left to work eleven hours a day in a factory. We must arrange that he be maintained by the Party, that he may in due time go underground."* [Op. Cit., p. 155]

Thus the full time professional revolutionaries are drawn from all classes into the party apparatus.

However, in practice the majority of such full-timers were/are middle class. Trotsky notes that *"just as in the Bolshevik committees, so at the [1905] Congress itself, there were almost no workingmen. The intellectuals predominated."* [Stalin, vol. 1, p. 101] This did not change, even after the influx of working class members in 1917 the *"incidence of middle-class activists increases at the highest echelons of the hierarchy of executive committees."* [Robert Service, **The Bolshevik Party in Revolution**, p. 47] An ex-worker was a rare sight in the Bolshevik Central Committee, an actual worker non-existent. However, regardless of their original class background what unites the full-timers is not their origin but rather their current relationship with the working class, one of separation and hierarchy.

The organisational structure of this system was made clear at around the same time as **What is to be Done?**, with Lenin arguing that the factory group (or cell) of the party *"must consist of a small number of revolutionaries, receiving direct from the [central] committee orders and power to conduct the whole social-democratic work in the factory. All members of the factory committee must regard themselves as agents of the [central] committee, bound to submit to all its directions, bound to observe all 'laws and customs' of this 'army in the field' in which they have entered and which they cannot leave without permission of the commander."* [quoted by E.H. Carr, **The Bolshevik Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 33] The similarities to the structure proposed by Lenin and agreed to by the Comintern in 1920 is obvious. Thus we have a highly centralised party, one run by *"professional revolutionaries"* from the top down (as we noted in [section H.3.3](#) Lenin stressed that the organisational principle of Marxism was from top down).

It will be objected that Lenin was discussing the means of party building under Tsarism and advocated wider democracy under legality. However, given that in 1920 he universalised the Bolshevik experience and urged the creation of a dual party structure (based on legal and illegal structures), his comments on centralisation are applicable to vanguardism in general. Moreover, in 1902 he based his argument on experiences drawn from democratic capitalist regimes. As he argued, *"no revolutionary organisation has ever practised broad democracy, nor could it, however much it desired to do so."* This was not considered as just applicable in Russia under the Tsar as Lenin then goes on to quote the Webb's *"book on trade unionism"* in order to clarify what he calls *"the confusion of ideas concerning the meaning of democracy."* He notes that *"in the first period of existence in their unions, the British workers thought it was an indispensable sign of democracy for all members to do all the work of managing the unions."* This involved *"all questions [being] decided by the votes of all the members"* and all *"official duties"* being *"fulfilled by all the members in turn."* He dismisses *"such a conception of democracy"* as *"absurd"* and *"historical experience"* made them *"understand the necessity for representative institutions"* and *"full-time professional officials."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 161 and pp. 162-3]

Needless to say, Lenin links this to Kautsky, who *"shows the need for professional journalists, parliamentarians, etc., for the Social-Democratic leadership of the proletarian class struggle"* and who *"attacks the 'socialism of anarchists and litterateurs' who . . . proclaim the principle that laws should be passed directly by the whole people, completely failing to understand that in modern society this principle can have only a relative application."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 163] The universal nature of his dismissal of self-management within the revolutionary organisation in favour of representative forms is thus stressed.

Significantly, Lenin states that this "*primitive' conception of democracy*" exists in two groups, the "*masses of the students and workers*" and the "*Economists of the Bernstein persuasion*" (i.e. reformists). Thus the idea of directly democratic working class organisations is associated with opportunism. He was generous, noting that he "*would not, of course, . . . condemn practical workers who have had too few opportunities for studying the theory and practice of real [sic!] democratic [sic!] organisation*" but individuals "*play[ing] a leading role*" in the movement should be so condemned! [Op. Cit., p. 163] These people should know better! Thus "*real*" democratic organisation implies the restriction of democracy to that of electing leaders and any attempt to widen the input of ordinary members is simply an expression of workers who need educating from their "*primitive*" failings!

In summary, we have a model of a "*revolutionary*" party which is based on full-time "*professional revolutionaries*" in which the concept of direct democracy is replaced by a system of, at best, representative democracy. It is highly centralised, as befitting a specialised organisation. As noted in [section H.3.3](#), the "*organisational principle of revolutionary Social-Democracy*" was "*to proceed from the top downward*" rather than "*from the bottom upward.*" [Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 7, pp. 396-7] Rather than being only applicable in Tsarist Russia, Lenin drew on examples from advanced, democratic capitalist countries to justify his model in 1902 and in 1920 he advocated a similar hierarchical and top-down organisation with a dual secret and public organisation in the **Communist International**. The continuity of ideas is clear.

## H.5.6 Why do anarchists oppose "**democratic centralism**"?

What to make of Lenin's suggested model of "*democratic centralism*" discussed in the [last section](#)? It is, to use Cornelius Castoriadis's term, a "*revolutionary party organised on a capitalist manner.*" He argues that in practice the "*democratic centralist*" party, while being centralised, will not be very democratic. In fact, the level of democracy would reflect that in a capitalist republic rather than a socialist society. In his words:

*"The dividing up of tasks, which is indispensable wherever there is a need for co-operation, becomes a real division of labour, the labour of giving orders being separate from that of carrying them out . . . this division between directors and executants tends to broaden and deepen by itself. The leaders specialise in their role and become indispensable while those who carry out orders become absorbed in their concrete tasks. Deprived of information, of the general view of the situation, and of the problems of organisation, arrested in their development by their lack of participation in the overall life of the Party, the organisation's rank-and-file militants less and less have the means or the possibility of having any control over those at the top.*

*"This division of labour is supposed to be limited by 'democracy.' But democracy, which should mean that **the majority rules**, is reduced to meaning that the majority **designates its rulers**; copied in this way from the model of bourgeois parliamentary democracy, drained of any real meaning, it quickly becomes a veil thrown over the unlimited power of*

*the rulers. The base does not run the organisation just because once a year it elects delegates who designate the central committee, no more than the people are sovereign in a parliamentary-type republic because they periodically elect deputies who designate the government.*

*"Let us consider, for example, 'democratic centralism' as it is supposed to function in an ideal Leninist party. That the central committee is designated by a 'democratically elected' congress makes no difference since, once it is elected, it has complete (statutory) control over the body of the Party (and can dissolve the base organisations, kick out militants, etc.) or that, under such conditions, it can determine the composition of the next congress. The central committee could use its powers in an honourable way, these powers could be reduced; the members of the Party might enjoy 'political rights' such as being able to form factions, etc. Fundamentally this would not change the situation, for the central committee would still remain the organ that defines the political line of the organisation and controls its application from top to bottom, that, in a word, has permanent monopoly on the job of leadership. The expression of opinions only has a limited value once the way the group functions prevents this opinion from forming on solid bases, i.e. permanent **participation** in the organisation's activities and in the solution of problems that arise. If the way the organisation is run makes the solution of general problems he specific task and permanent work of a separate category of militants, only their opinion will, or will appear, to count to the others."* [Social and Political Writings, vol. 2, pp. 204-5]

Castoridis' insight is important and strikes at the heart of the problem with vanguard parties. They simply reflect the capitalist society they claim to represent. As such, Lenin's argument against "primitive" democracy in the revolutionary and labour movements is significant. When he asserts that those who argue for direct democracy "completely" fail to "understand that in modern society this principle can have only a relative application," he is letting the cat out of the bag. [Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 163] After all, "modern society" is capitalism, a class society. In such a society, it is understandable that self-management should not be applied as it strikes at the heart of class society and how it operates. That Lenin can appeal to "modern society" without recognising its class basis says a lot. The question becomes, if such a "principle" is valid for a class system, is it applicable in a socialist society one and in the movement aiming to create such a society? Can we postpone the application of our ideas until "after the revolution" or can the revolution only occur when we apply our socialist principles in resisting class society?

In a nutshell, can the same set of organisational structures be used for the different ends? Can bourgeois structures be considered neutral or have they, in fact, evolved to ensure and protect minority rule? Ultimately, form and content are not independent of each other. Form and content adapt to fit each other and they cannot be divorced in reality. Thus, if the bourgeoisie embrace centralisation and representation they have done so because it fits perfectly with their specific form of class society. Neither centralisation and representation can undermine minority rule and, if they did, they would quickly be eliminated. This can be seen from the fate of radicals utilising representative democracy. If they are in a position to threaten bourgeois society, representative government is eliminated in favour of even stronger forms of

centralisation (e.g. fascism or some other form of dictatorship).

Ironically enough, both Bukharin and Trotsky acknowledged that fascism had appropriated Bolshevik ideas. The former demonstrated at the 12th Congress of the Communist Party in 1923 how Italian fascism had "*adopted and applied in practice the experiences of the Russian revolution*" in terms of their "*methods of combat.*" In fact, "*[i]f one regards them from the **formal** point of view, that is, from the point of view of the technique of their political methods, then one discovers in them a complete application of Bolshevik tactics. . . in the sense of the rapid concentration of forced [and] energetic action of a tightly structured military organisation.*" [quoted by R. Pipes, **Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime, 1919-1924**, p. 253] The latter, in his uncompleted biography on Stalin noted that "*Mussolini stole from the Bolsheviks . . . Hitler imitated the Bolsheviks and Mussolini.*" [**Stalin**, vol. 2, p. 243] The question arises as to whether the same tactics and structures serve both the needs of fascist reaction **and** socialist revolution? Now, if Bolshevism can serve as a model for fascism, it must contain structural and functional elements which are also common to fascism. After all, no one has detected a tendency of Hitler or Mussolini, in their crusade against democracy, the organised labour movement and the left, to imitate the organisational principles of anarchism or even of Menshevism.

Simply put, we can expect decisive structural differences to exist between capitalism and socialism if these societies are to have different aims. Where one is centralised to facilitate minority rule, the other must be decentralised and federal to facilitate mass participation. Where one is top-down, the other must be from the bottom-up. If a "*socialism*" exists which uses bourgeois organisational elements then we should not be surprised if it turns out it is socialist in name only. The same applies to revolutionary organisations. As the anarchists of **Trotwatch** explain:

*"In reality, a Leninist Party simply reproduces and institutionalises existing capitalist power relations inside a supposedly 'revolutionary' organisation: between leaders and led; order givers and order takers; between specialists and the acquiescent and largely powerless party workers. And that elitist power relation is extended to include the relationship between the party and class."* [**Carry on Recruiting!**, p. 41]

If you have an organisation which celebrates centralisation, having an institutionalised "*leadership*" separate from the mass of members becomes inevitable. Thus the division of labour which exists in the capitalist workplace or state is created. Forms cannot and do not exist independently of people and so imply specific forms of social relationships within them. These social relationships shape those subject to them. Can we expect the same forms of authority to have different impacts simply because the organisation has "*socialist*" or "*revolutionary*" in its name? Of course not. It is for this reason that anarchists argue that only in a "*libertarian socialist movement the workers learn about non-dominating forms of association through creating and experimenting with forms such as libertarian labour organisations, which put into practice, through struggle against exploitation, principles of equality and free association.*" [John Clark, **The Anarchist Moment**, p. 79]

As noted above, a "*democratic centralist*" party requires that the "*lower*" party bodies (cells, branches,



etc.) should be subordinate to the higher ones (e.g. the central committee). The higher bodies are elected at the (usually) annual conference. As it is impossible to mandate for future developments, the higher bodies therefore are given carte blanche to determine policy which is binding on the whole party (hence the *"from top-down"* principle). In between conferences, the job of full time (ideally elected, but not always) officers is to lead the party and carry out the policy decided by the central committee. At the next conference, the party membership can show its approval of the leadership by electing another. The problems with this scheme are numerous:

*"The first problem is the issue of hierarchy. Why should 'higher' party organs interpret party policy any more accurately than 'lower' ones? The pat answer is that the 'higher' bodies compromise the most capable and experienced members and are (from their lofty heights) in a better position to take an overall view on a given issue. In fact what may well happen is that, for example, central committee members may be more isolated from the outside world than mere branch members. This might ordinarily be the case because given the fact that many central committee members are full timers and therefore detached from more real issues such as making a living . . ."* [ACF, **Marxism and its Failures**, p. 8]

Equally, in order that the *"higher"* bodies can evaluate the situation they need effective information from the *"lower"* bodies. If the *"lower"* bodies are deemed incapable of formulating their own policies, how can they be wise enough, firstly, to select the right leaders and, secondly, determine the appropriate information to communicate to the *"higher"* bodies? As such, given the assumptions for centralised power in the party, can we not see that *"democratic centralised"* parties will be extremely inefficient in practice as information and knowledge is lost in the party machine and whatever decisions which are reached at the top are made in ignorance of the real situation on the ground? As we discuss in [section H.3.8](#), this is usually the fate of such parties.

Within the party, as noted, the role of *"professional revolutionaries"* (or *"full timers"*) is stressed. As Lenin argued, any worker which showed any talent must be removed from the workplace and become a party functionary. Is it surprising that the few Bolshevik cadres (i.e. professional revolutionaries) of working class origin soon lost real contact with the working class? Equally, what will their role **within** the party be? As we discuss in [section 3](#) of the appendix on ["What happened during the Russian Revolution?"](#), their role in the Bolshevik party was essentially conservative in nature and aimed to maintain their own position. As Bakunin argued (in a somewhat different context) Marxism always *"comes down to the same dismal result: government of the vast majority of the people by a privileged minority. But this minority, the Marxists say, will consist of workers. Yes, perhaps of former workers, who, as soon as they become rulers or representatives of the people will cease to be workers and will begin to look upon the whole workers' world from the heights of the state. They will no longer represent the people but themselves and their own pretensions to govern the people."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 178] Replacing *"state"* with *"party machine"* and *"the people"* by *"the party"* we get a good summation of the way the Bolshevik cadres **did** look upon the party members (see [section H.5.9](#)). It also indicates the importance of organising today in a socialist manner rather than in a bourgeois one.

That the anarchist critique of "*democratic centralism*" is valid, we need only point to the comments and analysis of numerous members (and often soon to be ex-members) of such parties. Thus we get a continual stream of articles discussing why specific parties are, in fact, "*bureaucratic centralist*" rather than "democratic centralist" and what is required to reform them. That almost every "*democratic centralist*" party in existence is not that democratic does not hinder their attempts to create one which is. In a way, the truly "*democratic centralist*" party is the Holy Grail of modern Leninism. As we discuss in [section H.5.10](#), their goal may be as mythical as that of the Arthurian legends.

## H.5.7 Is the way revolutionaries organise important?

As we discussed in the [last section](#), anarchists argue that the way revolutionaries organise today is important. However, according to some of Lenin's followers, the fact that the "revolutionary" party is organised in a non-revolutionary manner does not matter. In the words of Chris Harman, leading member of the British Socialist Workers' Party, "*[e]xisting under capitalism, the revolutionary organisation [i.e. the vanguard party] will of necessity have a quite different structure to that of the workers' state that will arise in the process of overthrowing capitalism.*" [**Party and Class**, p. 34]

However, in practice this distinction is impossible to make. If the party is organised in specific ways then it is so because this is conceived to be "*efficient*," "*practical*" and so on. Hence we find Lenin arguing against "*backwardness in organisation*" and that the "*point at issue is whether our ideological struggle is to have forms of a higher type to clothe it, forms of Party organisation binding on all.*" [contained in Robert V. Daniels, **A Documentary History of Communism**, vol. 1, p. 23] Why would the "*workers' state*" be based on "*backward*" or "*lower*" kinds of organisational forms? If, as Lenin remarked, "*the organisational principle of revolutionary Social-Democracy*" was "*to proceed from the top downward*," why would the party, once in power, reject its "*organisational principle*" in favour of one it thinks is "*opportunist*," "*primitive*" and so on?

Therefore, as the **vanguard** the party represents the level to which the working class is supposed to reach then its organisational principles must, similarly, be those which the class must reach. As such, Harman's comments are incredulous. How we organise today is hardly irrelevant, particularly if the revolutionary organisation in question seeks (to use Lenin's words) to "*take over full state power alone.*" [**Selected Works**, vol. 2, p. 352] These prejudices (and the political and organisational habits they generate) will influence the shaping of the "*workers' state*" by the party once it has taken power. This decisive influence of the party and its ideological as well as organisational assumptions can be seen when Trotsky argued in 1923 that "*the party created the state apparatus and can rebuild it anew . . . from the party you get the state, but not the party from the state.*" [**Leon Trotsky Speaks**, p. 161] This is to be expected, after all the aim of the party is to take, hold and execute power. Given that the vanguard party is organised as it is to ensure effectiveness and efficiency, why should we assume that the ruling party will not seek to recreate these organisational principles once in power? As the Russian Revolution proves, this is the case:

*"On 30 October, Sovnarkom [The Council of People's Commissars] unilaterally arrogated to itself legislative power simply by promulgating a decree to this effect. This was, effectively, a Bolshevik **coup d'etat** that made clear the government's (and party's) pre-eminence over the soviets and their executive organ. Increasingly, the Bolsheviks relied upon the appointment from above of commissars with plenipotentiary powers, and they split up and reconstituted fractious Soviets and intimidated political opponents."* [Neil Harding, **Leninism**, p. 253]

As such, to claim how we organise under capitalism is not important to a revolutionary movement is simply not true. The way revolutionaries organise have an impact both on themselves and how they will view the revolution developing. An ideological prejudice for centralisation and "top-down" organisation will not disappear once the revolution starts. Rather, it will influence the way the party acts within it and, if it aims to seize power, how it will exercise that power once it has.

For these reasons anarchists stress the importance of building the new world in the shell of the old. All organisations exert pressures on their membership and create social relationships which shape them. As the members of these parties will be part of the revolutionary process, they will influence how that revolution will develop and any *"transitional"* institutions which are created. As the aim of such organisations is to facilitate the creation of socialism, the obvious implication is that the revolutionary organisation must, itself, reflect the society it is trying to create. Clearly, then, the idea that how we organise as revolutionaries today can be considered somehow independent of the revolutionary process and the nature of post-capitalist society and its institutions cannot be maintained (particularly is the aim of the *"revolutionary"* organisation is to seize power on behalf of the working class).

As we argue elsewhere (see section [H.2.10](#) and [J.3](#)) anarchists argue for revolutionary groups based on self-management, federalism and decision making from below. In other words, we apply within our organisations the same principles as those which the working class has evolved in the course of its own struggles. Autonomy is combined with federalism, so ensuring co-ordination of decisions and activities is achieved from below upwards by means of mandated and recallable delegates. Effective co-operation is achieved as it is informed by and reflects the needs on the ground. Simply put, working class organisation and discipline -- as exemplified by the workers' council or strike committee -- represents a completely different thing from **capitalist** organisation and discipline, of which Leninists are constantly asking for more (albeit draped with the Red Flag and labelled *"revolutionary"*). And as we discuss in the [next section](#), the Leninist model of top-down centralised parties is marked more by its failures than its successes, suggesting that not only is the vanguard model undesirable, it is also unnecessary.

## H.5.8 Are vanguard parties effective?

In a word, no. Vanguard parties have rarely been proven to be effective organs for fermenting revolutionary change which is, let us not forget, their stated purpose. Indeed, rather than being in the vanguard of social struggle, the Leninist parties are often the last to recognise, let alone understand, the initial stirrings of important social movements and events. It is only once these movements have

exploded in the streets that the self-proclaimed "*vanguards*" notice it and decide it requires their leadership.

Part of this process are constant attempts to install their political program onto movements that they do not understand, movements that have proven to be successful using different tactics and methods of organisation. Rather than learn from the experiences of others, social movements are seen as raw material, as a source of new party members, to be used in order to advance the party rather than the autonomy and combativeness of the working class. The latest example of this process is the current "*anti-globalisation*" or "*anti-capitalist*" movement which started without the help of these self-appointed vanguards, who have since spent a lot of time trying to catch up with the movement while criticising its proven organisational principles and tactics.

The reasons for such behaviour are not too difficult to find. They lie in organisational structure favoured by these parties and the mentality lying behind them. As anarchists have long argued, a centralised, top-down structure will simply be unresponsive to the needs of those in struggle. The inertia associated with the party hierarchy will ensure that it responds slowly to new developments and its centralised structure means that the leadership is isolated from what is happening on the ground and cannot respond appropriately. The underlying assumption of the vanguard party, namely that the party represents the interests of the working class, makes it unresponsive to new developments within the class struggle. As Lenin argued that spontaneous working class struggle tends to reformism, the leaders of a vanguard party automatically are suspicious of new developments which, by their very nature, rarely fit into previously agreed models of "*proletarian*" struggle. The example of Bolshevik hostility to the soviets spontaneously formed by workers during the 1905 Russian revolution is one of the best known examples of this tendency.

Murray Bookchin is worth quoting at length on this subject:

*"The 'glorious party,' when there is one, almost invariably lags behind the events . . . In the beginning . . . it tends to have an inhibitory function, not a 'vanguard' role. Where it exercises influence, it tends to slow down the flow of events, not 'co-ordinate' the revolutionary forced. This is not accidental. The party is structured along hierarchical lines **that reflect the very society it professes to oppose**. Despite its theoretical pretensions, it is a bourgeois organism, a miniature state, with an apparatus and a cadre whose function it is to **seize** power, not **dissolve** power. Rooted in the pre-revolutionary period, it assimilates all the forms, techniques and mentality of bureaucracy. Its membership is schooled in obedience and in the preconceptions of a rigid dogma and is taught to revere the leadership. The party's leadership, in turn, is schooled in habits born of command, authority, manipulation and egomania. This situation is worsened when the party participates in parliamentary elections. In election campaigns, the vanguard party models itself completely on existing bourgeois forms and even acquires the paraphernalia of the electoral party. . .*

*"As the party expands, the distance between the leadership and the ranks inevitably increases. Its leaders not only become 'personages,' they lose contact with the living situation below. The local groups, which know their own immediate situation better than any remote leaders, are obliged to subordinate their insights to directives from above. The leadership, lacking any direct knowledge of local problems, responds sluggishly and prudently. Although it stakes out a claim to the 'larger view,' to greater 'theoretical competence,' the competence of the leadership tends to diminish as one ascends the hierarchy of command. The more one approaches the level where the real decisions are made, the more conservative is the nature of the decision-making process, the more bureaucratic and extraneous are the factors which come into play, the more considerations of prestige and retrenchment supplant creativity, imagination, and a disinterested dedication to revolutionary goals.*

*"The party becomes less efficient from a revolutionary point of view the more it seeks efficiency by means of hierarchy, cadres and centralisation. Although everyone marches in step, the orders are usually wrong, especially when events begin to move rapidly and take unexpected turns -- as they do in all revolutions. . .*

*"On the other hand, this kind of party is extremely vulnerable in periods of repression. The bourgeoisie has only to grab its leadership to destroy virtually the entire movement. With its leaders in prison or in hiding, the party becomes paralysed; the obedient membership had no one to obey and tends to flounder. Demoralisation sets in rapidly. The party decomposes not only because of the repressive atmosphere but also because of its poverty of inner resources.*

*"The foregoing account is not a series of hypothetical inferences, it is a composite sketch of all the mass Marxian parties of the past century -- the Social Democrats, the Communists and the Trotskyist party of Ceylon (the only mass party of its kind. To claim that these parties failed to take their Marxian principles seriously merely conceals another question: why did this failure happen in the first place? The fact is, these parties were co-opted into bourgeois society because they were structured along bourgeois lines. The germ of treachery existed in them from birth." [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, pp. 194-8]*

Thus, the evidence Bookchin summarises suggests that vanguard parties are less than efficient promoting revolutionary change. Sluggish, unresponsive, undemocratic, they simply cannot adjust to the dynamic nature of social struggle, never mind revolution. This is to be expected:

*"For the state centralisation is the appropriate form of organisation, since it aims at the greatest possible uniformity in social life for the maintenance of political and social equilibrium. But for a movement whose very existence depends on prompt action at any favourable moment and on the independent thought and action of its supporters, centralism could but be a curse by weakening its power of decision and systematically*

*repressing all immediate action. If, for example, as was the case in Germany, every local strike had first to be approved by the Central, which was often hundreds of miles away and was not usually in a position to pass a correct judgement on the local conditions, one cannot wonder that the inertia of the apparatus of organisation renders a quick attack quite impossible, and there thus arises a state of affairs where the energetic and intellectually alert groups no longer serve as patterns for the less active, but are condemned by these to inactivity, inevitably bringing the whole movement to stagnation. Organisation is, after all, only a means to an end. When it becomes an end in itself, it kills the spirit and the vital initiative of its members and sets up that domination by mediocrity which is the characteristic of all bureaucracies."* [Rudolf Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 54]

As we discuss in [section 3](#) of the appendix on "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)" the example of the Bolshevik party during the Russian Revolution amply proves Rocker's point. Rather than being a highly centralised, disciplined vanguard party, the Bolshevik party was marked by extensive autonomy throughout its ranks. Party discipline was regularly ignored, including by Lenin in his attempts to get the central party bureaucracy to catch up with the spontaneous revolutionary actions and ideas of the Russian working class. As Bookchin summarises, the "*Bolshevik leadership was ordinarily extremely conservative, a trait that Lenin had to fight throughout 1917 -- first in his efforts to reorient the Central Committee against the provisional government (the famous conflict over the 'April Theses'), later in driving the Central Committee toward insurrection in October. In both cases he threatened to resign from the Central Committee and bring his views to 'the lower ranks of the party.'*" Once in power, however, "*the Bolsheviks tended to centralise their party to the degree that they became isolated from the working class.*" [Op. Cit., pp. 198-9 and p. 199]

The "vanguard" model of organising is not only inefficient and ineffective from a revolutionary perspective, it generates bureaucratic and elitist tendencies which undermine any revolution unfortunate enough to be dominated by such a party. For these extremely practical and sensible reasons anarchists reject it wholeheartedly.

In summary, vanguard parties have been proven to be less than effective in a revolutionary sense. Their top-down centralised structure is simply not responsive enough to the needs of social struggle and so usually remain out of touch with such movements, spending most of their time trying to catch up with them. As we discuss in the [next section](#), the only thing vanguard parties **are** effective at is to supplant the diversity produced and required by revolutionary movements with the drab conformity produced by centralisation and to replace popular power and freedom with party power and tyranny.

## H.5.9 What are vanguard parties effective at?

As we discussed the [last section](#), vanguard parties are not efficient as agents of revolutionary change. So, it may be asked, what **are** vanguard parties effective at? If they are harmful to revolutionary struggle, what are they good at? The answer to this is simple. No anarchist would deny that vanguard parties are

extremely efficient and effective at certain things, most notably reproducing hierarchy and bourgeois values into so-called "*revolutionary*" organisations and movements. As Murray Bookchin argues, the party "*is efficient in only one respect -- in moulding society in its own hierarchical image if the revolution is successful. It recreates bureaucracy, centralisation and the state. It fosters the very social conditions which justify this kind of society. Hence, instead of 'withering away,' the state controlled by the 'glorious party' preserves the very conditions which 'necessitate' the existence of a state -- and a party to 'guard' it.*" [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 197-8]

Thus, by being structured along hierarchical lines that reflect the very system that it professes to oppose, the vanguard party very "*effectively*" reproduces that system within both the current radical social movements **and** any revolutionary society that may be created. This means that once in power, it shapes society in its own image. Ironically, this tendency towards conservatism and bureaucracy was noted by Trotsky:

*"As often happens, a sharp cleavage developed between the classes in motion and the interests of the party machines. Even the Bolshevik Party cadres, who enjoyed the benefit of exceptional revolutionary training, were definitely inclined to disregard the masses and to identify their own special interests and the interests of the machine on the very day after the monarchy was overthrown. What, then, could be expected of these cadres when they became an all-powerful state bureaucracy?"* [**Stalin**, vol. 1, p. 298]

In such circumstances, it is unsurprising that urging party power and identifying it with working class power would have less than revolutionary results. Discussing the Bolsheviks in 1905 Trotsky points out this tendency existed from the start:

*"The habits peculiar to a political machine were already forming in the underground. The young revolutionary bureaucrat was already emerging as a type. The conditions of conspiracy, true enough, offered rather merge scope for such formalities of democracy as electiveness, accountability and control. Yet, undoubtedly the committeemen narrowed these limitations considerably more than necessity demanded and were far more intransigent and severe with the revolutionary workingmen than with themselves, preferring to domineer even on occasions that called for lending an attentive ear to the voice of the masses."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 101]

He quotes Krupskaya on these party bureaucrats, the "*committeemen*." Krupskaya argues that "*as a rule*" they "*did not recognise any party democracy*" and "*did not want any innovations. The 'committeeman' did not desire, and did not know how to, adapt himself to rapidly changing conditions.*" [quoted by Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 101] This conservatism played havoc in the party during 1917, incidentally. It would be no exaggeration to argue that the Russian revolution occurred in spite of, rather than because of, Bolshevik organisational principles (see [next section](#)). These principles, however, came into their own once the party had seized power, ensuring the consolidation of bureaucratic rule by an elite.

That a vanguard party helps to produce a bureaucratic regime once in power should not come as a surprise. If the party, to use Trotsky's expression, exhibits a "*caste tendency of the committeemen*" can we be surprised if once in power it reproduces such a tendency in the state it is now the master of? [Op. Cit., p. 102] And this "*tendency*" can be seen today in the multitude of Trotskyist sects that exist.

## H.5.10 Why does "*democratic centralism*" produce "*bureaucratic centralism*"?

In spite of the almost ritualistic assertions that vanguard parties are "*the most democratic the world has seen*," an army of ex-members, expelled dissidents and disgruntled members testify that they do not live up to the hype. They argue that most, if not all, "vanguard" parties are not "*democratic centralist*" but are, in fact, "*bureaucratic centralist*." Within the party, in other words, a bureaucratic clique controls it from the top-down with little democratic control, never mind participation.

For anarchists, this is hardly surprising. The reasons why this continually happens are rooted in the nature of "*democratic centralism*" itself.

Firstly, the assumption of "*democratic centralism*" is that the membership elect a leadership and give them the power to decide policy between conferences and congresses. This has a subtle impact on the membership, as it is assumed that the leadership has a special insight into social problems above and beyond that of anyone else, otherwise they would not have been elected to such an important position. Thus many in the membership come to believe that disagreements with the leadership's analysis, even before they had been clearly articulated, are liable to be wrong. Doubt dares not speak its name. Unquestioning belief in the party leadership has been an all too common recurring theme in many accounts of vanguard parties.

Conformity within such parties is also reinforced by the intense activism expected by members, particularly leading activists and full-time members. Paradoxically, the more deeply people participate in activism, the harder it becomes to reflect on what they are doing. The unrelenting pace often induces exhaustion and depression, while making it harder to "*think your way out*" -- too many commitments have been made and too little time is left over from party activity for reflection. Moreover, high levels of activism prevent many, particularly the most committed, from having a personal life outside their role as party members. This high-speed political existence assure that rival social networks atrophy through neglect, so ensuring that the party line is the only one which members get exposed to. Members tend to leave, typically, because of exhaustion, crisis, even despair rather than as the result of rational reflection and conscious decision.

Secondly, given that vanguard parties are based on the belief that they are the guardians of "*scientific socialism*," this means that there is a tendency to squeeze all of social life into the confines of the party's ideology. Moreover, as the party's ideology is a "science" it is expected to explain everything (hence the tendency of Leninists to expound on every subject imaginable, regardless of whether the author knows enough about the subject to discuss it in an informed way). The view that the party's ideology explains



everything eliminates the need for fresh or independent thought, precludes the possibility of critically appraising past practice or acknowledging mistakes, and removes the need to seek meaningful intellectual input outside the party's own ideological fortress. As Victor Serge, anarchist turned Bolshevik, admitted in his memoirs, "*Bolshevik thinking is grounded in the possession of the truth. The Party is the repository of truth, and any form of thinking which differs from it is a dangerous or reactionary error. Here lies its spiritual source of its intolerance. The absolute conviction of its lofty mission assures it of a moral energy quite astonishing in its intensity -- and, at the same time, a clerical mentality which is quick to becoming Inquisitorial.*" [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 134]

In fact, the intense levels of activism means that members are bombarded with party propaganda, are in endless party meetings, or spend time reading party literature and so, by virtue of the fact that there is not enough time to read anything, members end up reading nothing but party publications. Most points of contact with the external world are eliminated or drastically curtailed. Indeed, such alternative sources of information and such thinking is regularly dismissed as being contaminated by bourgeois influences. This often goes so far as to label those who question any aspect of the party's analysis revisionists or deviationists, bending to the "*pressures of capitalism,*" and are usually driven from the ranks as heretics. All this is almost always combined with contempt for all other organisations on the Left (indeed, the closer they are to the party's own ideological position the more likely they are to be the targets of abuse).

Thirdly, the practice of "*democratic centralism*" also aids this process towards conformity. Based on the idea that the party must be a highly disciplined fighting force, the party is endowed with a powerful central committee and a rule that all members must publicly defend the agreed-upon positions of the party and the decisions of the central committee, whatever opinions they might hold to the contrary in private. Between conferences, the party's leading bodies usually have extensive authority to govern the party's affairs, including updating party doctrine and deciding the party's response to current political events.

As unity is the key, there is a tendency to view any opposition as a potential threat. It is not at all clear when "*full freedom to criticise*" policy internally can be said to disturb the unity of a defined action. The norms of democratic centralism confer all power between conferences onto a central committee, allowing it to become the arbiter of when a dissident viewpoint is in danger of weakening unity. The evidence from numerous vanguard parties suggest that their leaderships usually view **any** dissent as precisely such a disruption and demand that dissidents cease their action or face expulsion from the party.

It should also be borne in mind that Leninist parties also view themselves as vitally important to the success of any future revolution. This cannot help but reinforce the tendency to view dissent as something which automatically imperils the future of the planet and so something which must be combated at all costs. As Lenin stressed in a polemic directed to the international communist movement in 1920, "*[w]hoever brings about even the slightest weakening of the iron discipline of the party of the proletariat (especially during its dictatorship) is actually aiding the bourgeoisie against the proletariat.*" [**Collected Works**, vol. 31, p. 45] As can be seen, Lenin stresses the importance of "*iron*

*discipline*" at all times, not only during the revolution when *"the party"* is applying *"its dictatorship"* (see [section H.3.8](#) for more on this aspect of Leninism). This provides a justification of whatever measures are required to restore the illusion of unanimity, including the trampling underfoot of whatever rights the membership may have on paper and the imposition of any decisions the leadership considers as essential between conferences.

Fourthly, and more subtly, it is well known that when people take a public position in defence of a proposition, there is then a strong tendency for their private attitudes to shift so that they harmonise with their public behaviour. It is difficult to say one thing in public and hold to a set of private beliefs at variance with what is publicly expressed. In short, if people tell others that they support X (for whatever reason), they will slowly begin to change their own opinions and, indeed, internally come to support X. The more public such declarations have been, the more likely it is that such a shift will take place. This has been confirmed by empirical research (see R. Cialdini, **Influence: Science and Practice**).

This suggests that if, in the name of democratic centralism, party members publicly uphold the party line, it becomes increasingly difficult to hold a private belief at variance with publicly expressed opinions. The evidence suggests that it is not possible to have a group of people presenting a conformist image to society at large while maintaining an inner party regime characterised by frank and full discussion. Conformity in public tends to equal conformity in private. So given what is now known of social influence, *"democratic centralism"* is almost certainly destined to prevent genuine internal discussion. This is sadly all too often confirmed in the internal regimes of vanguard parties, where debate is often narrowly focused on a few minor issues of emphasis rather than fundamental issues of policy and theory.

It has already been noted (in [section H.5.5](#)) that the organisational norms of democratic centralism imply a concentration of power at the top. There is abundant evidence that such a concentration has been a vital feature of every vanguard party and that such a concentration limits party democracy. An authoritarian inner party regime is maintained, which ensures that decision making is concentrated in elite hands. This regime gradually dismantles or ignores all formal controls on its activities. Members are excluded from participation in determining policy, calling leaders to account, or expressing dissent. This is usually combined with persistent assurances about the essentially democratic nature of the organisation, and the existence of exemplary democratic controls -- on paper. Correlated with this inner authoritarianism is a growing tendency toward the abuse of power by the leaders, who act in arbitrary ways, accrue personal power and so on (as noted by Trotsky with regards to the Bolshevik party machine, as mentioned above). Indeed, it is often the case that activities that would provoke outrage if engaged in by rank-and-file members are tolerated when they apply to leaders. As one group of Scottish libertarians notes:

*"Further, in so far as our Bolshevik friends reject and defy capitalist and orthodox labourist conceptions, they also are as much 'individualistic' as the anarchist. Is it not boasted, for example, that on many occasions Marx, Lenin and Trotsky were prepared to be in a minority of one -- if they thought they were more correct than all others on the*

*question at issue? In this, like Galileo, they were quite in order. Where they and their followers, obsessed by the importance of their own judgement go wrong, is in their tendency to refuse this inalienable right to other protagonists and fighters for the working class." [APCF, "Our Reply," **Class War on the Home Front**, p. 70]*

As in any hierarchical structure, the tendency is for those in power is to encourage and promote those who agree with them. This means that members usually find their influence and position in the party dependent on their willingness to conform to the hierarchy and its leadership. Dissenters will rarely find their contribution valued and advancement is limited, which produces a strong tendency not to make waves. As Miasnikov, a working class Bolshevik dissident, argued in 1921, *"the regime within the party"* meant that *"if someone dares to have the courage of his convictions,"* they are called either a self-seeker or, worse, a counter-revolutionary, a Menshevik or an SR. Moreover, within the party, favouritism and corruption were rife. In Miasnikov's eyes a new type of Communist was emerging, the toadying careerist who *"knows how to please his superiors."* At the last party congress Lenin attended, Miasnikov was expelled. Only one delegate, V. V. Kosior, *"argued that Lenin had taken the wrong approach to the question of dissent. If someone, said Kosior, had the courage to point out deficiencies in party work, he was marked down as an oppositionist, relieved of authority, placed under surveillance, and -- a reference to Miasnikov -- even expelled from the party."* [Paul Avrich, **Bolshevik Opposition to Lenin**] Serge notes about the same period that Lenin *"proclaimed a purge of the Party, aimed at those revolutionaries who had come in from other parties -- i.e. those who were not saturated with the Bolshevik mentality. This meant the establishment within the Party of a dictatorship of the old Bolsheviks, and the direction of disciplinary measures, not against the unprincipled careerists and conformist late-comers, but against those sections with a critical outlook."* [Op. Cit., p. 135]

This, of course, also applies to the party congress, on paper the sovereign body of the organisation. All too often, resolutions at party conferences will either come from the leadership or be completely supportive of its position. If branches or members submit resolutions which are critical of the leadership, enormous pressure is exerted to ensure that they are withdrawn. Moreover, often delegates to the congress are not mandated by their branches, so ensuring that rank and file opinions are not raised, never mind discussed. Other, more drastic measures have been known to occur. Victor Serge saw what he termed the *"Party steamroller"* at work in early 1921 and saw *"the voting rigged for Lenin's and Zinoviev's 'majority'"* in one of the districts of Petrograd. [Op. Cit., p.123]

All too often, such parties have "elected" bodies which have, in practice, usurped the normal democratic rights of members and become increasingly removed from formal controls. All practical accountability of the leaders to the membership for their actions is eliminated. Usually this authoritarian structure is combined with militaristic sounding rhetoric and the argument that the *"revolutionary"* movement needs to be organised in a more centralised way than the current class system, with references to the state's forces of repression (notably the army). As Murray Bookchin argued, the Leninist *"has always had a grudging admiration and respect for that most inhuman of all hierarchical institutions, the military."* [Toward an Ecological Society, p. 254f]

The modern day effectiveness of the vanguard party can be seen by the strange fact that many Leninists

fail to join any of the existing parties due to their bureaucratic internal organisation and that many members are expelled (or leave in disgust) due to their attempts to make them more democratic. If vanguard parties are such positive organisations to be a member of, why do they have such big problems with member retention? Why are there so many vocal ex-members? Why are so many Leninists ex-members of vanguard parties, desperately trying to find an actual party which matches their own vision of democratic centralism rather than the bureaucratic centralism which seems the norm?

Our account of the workings of vanguard parties explains, in part, why many anarchists and other libertarians voice concern about them and their underlying ideology. We do so because their practices are disruptive and alienate new activists, hindering the very goal (socialism/revolution) they claim to be aiming for. As anyone familiar with the numerous groupings and parties in the Leninist left will attest, the anarchist critique of vanguardism seems to be confirmed in reality while the Leninist defence seems sadly lacking (unless, of course, the person is a member of such a party and then their organisation is the exception to the rule!).

## **H.5.11 Can you provide an example of the negative nature of vanguard parties?**

Yes. Our theoretical critique of vanguardism we have presented in the last few sections is more than proved by the empirical evidence of such parties in operation today. Rarely do "vanguard" parties reach in practice the high hopes their supporters like to claim for them. Such parties are usually small, prone to splitting as well as leadership cults, and usually play a negative role in social struggle. A long line of ex-members complain that such parties are elitist, hierarchical and bureaucratic.

Obviously we cannot hope to discuss all such parties. As such, we will take just one example, namely the arguments of one group of dissidents of the biggest British Leninist party, the Socialist Workers Party. It is worth quoting their account of the internal workings of the SWP at length:

*"The SWP is not democratic centralist but bureaucratic centralist. The leadership's control of the party is unchecked by the members. New perspectives are initiated exclusively by the central committee (CC), who then implement their perspective against all party opposition, implicit or explicit, legitimate or otherwise.*

*"Once a new perspective is declared, a new cadre is selected from the top down. The CC select the organisers, who select the district and branch committees - any elections that take place are carried out on the basis of 'slates' so that it is virtually impossible for members to vote against the slate proposed by the leadership. Any members who have doubts or disagreements are written off as 'burnt out' and, depending on their reaction to this, may be marginalised within the party and even expelled.*

*"These methods have been disastrous for the SWP in a number of ways: Each new*

*perspective requires a new cadre (below the level of the CC), so the existing cadre are actively marginalised in the party. In this way, the SWP has failed to build a stable and experienced cadre capable of acting independently of the leadership. Successive layers of cadres have been driven into passivity, and even out of the revolutionary movement altogether. The result is the loss of hundreds of potential cadres. Instead of appraising the real, uneven development of individual cadres, the history of the party is written in terms of a star system (comrades currently favoured by the party) and a demonology (the 'renegades' who are brushed aside with each turn of the party). As a result of this systematic dissolution of the cadre, the CC grows ever more remote from the membership and increasingly bureaucratic in its methods. In recent years the national committee has been abolished (it obediently voted for its own dissolution, on the recommendation of the CC), to be replaced by party councils made up of those comrades active at any one time (i.e. those who already agree with current perspectives); district committees are appointed rather than elected; the CC monopolise all information concerning the party, so that it is impossible for members to know much about what happens in the party outside their own branch; the CC give a distorted account of events rather than admit their mistakes . . . history is rewritten to reinforce the prestige of the CC . . . The outcome is a party whose conferences have no democratic function, but serve only to orientate party activists to carry out perspectives drawn up before the delegates even set out from their branches. At every level of the party, strategy and tactics are presented from the top down, as pre-digested instructions for action. At every level, the comrades 'below' are seen only as a passive mass to be shifted into action, rather than as a source of new initiatives."*

*"The only exception is when a branch thinks up a new tactic to carry out the CC's perspective. In this case, the CC may take up this tactic and apply it across the party. In no way do rank and file members play an active role in determining the strategy and theory of the party -- except in the negative sense that if they refuse to implement a perspective eventually even the CC notice, and will modify the line to suit. A political culture has been created in which the leadership outside of the CC consists almost solely of comrades loyal to the CC, willing to follow every turn of the perspective without criticism . . . Increasingly, the bureaucratic methods used by the CC to enforce their control over the political direction of the party have been extended to other areas of party life. In debates over questions of philosophy, culture and even anthropology an informal party 'line' emerged (i.e. concerning matters in which there can be no question of the party taking a 'line'). Often behind these positions lay nothing more substantial than the opinions of this or that CC member, but adherence to the line quickly became a badge of party loyalty, disagreement became a stigma, and the effect was to close down the democracy of the party yet further by placing even questions of theory beyond debate. Many militants, especially working class militants with some experience of trade union democracy, etc., are often repelled by the undemocratic norms in the party and refuse to join, or keep their distance despite accepting our formal politics." [ISG, **Discussion Document of Ex-SWP Comrades**]*

They argue that a "democratic" party would involve the "[r]egular election of all party full-timers, branch and district leadership, conference delegates, etc. with the right of recall," which means that in the SWP appointment of full-timers, leaders and so on is the norm. They argue for the "right of branches to propose motions to the party conference" and for the "right for members to communicate horizontally in the party, to produce and distribute their own documents." They stress the need for "an independent Control Commission to review all disciplinary cases (independent of the leadership bodies that exercise discipline), and the right of any disciplined comrades to appeal directly to party conference." They argue that in a democratic party "no section of the party would have a monopoly of information" which indicates that the SWP's leadership is essentially secretive, withholding information from the party membership. [Ibid.]

Even more significantly, given our discussion on the influence of the party structure on post-revolutionary society in [section H.5.7](#), they argue that "[w]orst of all, the SWP are training a layer of revolutionaries to believe that the organisational norms of the SWP are a shining example of proletarian democracy, applicable to a future socialist society. Not surprisingly, many people are instinctively repelled by this idea." [Ibid.]

Some of these critics of Leninism do not give up hope and still look for a truly democratic centralist party rather than the bureaucratic centralist ones which seem so common. For example, our group of ex-SWP dissidents argue that "[a]nybody who has spent time involved in 'Leninist' organisations will have come across workers who agree with Marxist politics but refuse to join the party because they believe it to be undemocratic and authoritarian. Many draw the conclusion that Leninism itself is at fault, as every organisation that proclaims itself Leninist appears to follow the same pattern." [Lenin vs. the SWP: Bureaucratic Centralism Or Democratic Centralism?] This is a common refrain with Leninists -- when reality says one thing and the theory another, it must be reality that is at fault. Yes, every Leninist organisation may be bureaucratic and authoritarian but it is not the theory's fault that those who apply it are not capable of actually doing so successfully. Such an application of scientific principles by the followers of "scientific socialism" is worthy of note -- obviously the usual scientific method of generalising from facts to produce a theory is inapplicable when evaluating "scientific socialism" itself. However, Rather than ponder the possibility that "democratic centralism" does not actually work and automatically generates the "bureaucratic centralism," they point to the example of the Russian revolution and the original Bolshevik party as proof of the validity of their hopes.

Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to argue that the only reason people take the vanguard party organisational structure seriously is the apparent success of the Bolsheviks in the Russian revolution. However, as noted above, even the Bolshevik party was subject to bureaucratic tendencies and as we discuss in the [section 3](#) of the appendix on "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)", the experience of the 1917 Russian Revolutions disprove the effectiveness of "vanguard" style parties. The Bolshevik party of 1917 was a totally different form of organisation than the ideal "democratic centralist" type argued for by Lenin in 1902 and 1920. As a model of revolutionary organisation, the "vanguardist" one has been proven false rather than confirmed by the experience of the Russian revolution. Insofar as the Bolshevik party was effective, it operated in a non-vanguardist way and insofar

as it did operate in such a manner, it held back the struggle.

## I.8 Does revolutionary Spain show that libertarian socialism can work in practice?

Yes. As Murray Bookchin puts it, "*[i]n Spain, millions of people took large segments of the economy into their own hands, collectivised them, administered them, even abolished money and lived by communistic principles of work and distribution -- all of this in the midst of a terrible civil war, yet without producing the chaos or even the serious dislocations that were and still are predicted by authoritarian 'radicals.'* Indeed, in many collectivised areas, the efficiency with which an enterprise worked by far exceeded that of a comparable one in nationalised or private sectors. This 'green shoot' of revolutionary reality has more meaning for us than the most persuasive theoretical arguments to the contrary. On this score it is not the anarchists who are the 'unrealistic day-dreamers,' but their opponents who have turned their backs to the facts or have shamelessly concealed them." ["Introductory Essay," in **The Anarchist Collectives**, Sam Dolgoff (ed.), p. xxxix]

Sam Dolgoff's book is by far the best English source on the Spanish collectives and deserves to be quoted at length (as we do below). He quotes French Anarchist Gaston Leval comments that in those areas which defeated the fascist uprising on the 19th of July 1936 a profound social revolution took place based, mostly, on anarchist ideas:

*"In Spain, during almost three years, despite a civil war that took a million lives, despite the opposition of the political parties . . . this idea of libertarian communism was put into effect. Very quickly more than 60% of the land was very quickly collectively cultivated by the peasants themselves, without landlords, without bosses, and without instituting capitalist competition to spur production. In almost all the industries, factories, mills, workshops, transportation services, public services, and utilities, the rank and file workers, their revolutionary committees, and their syndicates reorganised and administered production, distribution, and public services without capitalists, high-salaried managers, or the authority of the state.*

*"Even more: the various agrarian and industrial collectives immediately instituted economic equality in accordance with the essential principle of communism, 'From each according to his ability and to each according to his needs.' They co-ordinated their efforts through free association in whole regions, created new wealth, increased production (especially in agriculture), built more schools, and bettered public services. They instituted not bourgeois formal democracy but genuine grass roots functional libertarian democracy, where each individual participated directly in the revolutionary reorganisation of social life. They replaced the war between men, 'survival of the fittest,' by the universal practice of mutual aid, and replaced rivalry by the principle of solidarity . . .*



*"This experience, in which about eight million people directly or indirectly participated, opened a new way of life to those who sought an alternative to anti-social capitalism on the one hand, and totalitarian state bogus socialism on the other."* [Op. Cit., pp. 6-7]

Thus about eight million people directly or indirectly participated in the libertarian based new economy during the short time it was able to survive the military assaults of the fascists and the attacks and sabotage of the Communists. This in itself suggests that libertarian socialist ideas are of a practical nature.

Lest the reader think that Dolgoff and Bookchin are exaggerating the accomplishments and ignoring the failures of the Spanish collectives, in the following subsections we will present specific details and answer some objections often raised by misinformed critics. We will try to present an objective analysis of the revolution, its many successes, its strong points and weak points, the mistakes made and possible lessons to be drawn from the experience, both from the successes and the mistakes.

This libertarian influenced revolution has (generally) been ignored by historians, or its existence mentioned in passing. Some so-called historians and "*objective investigators*" have slandered it and lied about (when not ignoring) the role anarchists played in it. Communist histories are particularly unreliable (to use a polite word for their activities) but it seems that almost **every** political perspective has done this (including liberal, right-wing libertarian, Stalinist, Trotskyist, Marxist, and so on). Indeed, the myths generated by Marxists of various shades are quite extensive (see the appendix on "[Marxists and Spanish Anarchism](#)" for a reply to some of the more common ones).

Thus any attempt to investigate what actually occurred in Spain and the anarchists' role in it is subject to a great deal of difficulty. Moreover, the positive role that Anarchists played in the revolution and the positive results of our ideas when applied in practice are also downplayed, if not ignored. Indeed, the misrepresentations of the Spanish Anarchist movement are downright amazing (see Jerome R. Mintz's wonderful book **The Anarchists of Casa Viejas** for a refutation of the historians claims, a refutation based on oral history, as well as J. Romero Maura's, "*The Spanish case*", contained in **Anarchism Today**, edited by J. Joll and D. Apter. Both are essential reading to understand the distortions of historians about the Spanish anarchist movement).

All we can do here is present a summary of the social revolution that took place and attempt to explode a few of the myths that have been created around the work of the C.N.T. and F.A.I. during those years.

In addition, we must stress that this section of the FAQ can be nothing but an introduction to the Spanish Revolution. We concentrate on the economic and political aspects of the revolution as we cannot cover the social transformations that occurred. All across non-fascist Spain traditional social relationships between men and women, adults and children, individual and individual were transformed, revolutionised, in a libertarian way. C.N.T. militant Abel Paz gives a good indication of this when he wrote:

*"Industry is in the hands of the workers and all the production centres conspicuously fly the red and black flags as well as inscriptions announcing that they have really become collectives. The revolution seems to be universal. Changes are also evident in social relations. The former barriers which used to separate men and woman arbitrarily have been destroyed. In the cafes and other public places there is a mingling of the sexes which would have been completely unimaginable before. The revolution has introduced a fraternal character to social relations which has deepened with practice and show clearly that the old world is dead."* [Durruti: **The People Armed**, p. 243]

The social transformation empowered individuals and these, in turn, transformed society. Anarchist militant Enriqueta Rovira presents a vivid picture of the self-liberation the revolution generated:

*"The atmosphere then [during the revolution], the feelings were very special. It was beautiful. A feeling of -- how shall I say it -- of power, not in the sense of domination, but in the sense of things being under **our** control, of under anyone's. Of **possibility**. We **had** everything. We had Barcelona: It was ours. You'd walk out in the streets, and they were ours -- here, CNT; there, **comite** this or that. It was totally different. Full of possibility. A feeling that we could, together, really **do** something. That we could make things different."* [quoted by Martha A. Ackelsberg and Myrna Margulies Breithart, *Terrains of Protest: Striking City Women*, pp. 151-176, **Our Generation**, vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 164-5]

Moreover, the transformation of society that occurred during the revolution extended to all areas of life and work. For example, the revolution saw *"the creation of a health workers' union, a true experiment in socialised medicine. They provided medical assistance and opened hospitals and clinics."* [Juan Gomez Casas, **Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI**, p. 192] We discuss this example in some detail in [section I.5.12](#) and so will not do so here. Therefore, we must stress that this section of the FAQ is just an introduction to what happened and does not (indeed, cannot) discuss all aspects of the revolution. We just present an overview, bringing out the libertarian aspects of the revolution, the ways workers' self-management was organised, how the collectives organised and what they did.

Needless to say, many mistakes were made during the revolution. We point out and discuss some of them in what follows. Moreover, much of what happened did not correspond exactly with what many people consider as the essential steps in a communist (libertarian or otherwise) revolution. Economically, for example, few collectives reached beyond a mutualist or collectivist state. Politically, the fear of a fascist victory made many anarchists accept collaboration with the state as a lesser evil. However, to dismiss the Spanish Revolution because it did not meet the ideas laid out by a handful of revolutionaries would be sectarian and elitist nonsense. No working class revolution is pure, no mass struggle is without its contradictions, no attempt to change society will be perfect. *"It is only those who do nothing who make no mistakes,"* as Kropotkin so correctly pointed out. [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 143] The question is whether the revolution creates a system of institutions which will allow those involved to discuss the problems they face and correct the decisions they make. In this, the Spanish Revolution clearly succeeded, creating organisations based on the initiative, autonomy and

power of working class people.

For more information about the social revolution, Sam Dolgoff's **The Anarchist Collectives** is an excellent starting place. Gaston Leval's **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution** is another essential text. Jose Pierat's **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution** and Vernon Richards' **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution** are excellent critical anarchist works on the revolution and the role of the anarchists. Robert Alexander's **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War** is a good general overview of the anarchist's role in the revolution and civil war, as is Burnett Bolloten's **The Spanish Civil War**. Noam Chomsky's excellent essay "*Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship*" indicates how liberal books on the Spanish Civil War can be misleading, unfair and essentially ideological in nature (this classic essay can be found in **The Chomsky Reader** and **American Power and the New Mandarins**). George Orwell's **Homage to Catalonia** cannot be bettered as an introduction to the subject (Orwell was in the POUM militia at the Aragon Front and was in Barcelona during the May Days of 1937).

## I.8.1 Wasn't the Spanish Revolution primarily a rural phenomenon and therefore inapplicable as a model for modern industrialised societies?

Quite the reverse. More urban workers took part in the revolution than in the countryside. So while it is true that collectivisation was extensive in rural areas, the revolution also made its mark in urban areas and in industry.

In total, the "*regions most affected*" by collectivisation "*were Catalonia and Aragon, were about 70 per cent of the workforce was involved. The total for the whole of Republican territory was nearly 800,000 on the land and a little more than a million in industry. In Barcelona workers' committees took over all the services, the oil monopoly, the shipping companies, heavy engineering firms such as Volcano, the Ford motor company, chemical companies, the textile industry and a host of smaller enterprises. . . Services such as water, gas and electricity were working under new management within hours of the storming of the Atarazanas barracks . . . a conversion of appropriate factories to war production meant that metallurgical concerns had started to produce armed cars by 22 July . . . The industrial workers of Catalonia were the most skilled in Spain . . . One of the most impressive feats of those early days was the resurrection of the public transport system at a time when the streets were still littered and barricaded.*" Five days after the fighting had stopped, 700 tramcars rather than the usual 600, all painted in the colours of the CNT-FAI were operating in Barcelona." [Antony Beevor, **The Spanish Civil War**, pp. 91-2]

About 75% of Spanish industry was concentrated in Catalonia, the stronghold of the anarchist labour movement, and widespread collectivisation of factories took place there. However, collectivisation was not limited to Catalonia and took place all across urban as well as rural Republican Spain. As Sam Dolgoff rightly observes, "*[t]his refutes decisively the allegation that anarchist organisational principles are not applicable to industrial areas, and if at all, only in primitive agrarian societies or in*

*isolated experimental communities.*" [The Anarchist Collectives, pp. 7-8]

There had been a long tradition of peasant collectivism in the Iberian Peninsula, as there was among the Berbers and in the ancient Russian **mir**. The historians Costa and Reparaz maintain that a great many Iberian collectives can be traced to "*a form of rural libertarian-communism [which] existed in the Iberian Peninsula before the Roman invasion. Not even five centuries of oppression by Catholic kings, the State and the Church have been able to eradicate the spontaneous tendency to establish libertarian communistic communities.*" [cited, **Op. Cit.**, p. 20] So it is not surprising that there were collectives in the countryside.

According to Augustin Souchy, "*[i]t is no simple matter to collectivise and place on firm foundations an industry employing almost a quarter of a million textile workers in scores of factories scattered in numerous cities. But the Barcelona syndicalist textile union accomplished this feat in a short time. It was a tremendously significant experiment. The dictatorship of the bosses was toppled, and wages, working conditions and production were determined by the workers and their elected delegates. All functionaries had to carry out the instructions of the membership and report back directly to the men on the job and union meetings. The collectivisation of the textile industry shatters once and for all the legend that the workers are incapable of administrating a great and complex corporation*" [cited, **Op. Cit.**, p. 94].

Moreover, Spain in the 1930s was not a "*backward, peasant country,*" as is sometimes supposed. Between 1910 and 1930, the industrial working class more than doubled to over 2,500,000. This represented just over 26% of the working population (compared to 16% twenty years previously). In 1930, 45 per cent of the working population were engaged in agriculture. [Ronald Fraser, **The Blood of Spain**, p. 38] In Catalonia alone, 200,000 workers were employed in the textile industry and 70,000 in metal-working and machinery manufacturing. This was very different than the situation in Russia at the end of World War I, where the urban working class made up only 10% of the population.

Capitalist social relations had also penetrated agriculture much more thoroughly than in "*backward, underdeveloped*" countries by the 1930s. In Russia at the end of World War I, for example, agriculture mostly consisted of small farms on which peasant families worked mainly for their own subsistence, bartering or selling their surplus. In Spain, however, agriculture was oriented to the world market and by the 1930s approximately 90% of farm land was in the hands of the bourgeoisie. [Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 37] Spanish agribusiness also employed large numbers of labourers who did not own enough land to support themselves. The revolutionary labour movement in the Spanish countryside in the 1930s was precisely based on this large population of rural wage-earners (the socialist UGT land workers union had 451,000 members in 1933, 40% of its total membership, for example).

Therefore the Spanish Revolution cannot be dismissed as a product of pre-industrial society. The urban collectivisations occurred predominately in the most heavily industrialised part of Spain and indicate that anarchist ideas are applicable to modern societies (indeed, the CNT organised most of the unionised urban working class). By 1936 agriculture itself was predominately capitalist (with 2% of the population owning 67% of the land). The revolution in Spain was the work (mostly) of rural and urban wage

labourers (joined with poor peasants) fighting a well developed capitalist system.

Therefore, the anarchist revolution in Spain has many lessons for revolutionaries in developed capitalist countries and cannot be dismissed as a product of industrial backwardness.

## I.8.2 How were the anarchists able to obtain mass popular support in Spain?

Anarchism was introduced in Spain in 1868 by Giuseppe Fanelli, an associate of Michael Bakunin, and found fertile soil among both the workers and the peasants of Spain.

The peasants supported anarchism because of the rural tradition of Iberian collectivism mentioned in the [last section](#). The urban workers supported it because its ideas of direct action, solidarity and free federation of unions corresponded to their needs in their struggle against capitalism and the state.

In addition, many Spanish workers were well aware of the dangers of centralisation and the republican tradition in Spain was very much influenced by federalist ideas (coming, in part, from Proudhon's work). The movement later spread back and forth between countryside and cities as union organisers and anarchist militants visited villages and as peasants came to industrial cities like Barcelona, looking for work.

Therefore, from the start anarchism in Spain was associated with the labour movement (as Bakunin desired) and so anarchists had a practical area to apply their ideas and spread the anarchist message. By applying their principles in everyday life, the anarchists in Spain ensured that anarchist ideas became commonplace and accepted in a large section of the population.

This acceptance of anarchism cannot be separated from the structure and tactics of the C.N.T. and its fore-runners. The practice of direct action and solidarity encouraged workers to rely on themselves to identify and solve their own problems. The decentralised structure of the anarchist unions had an educational effect of their members. By discussing issues, struggles, tactics, ideals and politics in their union assemblies, the members of the union educated themselves and, by the process of self-management in the struggle, prepared themselves for a free society. The very organisational structure of the C.N.T. ensured the dominance of anarchist ideas and the political evolution of the union membership. As one C.N.T. militant from Casas Viejas put it, new members *"asked for too much, because they lacked education. They thought they could reach the sky without a ladder . . . they were beginning to learn . . . There was good faith but lack of education. For that reason we would submit ideas to the assembly, and the bad ideas would be thrown out."* [quoted by J. Mintz, **The Anarchists of Casas Viejas**, p. 27]

It was by working in the union meetings that anarchists influenced their fellow workers. The idea that the anarchists, through the F.A.I, controlled the C.N.T is a myth. Not all anarchists in the C.N.T were

members of the F.A.I, for example. Almost all F.A.I members were also rank-and-file members of the C.N.T. who took part in union meetings as equals. Anarchists were not members of the FAI indicate this. Jose Borrás Casacarosa notes that "*[o]ne has to recognise that the F.A.I. did not intervene in the C.N.T. from above or in an authoritarian manner as did other political parties in the unions. It did so from the base through militants . . . the decisions which determined the course taken by the C.N.T. were taken under constant pressure from these militants.*" Jose Campos notes that F.A.I. militants "*tended to reject control of confederal committees and only accepted them on specific occasions . . . if someone proposed a motion in assembly, the other F.A.I. members would support it, usually successfully. It was the individual standing of the **faista** in open assembly.*" [quoted by Stuart Christie, **We, the Anarchists**, p. 62]

This explains the success of anarchism in the CNT. Anarchist ideas, principles and tactics, submitted to the union assemblies, proved to be good ideas and were not thrown out. The structure of the organisation, in other words, decisively influenced the **content** of the decisions reached as ideas, tactics, union policy and so on were discussed by the membership and those which best applied to the members lives were accepted and implemented. The C.N.T assemblies showed the validity of Bakunin's arguments for self-managed unions as a means of ensuring workers' control of their own destinies and organisations. As he put it, the union "*sections could defend their rights and their autonomy [against union bureaucracy] in only one way: the workers called general membership meetings . . . In these great meetings of the sections, the items on the agenda were amply discussed and the most progressive opinion prevailed.*" [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 247] The C.N.T was built on such "*popular assemblies*," with the same radicalising effect. It showed, in practice, that bosses (capitalist as well as union ones) were not needed -- workers can manage their own affairs directly. As a school for anarchism it could not be bettered as it showed that anarchist principles were not utopian. The C.N.T, by being based on workers' self-management of the class struggle, prepared its members for workers' self-management of the revolution and the new society.

The Spanish Revolution also shows the importance of anarchist education and media. In a country with a very high illiteracy rate, huge quantities of literature on social revolution were disseminated and read out loud at meetings by those who could read to those who could not. Anarchist ideas were widely discussed. "*There were tens of thousands of books, pamphlets and tracts, vast and daring cultural and popular educational experiments (the Ferrer schools) that reached into almost every village and hamlet throughout Spain.*" [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 27] The discussion of political, economic and social ideas was continuous, and "*the centro [local union hall] became the gathering place to discuss social issues and to dream and plan for the future. Those who aspired to learn to read and write would sit around . . . studying.*" [Jerome R. Mintz, **The Anarchists of Casas Viejas**, p. 160] One anarchist militant described it as follows:

*"With what joy the orators were received whenever a meeting was held . . . We spoke that night about everything: of the ruling inequality of the regime and of how one had a right to a life without selfishness, hatred, without wars and suffering. We were called on another occasion and a crowd gathered larger than the first time. That's how the pueblo started to evolve, fighting the present regime to win something by which they could sustain*

*themselves, and dreaming of the day when it would be possible to create that society some depict in books, others by word of mouth. Avid for learning, they read everything, debated, discussed, and chatted about the different modes of perfect social existence.*" [Perez Cordon, quoted by Jerome R. Mintz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 158]

Newspapers and periodicals were extremely important. By 1919, more than 50 towns in Andalusia had their own libertarian newspapers. By 1934 the C.N.T. (the anarcho-syndicalist labour union) had a membership of around one million and the anarchist press covered all of Spain. In Barcelona the C.N.T. published a daily, **Solidaridad Obrera** (Worker Solidarity), with a circulation of 30,000. The FAI's magazine **Tierra y Libertad** (Land and Liberty) had a circulation of 20,000. In Gijon there was **Vida Obrera** (Working Life), in Seville **El Productor** (The Producer), and in Saragossa **Accion y Cultura** (Action and Culture), each with a large circulation. There were many more.

As well as leading struggles, organising unions, and producing books, papers and periodicals, the anarchists also organised libertarian schools, cultural centres, co-operatives, anarchist groups (the F.A.I), youth groups (the Libertarian Youth) and women's organisations (the Free Women movement). They applied their ideas in all walks of life and so ensured that ordinary people saw that anarchism was practical and relevant to them.

This was the great strength of the Spanish Anarchist movement. It was a movement *"that, in addition to possessing a revolutionary ideology [sic], was also capable of mobilising action around objectives firmly rooted in the life and conditions of the working class . . . It was this ability periodically to identify and express widely felt needs and feelings that, together with its presence at community level, formed the basis of the strength of radical anarchism, and enabled it to build a mass base of support."* [Nick Rider, *"The practice of direct action: the Barcelona rent strike of 1931"*, p. 99, from **For Anarchism**, pp. 79-105]

Historian Temma Kaplan stressed this in her work on the Andalusian anarchists. She argued that the anarchists were *"rooted in" social life and created "a movement firmly based in working-class culture."* They *"formed trade unions, affinity groups such as housewives' sections, and broad cultural associations such as workers' circles, where the anarchist press was read and discussed."* Their *"great strength . . . lay in the merger of communal and militant trade union traditions. In towns where the vast majority of worked in agriculture, agricultural workers' unions came to be identified with the community as a whole . . . anarchism . . . show[ed] that the demands of agricultural workers and proletarians could be combined with community support to create an insurrectionary situation . . . It would be a mistake . . . to argue that 'village anarchism' in Andalusia was distinct from militant unionism, or that the movement was a surrogate religion."* [**Anarchists of Andalusia: 1868-1903**, p. 211, p. 207, pp. 204-5]

The Spanish anarchists, before and after the C.N.T was formed, fought in and out of the factory for economic, social and political issues. This refusal of the anarchists to ignore any aspect of life ensured that they found many willing to hear their message, a message based around the ideas of individual

liberty. Such a message could do nothing but radicalise workers for *"the demands of the C.N.T went much further than those of any social democrat: with its emphasis on true equality, autogestion [self-management] and working class dignity, anarchosyndicalism made demands the capitalist system could not possibly grant to the workers."* [J. Romero Maura, *"The Spanish case"*, p. 79, from **Anarchism Today**, edited by J. Joll and D. Apter]

Strikes, due to the lack of strike funds, depended on mutual aid to be won, which fostered a strong sense of solidarity and class consciousness in the CNT membership. Strikes did not just involve workers. For example, workers in Jerez responded to bosses importing workers from Malaga *"with a weapon of their own -- a boycott of those using strikebreakers. The most notable boycotts were against landowners near Jerez who also had commercial establishments in the city. The workers and their wives refused to buy there, and the women stationed themselves nearby to discourage other shoppers."* [Jerome R. Mintz, **Op. Cit.**, p. 102]

The structure and tactics of the C.N.T encouraged the politicisation, initiative and organisational skills of its members. It was a federal, decentralised body, based on direct discussion and decision making from the bottom up. *"The C.N.T tradition was to discuss and examine everything"*, as one militant put it. In addition, the C.N.T created a viable and practical example of an alternative method by which society could be organised. A method which was based on the ability of ordinary people to direct society themselves and which showed in practice that special ruling authorities are undesirable and unnecessary.

The very structure of the C.N.T and the practical experience it provided its members in self-management produced a revolutionary working class the likes of which the world has rarely seen. As Jose Peirats points out, *"above the union level, the C.N.T was an eminently political organisation . . . , a social and revolutionary organisation for agitation and insurrection."* [**Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 239]

The C.N.T. was organised in such a way as to encourage solidarity and class consciousness. Its organisation was based on the **sindicato unico** (one union) which united all workers of the same workplace in the same union. Instead of organising by trade, and so dividing the workers into numerous different unions, the C.N.T united all workers in a workplace into the same organisation, all trades, skilled and unskilled, where in a single organisation and so solidarity was increased and encouraged as well as increasing their fighting power by eliminating divisions within the workforce. All the unions in an area were linked together into a local federation, the local federations into a regional federation and so on. As J. Romero Maura argues, the *"territorial basis of organisation linkage brought all the workers from one area together and fomented working-class solidarity over and above corporate [industry or trade] solidarity."* [*"The Spanish case"*, p. 75, from **Anarchism Today**, edited by J. Joll and D. Apter]

Thus the structure of the C.N.T. encouraged class solidarity and consciousness. In addition, being based on direct action and self-management, the union ensured that working people became accustomed to managing their own struggles and acting for themselves, directly. This prepared them to manage their own personal and collective interests in a free society (as seen by the success of the self-managed



collectives created in the revolution). Thus the process of self-managed struggle and direct action prepared people for the necessities of the social revolution and the an anarchist society -- it built, as Bakunin argued, the seeds of the future in the present.

In other words, *"the route to radicalisation . . . came from direct involvement in struggle and in the design of alternative social institutions."* Every strike and action empowered those involved and created a viable alternative to the existing system. For example, while the strikes and food protests in Barcelona at the end of the First World War *"did not topple the government, patterns of organisation established then provided models for the anarchist movement for years to follow."* [Martha A. Ackelsberg and Myrna Margulies Breithart, *"Terrains of Protest: Striking City Women"*, pp. 151-176, **Our Generation**, vol. 19, No. 1, p. 164] The same could be said of every strike, which confirmed Bakunin's and Kropotkin's stress on the strike as not only creating class consciousness and confidence but also the structures necessary to not only fight capitalism, but to replace it.

It was the revolutionary nature of the C.N.T. that created a militant membership who were willing and able to use direct action to defend their liberty. Unlike the Marxist led German workers, organised in a centralised fashion and trained in the obedience required by hierarchy, who did nothing to stop Hitler, the Spanish working class (like their comrades in anarchist unions in Italy) took to the streets to stop fascism.

The revolution in Spain did not "just happen"; it was the result of nearly seventy years of persistent anarchist agitation and revolutionary struggle, including a long series of peasant uprisings, insurrections, industrial strikes, protests, sabotage and other forms of direct action that prepared the peasants and workers organise popular resistance to the attempted fascist coup in July 1937 and to take control of the economy when they had defeated it in the streets.

### **I.8.3 How were Spanish industrial collectives organised?**

Marta A. Ackelsberg gives us an excellent short summary of how the industrial collectives were organised:

*"In most collectivised industries, general assemblies of workers decided policy, while elected committees managed affairs on a day-to-day basis."* [**Free Women of Spain**, p. 73]

The collectives were based on workers' democratic self-management of their workplaces, using productive assets that were under the custodianship of the entire working community and administered through federations of workers' associations. Augustin Souchy writes:

*"The collectives organised during the Spanish Civil War were workers' economic associations without private property. The fact that collective plants were managed by those who worked in them did not mean that these establishments became their private*

*property. The collective had no right to sell or rent all or any part of the collectivised factory or workshop, The rightful custodian was the C.N.T., the National Confederation of Workers Associations. But not even the C.N.T. had the right to do as it pleased. Everything had to be decided and ratified by the workers themselves through conferences and congresses."* [cited in **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 67]

According to Souchy, in Catalonia *"every factory elected its administrative committee composed of its most capable workers. Depending on the size of the factory, the function of these committees included inner plant organisation, statistics, finance, correspondence, and relations with other factories and with the community. . . . Several months after collectivisation the textile industry of Barcelona was in far better shape than under capitalist management. Here was yet another example to show that grass roots socialism from below does not destroy initiative. Greed is not the only motivation in human relations."* [Op. Cit., p 95]

Thus the individual collective was based on a mass assembly of those who worked there. This assembly nominated administrative staff who were mandated to implement the decisions of the assembly and who had to report back to, and were accountable to, that assembly. For example, in Castellon de la Plana *"[e]very month the technical and administrative council presented the general assembly of the Syndicate with a report which was examined and discussed if necessary, and finally introduced when this majority thought it of use. Thus all the activities were known and controlled by all the workers. We find here a practical example of libertarian democracy."* [**Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 303]

So, in general, the industrial collectives were organised from the bottom-up, with policy in the hands of workers' assemblies who elected the administration required, including workplace committees and managers. However, power rested at the base of the collective, with *"all important decisions [being] taken by the general assemblies of the workers, . . . [which] were widely attended and regularly held. . . if an administrator did something which the general assembly had not authorised, he was likely to be deposed at the next meeting."* An example of this process can be seen from the Casa Rivieria company. After the defeat of the army coup *"a control committee (Comite de Control) was named by the Barcelona Metal Workers' Union to take over temporary control of the enterprises. . . A few weeks after July 19th, there was the first general assembly of the firm's workers . . . It elected an enterprise committee (Comite de Empresa) to take control of the firm on a more permanent basis. . . . Each of the four sections of the firm -- the three factories and the office staff -- held their own general assemblies at least once a week. There they discussed matters ranging from the most important affairs to the most trivial."* [Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 1, p. 469 and p. 532]

A plenum of syndicates met in December of 1936 and formulated norms for socialisation in which the inefficiency of the capitalist industrial system was analysed. The report of the plenum stated:

*"The major defect of most small manufacturing shops is fragmentation and lack of technical/commercial preparation. This prevents their modernisation and consolidation into better and more efficient units of production, with better facilities and co-*

*ordination. . . . For us, socialisation must correct these deficiencies and systems of organisation in every industry. . . . To socialise an industry, we must consolidate the different units of each branch of industry in accordance with a general and organic plan which will avoid competition and other difficulties impeding the good and efficient organisation of production and distribution. . . .* [cited by Souchy, **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 83]

As Souchy points out, this document is very important in the evolution of collectivisation, because it indicates a realisation that *"workers must take into account that partial collectivisation will in time degenerate into a kind of bourgeois co-operativism,"* [Op. Cit., p. 83] as discussed earlier. Thus many collectives did not compete with each other for profits, as surpluses were pooled and distributed on a wider basis than the individual collective -- in most cases industry-wide.

We have already noted some examples of the improvements in efficiency realised by collectivisation during the Spanish Revolution ( [section I.4.10](#)). Another example was the baking industry. Souchy reports that, *"[a]s in the rest of Spain, Barcelona's bread and cakes were baked mostly at night in hundreds of small bakeries. Most of them were in damp, gloomy cellars infested with roaches and rodents. All these bakeries were shut down. More and better bread and cake were baked in new bakeries equipped with new modern ovens and other equipment."* [Op. Cit., p. 82]

Therefore, the collectives in Spain were marked by workplace democracy and a desire to co-operate within and across industries. This attempt at libertarian socialism, like all experiments, had its drawbacks as well as successes and these will be discussed in the [next section](#) as well as some of the conclusions drawn from the experience.

## I.8.4 How were the Spanish industrial collectives co-ordinated?

The methods of co-operation tried by the collectives varied considerably. Initially, there were very few attempts to co-ordinate economic activities beyond the workplace. This is hardly surprising, given that the overwhelming need was to restart production, convert a civilian economy to a wartime one and to ensure that the civilian population and militias were supplied with necessary goods. This, unsurprisingly enough, lead to a situation of anarchist mutualism developing, with many collectives selling the product of their own labour on the market (in other words, a form of simple commodity production).

This lead to some economic problems as there existed no framework of institutions between collectives to ensure efficient co-ordination of activity and so lead to pointless competition between collectives (which lead to even more problems). As there were initially no confederations of collectives nor mutual/communal banks this lead to the inequalities that initially existed between collectives (due to the fact that the collectives took over rich and poor capitalist firms) and it made the many ad hoc attempts at mutual aid between collectives difficult and temporary.

Therefore, the collectives were (initially) a form of *"self-management straddling capitalism and*

*socialism, which we maintain would not have occurred had the Revolution been able to extend itself fully under the direction of our syndicates."* [Gaston Leval, **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, pp. 227-8] As economic and political development are closely related, the fact that the C.N.T. did not carry out the **political** aspect of the revolution meant that the revolution in the economy was doomed to failure. As Leval stresses, in *"the industrial collectives, especially in the large towns, matters proceeded differently as a consequence of contradictory factors and of opposition created by the co-existence of social currents emanating from different social classes."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 227]

Given that the C.N.T. program of libertarian communism recognised that a fully co-operative society must be based upon production for use, C.N.T. militants fought against this system of mutualism and for inter-workplace co-ordination. They managed to convince their fellow workers of the difficulties of mutualism by free debate and discussion within their unions and collectives.

Therefore, the degree of socialisation varied over time (as would be expected). Initially, after the initial defeat of Franco's forces, there was little formal co-ordination and organisation. The most important thing was to get production started again. However, the needs of co-ordination soon became obvious (as predicted in anarchist theory and the programme of the CNT). Gaston Leval gives the example of Hospitalet del Llobregat with regards to this process:

*"Local industries went through stages almost universally adopted in that revolution . . . [I]n the first instance, **comites** nominated by the workers employed in them [were organised]. Production and sales continued in each one. But very soon it was clear that this situation gave rise to competition between the factories. . . creating rivalries which were incompatible with the socialist and libertarian outlook. So the CNT launched the watchword: 'All industries must be ramified in the Syndicates, completely socialised, and the regime of solidarity which we have always advocated be established once and for all.*

*"The idea won support immediately"* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 291-2]

Another example was the woodworkers' union which a massive debate on socialisation and decided to do so (the shopworkers' union had a similar debate, but the majority of workers rejected socialisation). According to Ronald Fraser a *"union delegate would go round the small shops, point out to the workers that the conditions were unhealthy and dangerous, that the revolution was changing all this, and secure their agreement to close down and move to the union-built Double-X and the 33 EU."* [Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 222]

This process went on in many different unions and collectives and, unsurprisingly, the forms of co-ordination agreed to lead to different forms of organisation in different areas and industries, as would be expected in a free society. However, the two most important forms can be termed syndicalisation and confederalism (we will ignore the forms created by the collectivisation decree as these were not created by the workers themselves).

"*Syndicalisation*" (our term) meant that the C.N.T.'s industrial union ran the whole industry. This solution was tried by the woodworkers' union after extensive debate. One section of the union, "*dominated by the F.A.I. [the anarchist federation], maintained that anarchist self-management meant that the workers should set up and operate autonomous centres of production so as to avoid the threat of bureaucratisation.*" [Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 222] However, those in favour of syndicalisation won the day and production was organised in the hands of the union, with administration posts and delegate meetings elected by the rank and file.

However, the "*major failure . . . (and which supported the original anarchist objection) was that the union became like a large firm . . . [and its] structure grew increasingly rigid.*" According to one militant, "*From the outside it began to look like an American or German trust*" and the workers found it difficult to secure any changes and "*felt they weren't particularly involved in decision making.*"

In the end, the major difference between the union-run industry and a capitalist firm organisationally appeared to be that workers could vote for (and recall) the industry management at relatively regular General Assembly meetings. While a vast improvement on capitalism, it is hardly the best example of participatory self-management in action although the economic problems caused by the Civil War and Stalinist led counter-revolution obviously would have had an effect on the internal structure of any industry and so we cannot say that the form of organisation created was totally responsible for any marginalisation that took place.

The other important form of co-operation was what we will term "*confederalisation.*" This form of co-operation was practised by the Badalona textile industry (and had been defeated in the woodworkers' union). It was based upon each workplace being run by its elected management, sold its own production, got its own orders and received the proceeds. However, everything each mill did was reported to the union which charted progress and kept statistics. If the union felt that a particular factory was not acting in the best interests of the industry as a whole, it was informed and asked to change course. According to one militant, the union "*acted more as a socialist control of collectivised industry than as a direct hierarchised executive*" [Op. Cit., p. 229]

This system ensured that the "*dangers of the big 'union trust' as of the atomised collective were avoided*" [Fraser, Op. Cit., p. 229] as well as maximising decentralisation of power. Unlike the syndicalisation experiment in the woodworkers' industry, this scheme was based on horizontal links between workplaces (via the C.N.T. union) and allowed a maximum of self-management **and** mutual aid. The ideas of an anarchist economy sketched in [section I.3](#) reflects in many ways the actual experiments in self-management which occurred during the Spanish Revolution.

Therefore, the industrial collectives co-ordinated their activity in many ways, with varying degrees of direct democracy and success. As would be expected, mistakes were made and different solutions found. When reading this section of the FAQ its important to remember that an anarchist society can hardly be produced "*overnight*" and so it is hardly surprising that the workers of the C.N.T. faced numerous problems and had to develop their self-management experiment as objective conditions allowed them to.

Unfortunately, thanks to fascist aggression and Communist Party back-stabbing, the experiment did not last long enough to fully answer all the questions we have about the viability of the solutions they tried. Given the time, however, we are sure they would have solved the problems they faced.

## I.8.5 How were the Spanish agricultural co-operatives organised and co-ordinated?

Jose Peirats describes collectivisation among the peasantry as follows:

*"The expropriated lands were turned over to the peasant syndicates, and it was these syndicates that organised the first collectives. Generally the holdings of small property owners were respected, always on the condition that only they or their families would work the land, without employing wage labour. In areas like Catalonia, where the tradition of petty peasant ownership prevailed, the land holdings were scattered. There were no great estates. Many of these peasants, together with the C.N.T., organised collectives, pooling their land, animals, tools, chickens, grain, fertiliser, and even their harvested crops.*

*"Privately owned farms located in the midst of collectives interfered with efficient cultivation by splitting up the collectives into disconnected parcels. To induce owners to move, they were given more or even better land located on the perimeter of the collective.*

*"The collectivist who had nothing to contribute to the collective was admitted with the same rights and the same duties as the others. In some collectives, those joining had to contribute their money (Girondella in Catalonia, Lagunarrotta in Aragon, and Cervera del Maestra in Valencia)." [cited **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 112]*

Peirats also notes that in conducting their internal affairs, all the collectives scrupulously and zealously observed democratic procedures. For example, *"Hospitalet de Llobregat held regular general membership meetings every three months to review production and attend to new business. The administrative council, and all other committees, submitted full reports on all matters. The meeting approved, disapproved, made corrections, issued instructions, etc."* [**Ibid.**, p. 119]

Dolgoff observes that *"supreme power was vested in, and actually exercised by, the membership in general assemblies, and all power derived from, and flowed back to, the grass roots organisations of the people"* and quotes Gaston Leval:

*"Regular general membership meetings were convoked weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. . . and these meetings were completely free of the tensions and recriminations which inevitably emerge when the power of decisions is vested in a few individuals -- even if democratically elected. The Assemblies were open for everyone to participate in the*

*proceedings. Democracy embraced all social life. In most cases, even the 'individualists' who were not members of the collective could participate in the discussions, and they were listened to by the collectivists."* [Op. Cit., p 119f]

It was in these face-to-face assemblies that decisions upon the distribution of resources were decided both within and without the collective. Here, when considering the importance of mutual aid, appeals were made to an individual's sense of empathy. As one activist remembers:

*"There were, of course, those who didn't want to share and who said that each collective should take care of itself. But they were usually convinced in the assemblies. We would try to speak to them in terms they understood. We'd ask, 'Did you think it was fair when the cacique [local boss] let people starve if there wasn't enough work?' and they said, 'Of course not.' They would eventually come around. Don't forget, there were three hundred thousand collectivists [in Aragon], but only ten thousand of us had been members of the C. N.T.. We had a lot of educating to do."* [Felix Carrasquer, quoted by Martha A. Ackelsberg in **Free Women of Spain**, p. 79]

In addition, regional federations of collectives were formed in many areas of Spain (for example, in Aragon and the Levant). The federations were created at congresses to which the collectives in an area sent delegates. These congresses agreed a series of general rules about how the federation would operate and what commitments the affiliated collectives would have to each other. The congress elected an administration council, which took responsibility for implementing agreed policy.

These federations had many tasks. They ensured the distribution of surplus produce to the front line and to the cities, cutting out middlemen and ensuring the end of exploitation. They also arranged for exchanges between collectives to take place. In addition, the federations allowed the individual collectives to pool resources together in order to improve the infrastructure of the area (building roads, canals, hospitals and so on) and invest in means of production which no one collective could afford.

In this way individual collectives pooled their resources, increased and improved the means of production they had access to as well as improving the social infrastructure of their regions. All this, combined with an increase of consumption at the point of production and the feeding of militia men and women fighting the fascists at the front.

Rural collectivisations allowed the potential creative energy that existed among the rural workers and peasants to be unleashed, an energy that had been wasted under private property. The popular assemblies allowed community problems and improvements to be identified and solved directly, drawing upon the ideas and experiences of everyone and enriched by discussion and debate. This enabled rural Spain to be transformed from one marked by poverty and fear, into one of hope and experimentation (see the [next section](#) for a few examples of this experimentation).

Therefore self-management in collectives combined with co-operation in rural federations allowed an

improvement in quality of rural life. From a purely economic viewpoint, production increased and as Benjamin Martin summarises, "[t]hough it is impossible to generalise about the rural land take-overs, there is little doubt that the quality of life for most peasants who participated in co-operatives and collectives notably improved." [The Agony of Modernisation, p. 394]

More importantly, however, this improvement in the quality of life included an increase in freedom as well as in consumption. To requote the member of the Beceite collective in Aragon we cited in [section A.5.6](#), "it was marvellous. . . to live in a collective, a free society where one could say what one thought, where if the village committee seemed unsatisfactory one could say. The committee took no big decisions without calling the whole village together in a general assembly. All this was wonderful." [Ronald Fraser, Blood of Spain, p. 288]

## I.8.6 What did the agricultural collectives accomplish?

Here are a few examples cited by Jose Peirats:

*"In Montblanc the collective dug up the old useless vines and planted new vineyards. The land, improved by modern cultivation with tractors, yielded much bigger and better crops. . . . Many Aragon collectives built new roads and repaired old ones, installed modern flour mills, and processed agricultural and animal waste into useful industrial products. Many of these improvements were first initiated by the collectives. Some villages, like Calanda, built parks and baths. Almost all collectives established libraries, schools, and cultural centres."* [cited **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 116]

Gaston Leval points out that *"the Peasant Federation of Levant . . . produced more than half of the total orange crop in Spain: almost four million kilos (1 kilo equals about 2 and one-fourth pounds). It then transported and sold through its own commercial organisation (no middlemen) more than 70% of the crop. (The Federations's commercial organisation included its own warehouses, trucks, and boats. Early in 1938 the export section established its own agencies in France: Marseilles, Perpignan, bordeaux, Cherbourg, and Paris.) Out of a total of 47,000 hectares in all Spain devoted to rice production, the collective in the Province of Valencia cultivated 30,000 hectares."* [cited in **Ibid.**, p. 124]

To quote Peirats again:

*"Preoccupation with cultural and pedagogical innovations was an event without precedent in rural Spain. The Amposta collectivists organised classes for semi-literates, kindergartens, and even a school of arts and professions. The Seros schools were free to all neighbours, collectivists or not. Grau installed a school named after its most illustrious citizen, Joaquin Costa. The Calanda collective (pop. only 4,500) schooled 1,233 children. The best students were sent to the Lyceum in Caspe, with all expenses paid by the collective. The Alcoriza (pop. 4,000) school was attended by 600 children. Many of the*



*schools were installed in abandoned convents. In Granadella (pop. 2,000), classes were conducted in the abandoned barracks of the Civil Guards. Graus organised a print library and a school of arts and professions, attended by 60 pupils. The same building housed a school of fine arts and high grade museum. In some villages a cinema was installed for the first time. The Penalba cinema was installed in a church. Viladecana built an experimental agricultural laboratory.*

*"The collectives voluntarily contributed enormous stocks of provisions and other supplies to the fighting troops. Utiel sent 1,490 litres of oil and 300 bushels of potatoes to the Madrid front (in addition to huge stocks of beans, rice, buckwheat, etc.). Porales de Tujana sent great quantities of bread, oil, flour, and potatoes to the front, and eggs, meat, and milk to the military hospital.*

*"The efforts of the collectives take on added significance when we take into account that their youngest and most vigorous workers were fighting in the trenches. 200 members of the little collective of Vilaboi were at the front; from Viledecans, 60; Amposta, 300; and Calande, 500." [Ibid., pp. 116-120]*

Peirats sums up the accomplishments of the agricultural collectives as follows:

*"In distribution the collectives' co-operatives eliminated middlemen, small merchants, wholesalers, and profiteers, thus greatly reducing consumer prices. The collectives eliminated most of the parasitic elements from rural life, and would have wiped them out altogether if they were not protected by corrupt officials and by the political parties. Non-collectivised areas benefited indirectly from the lower prices as well as from free services often rendered by the collectives (laundries, cinemas, schools, barber and beauty parlours, etc.)." [Ibid., p114]*

Leval emphasises the following achievements (among others):

*"In the agrarian collectives solidarity was practised to the greatest degree. Not only was every person assured of the necessities, but the district federations increasingly adopted the principle of mutual aid on an inter-collective scale. For this purpose they created common reserves to help out villages less favoured by nature. In Castile special institutions for this purpose were created. In industry this practice seems to have begun in Hospitalet, on the Catalan railways, and was applied later in Alcoy. Had the political compromise not impeded open socialisation, the practices of mutual aid would have been much more generalised. . . A conquest of enormous importance was the right of women to livelihood, regardless of occupation or function. In about half of the agrarian collectives, the women received the same wages as men; in the rest the women received less, apparently on the principle that they rarely live alone. . . In all the agrarian collectives of Aragon, Catalonia, Levant, Castile, Andalusia, and Estremadura, the workers formed*

*groups to divide the labour or the land; usually they were assigned to definite areas. Delegates elected by the work groups met with the collective's delegate for agriculture to plan out the work. This typical organisation arose quite spontaneously, by local initiative. . . In addition . . . the collective as a whole met in weekly, bi-weekly or monthly assembly . . . The assembly reviewed the activities of the councillors it named, and discussed special cases and unforeseen problems. All inhabitants -- men and women, producers and non-producers -- took part in the discussion and decisions . . . In land cultivation the most significant advances were: the rapidly increased use of machinery and irrigation; greater diversification; and forestation. In stock raising: the selection and multiplication of breeds; the adaptation of breeds to local conditions; and large-scale construction of collective stock barns." [Ibid., pp. 166-167]*

Martha A. Ackelsberg sums up the experience well:

*"The achievements of these collectives were extensive. In many areas they maintained, if not increased, agricultural production [not forgetting that many young men were at the front line], often introducing new patterns of cultivation and fertilisation. . . collectivists built chicken coups, barns, and other facilities for the care and feeding of the community's animals. Federations of collectives co-ordinated the construction of roads, schools, bridges, canals and dams. Some of these remain to this day as lasting contributions of the collectives to the infrastructure of rural Spain." [The Free Women of Spain, p. 79]*

She also points to inter-collective solidarity, noting that the *"collectivists also arranged for the transfer of surplus produce from wealthier collectives to those experiencing shortages."* [Ibid.]

Therefore, as well as significant economic achievements, the collectives ensured social and political ones too. Solidarity was practised and previously marginalised people took direct and full management of the affairs of their communities, transforming them to meet their own needs and desires.

## **I.8.7 I've heard that the rural collectives were created by force. Is this true?**

No, it is not. The myth that the rural collectives were created by "terror," organised and carried out by the anarchist militia, was started by the Stalinists of the Spanish Communist Party. More recently, some right-wing Libertarians have warmed up and repeated these Stalinist fabrications. Anarchists have been disproving these allegations since 1936 and it is worthwhile to do so again here.

As Vernon Richards notes, *"[h]owever discredited Stalinism may appear to be today the fact remains that the Stalinist lies and interpretation of the Spanish Civil War still prevail, presumably because it suits the political prejudices of those historians who are currently interpreting it."* [Introduction to Gaston Leval's **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 11] Here we shall present evidence to refute

claims that the rural collectives were created by force.

Firstly, we should point out that rural collectives were created in many different areas of Spain, such as the Levant (900 collectives), Castile (300) and Extremadura (30), where the anarchist militia did not exist. In Catalonia, for example, the C.N.T. militia passed through many villages on its way to Aragon and only around 40 collectives were created unlike the 450 in Aragon. In other words, the rural collectivisation process occurred independently of the existence of anarchist troops, with the majority of the 1,700 rural collectives created in areas without a predominance of anarchist troops.

One historian, Ronald Fraser, seems to imply that the Aragon Collectives were imposed upon the Aragon population. As he puts it the "*collectivisation, carried out under the general cover, if not necessarily the direct agency, of C.N.T. militia columns, represented a revolutionary minority's attempt to control not only production but consumption for egalitarian purposes and the needs of the war.*" [**Blood of Spain**, p. 370] Notice that he does not suggest that the anarchist militia actually **imposed** the collectives, a claim for which there is little or no evidence. Moreover, Fraser presents a somewhat contradictory narrative to the facts he presents. On the one hand, he talks of a policy of "*obligatory*" collectivisation imposed on the peasants by the C.N.T., while on the other hand he presents extensive evidence that the collectives did not have a 100% membership rate. How can collectivisation be obligatory if people remain outside the collectives? Similarly, he talks of how **some** C.N.T. militia leaders justified forced collectivisation in terms of the war effort while acknowledging the official C.N.T. policy of opposing forced collectivisation, an opposition expressed in practice as only around 5% of the collectives were total (and expressed in his own book as collectivists interviewed continually note that people remained outside their collectives!).

Thus Fraser's attempts to paint the Aragon collectives as a form of "*war communism*" imposed upon the population by the C.N.T. and obligatory for all fails to co-incidence with the evidence he presents.

Earlier he states that "*[t]here was no need to dragoon them [the peasants] at pistol point [into collectives]: the coercive climate, in which 'fascists' were being shot, was sufficient. 'Spontaneous' and 'forced' collectives existed, as did willing and unwilling collectivists within them.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p.349] Therefore, his suggestion that the Aragon collectives were imposed upon the rural population is based upon the insight that there was a "*coercive climate*" in Aragon at the time. Of course a civil war against fascism would produce a "*coercive climate*," particularly at the front line, and so the C.N.T. can hardly be blamed for that. In addition, in a life and death struggle against fascism, in which the fascists were systematically murdering vast numbers of anarchists, socialists and republicans in the areas under their control, it is hardly surprising that some anarchist troops took the law into their own hands and murdered some of those who supported and would help the fascists. Given what was going on in fascist Spain, and the experience of fascism in Germany and Italy, the C.N.T. militia knew exactly what would happen to them and their friends and family if they lost.

The question does arise, however, of whether the climate was made so coercive by the war and the nearness of the anarchist militia that individual choice was impossible.

The facts speak for themselves -- rural collectivisation in Aragon embraced more than 70% of the population in the area saved from fascism. Around 30% of the population felt safe enough not to join a collective, a sizeable percentage.

If the collectives had been created by anarchist terror or force, we would expect a figure of 100% membership in the collectives. This was not the case, indicating the basically voluntary nature of the experiment (we should point out that other figures suggest a lower number of collectivists which makes the forced collectivisation argument even less likely). Historian Antony Beevor (while noting that there *"had undoubtedly been pressure, and no doubt force was used on some occasions in the fervour after the rising"*) just stated the obvious when he wrote that *"the very fact that every village was a mixture of collectivists and individualists shows that peasants had not been forced into communal farming at the point of a gun."* [**The Spanish Civil War**, p. 206] In addition, if the C.N.T. militia had forced peasants into collectives we would expect the membership of the collectives to peak almost overnight, not grow slowly over time. However, this is what happened:

*"At the regional congress of collectives, held at Caspe in mid-February 1937, nearly 80 000 collectivists were represented from 'almost all the villages of the region.' This, however, was but a beginning. By the end of April the number of collectivists had risen to 140 000; by the end of the first week of May to 180 000; and by the end of June to 300 000."* [Graham Kelsey, *"Anarchism in Aragon,"* pp. 60-82, **Spain in Conflict 1931-1939**, Martin Blinkhorn (ed.), p. 61]

If the collectives had been created by force, then their membership would have been 300 000 in February, 1937, not increasing steadily to reach that number four months later. Neither can it be claimed that the increase was due to new villages being collectivised, as almost all villages had sent delegates in February. This indicates that many peasants joined the collectives because of the advantages associated with common labour, the increased resources it placed at their hands and the fact that the surplus wealth which had in the previous system been monopolised by the few was used instead to raise the standard of living of the entire community.

The voluntary nature of the collectives is again emphasised by the number of collectives which allowed smallholders to remain outside. According to evidence Fraser presents (on page 366), an F.A.I. schoolteacher is quoted as saying that the forcing of smallholders into the collective *"wasn't a widespread problem, because there weren't more than twenty or so villages where collectivisation was total and no one was allowed to remain outside..."* Instead of forcing the minority in a village to agree with the wishes of the majority, the vast majority (95%) of Aragon collectives stuck to their libertarian principles and allowed those who did not wish to join to remain outside.

So, only around 20 were *"total"* collectives (out of 450) and around 30% of the population felt safe enough **not** to join. In other words, in the vast majority of collectives those joining could see that those who did not were safe. These figures should not be discounted, as they give an indication of the basically spontaneous and voluntary nature of the movement. As was the composition of the new

municipal councils created after July 19th. As Graham Kesley notes, "*[w]hat is immediately noticeable from the results is that although the region has often been branded as one controlled by anarchists to the total exclusion of all other forces, the C.N.T. was far from enjoying the degree of absolute domination often implied and inferred.*" [**Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State**, p. 198]

In his account of the rural revolution, Burnett Bolloten notes that it "*embraced more than 70 percent of the population*" in liberated Aragon and that "*many of the 450 collectives of the region were largely voluntary*" although "*it must be emphasised that this singular development was in some measure due to the presence of militiamen from the neighbouring region of Catalonia, the immense majority of whom were members of the C.N.T. and F.A.I.*" [**The Spanish Civil War**, p. 74]

As Gaston Leval points out, "*it is true that the presence of these forces . . . favoured indirectly these constructive achievements by preventing active resistance by the supporters of the bourgeois republic and of fascism.*" [**Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 90]

In other words, the presence of the militia changed the balance of class forces in Aragon by destroying the capitalist state (i.e. the local bosses - caciques - could not get state aid to protect their property) and many landless workers took over the land. The presence of the militia ensured that land could be taken over by destroying the capitalist "*monopoly of force*" that existed before the revolution (the power of which will be highlighted below) and so the C.N.T. militia allowed the possibility of experimentation by the Aragonese population.

This class war in the countryside is reflected by Bolloten's statement that "*[if] the individual farmer viewed with dismay the swift and widespread collectivisation of agriculture, the farm workers of the Anarchosyndicalist C.N.T. and the Socialist UGT saw it as the commencement of a new era.*" [**The Spanish Civil War**, p. 63] Both were mass organisations and supported collectivisation.

Therefore, anarchist militia allowed the rural working class to abolish the artificial scarcity of land created by private property (and enforced by the state). The rural bosses obviously viewed with horror the possibility that they could not exploit day workers' labour. As Bolloten points out "*the collective system of agriculture threaten[ed] to drain the rural labour market of wage workers.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 62] Little wonder the richer peasants and landowners hated the collectives.

Bolloten also quotes a report on the district of Valderrobes which indicates popular support for the collectives:

*"Collectivisation was nevertheless opposed by opponents on the right and adversaries on the left. If the eternally idle who have been expropriated had been asked what they thought of collectivisation, some would have replied that it was robbery and others a dictatorship. But, for the elderly, the day workers, the tenant farmers and small proprietors who had always been under the thumb of the big landowners and heartless*

*usurers, it appeared as salvation" [Op. Cit., p. 71]*

However, most historians ignore the differences in class that existed in the countryside. They ignore it and explain the rise in collectives in Aragon (and ignore those elsewhere) as the result of the C.N.T. militia. Fraser, for example, states that "*[v]ery rapidly collectives . . . began to spring up. It did not happen on instructions from the C.N.T. leadership -- no more than had the [industrial] collectives in Barcelona. Here, as there, the initiative came from C.N.T. militants; here, as there, the 'climate' for social revolution in the rearguard was created by C.N.T. armed strength: the anarcho-syndicalists' domination of the streets of Barcelona was re-enacted in Aragon as the C.N.T. militia columns, manned mainly by Catalan anarcho-syndicalist workers, poured in. Where a nucleus of anarcho-syndicalists existed in a village, it seized the moment to carry out the long-awaited revolution and collectivised spontaneously. Where there was none, villagers could find themselves under considerable pressure from the militias to collectivise. . .*" [Op. Cit., p. 347]

In other words, he implies that the revolution was mostly imported into Aragon from Catalonia. However, the majority of C.N.T. column leaders were opposed to the setting up of the Council of Aragon (a confederation for the collectives) [Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 350]. Hardly an example of Catalan C. N.T. imposed social revolution. The evidence we have suggests that the Aragon C.N.T. was a widespread and popular organisation, suggesting that the idea that the collectives were imported into Aragon by the Catalan C.N.T. is simply **false**.

Fraser states that in "*some [of the Aragonese villages] there was a flourishing C.N.T., in others the UGT was strongest, and in only too many there was no unionisation at all.*" [**Blood of Spain**, p. 348] The question arises of how extensive was that strength. The evidence we have suggests that it was extensive, strong and growing, so indicating that rural Aragon was not without a C.N.T. base, a base that makes the suggestion of imposed collectives a false one.

Murray Bookchin summarises the strength of the C.N.T. in rural Aragon as follows:

*"The authentic peasant base of the C.N.T. [by the 1930s] now lay in Aragon . . . [C.N.T. growth in Zaragoza] provided a springboard for a highly effective libertarian agitation in lower Aragon, particularly among the impoverished labourers and debt-ridden peasantry of the dry steppes region."* [**The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 203]

Graham Kelsey, in his social history of the C.N.T. in Aragon between 1930 and 1937, provides the necessary evidence to more than back Bookchin's claim of C.N.T. growth. Kelsey points out that as well as the "*spread of libertarian groups and the increasing consciousness among C.N.T. members of libertarian theories . . . contribu[ting] to the growth of the anarchosyndicalist movement in Aragon*" the existence of "*agrarian unrest*" also played an important role in that growth [**Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State**, pp. 80-81]. This all led to the "*revitalisation of the C.N.T. network in Aragon*" [p. 82] and so by 1936, the C.N.T. had built upon the "*foundations laid in 1933. . . [and] had finally succeeded in translating the very great strength of the urban trade-union organisation*

*in Zaragoza into a regional network of considerable extent.*" [Op. Cit., p. 134]

Kelsey and other historians note the long history of anarchism in Aragon, dating back to the late 1860s. However, before the 1910s there had been little gains in rural Aragon by the C.N.T. due to the power of local bosses (called **caciques**):

*"Local landowners and small industrialists, the **caciques** of provincial Aragon, made every effort to enforce the closure of these first rural anarcho-syndicalist cells [created after 1915]. By the time of the first rural congress of the Aragonese C.N.T. confederation in the summer of 1923, much of the progress achieved through the organisation's considerable propaganda efforts had been countered by repression elsewhere."* [Graham Kelsey, "Anarchism in Aragon," p. 62]

A C.N.T. activist indicates the power of these bosses and how difficult it was to be a union member in Aragon:

*"Repression is not the same in the large cities as it is in the villages where everyone knows everybody else and where the Civil Guards are immediately notified of a comrade's slightest movement. Neither friends nor relatives are spared. All those who do not serve the state's repressive forces unconditionally are pursued, persecuted and on occasions beaten up."* [cited by Kelsey, **Op. Cit.**, p. 74]

However, while there were some successes in organising rural unions, even in 1931 "*propaganda campaigns which led to the establishment of scores of village trade-union cells, were followed by a counter-offensive from village **caciques** which forced them to close.*" [**Ibid.** p. 67] But even in the face of this repression the C.N.T. grew and "*from the end of 1932. . . [there was] a successful expansion of the anarcho-syndicalist movement into several parts of the region where previously it had never penetrated.*" [Kelsey, **Anarcho-syndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State**, p. 185]

This growth was built upon in 1936, with increased rural activism which had slowly eroded the power of the **caciques** (which in part explains their support for the fascist coup). After the election of the Popular Front, years of anarchist propaganda and organisation paid off with a massive increase in rural membership in the C.N.T.:

*"The dramatic growth in rural anarcho-syndicalist support in the six weeks since the general election was emphasised in the [Aragon C.N.T.'s April] congress's agenda. . . the congress directed its attention to rural problems . . . [and agreed a programme which was] exactly what was to happen four months later in liberated Aragon."* [Kelsey, "Anarchism in Aragon", p. 76]

In the aftermath of a regional congress, held in Zaragoza at the start of April, a series of intensive propaganda campaigns was organised through each of the provinces of the regional confederation. Many

meetings were held in villages which had never before heard anarcho- syndicalist propaganda. This was very successful and by the beginning of June, 1936, the number of Aragon unions had topped 400, compared to only 278 one month earlier (an increase of over 40% in 4 weeks). [**Ibid.**, pp. 75-76]

This increase in union membership reflects increased social struggle by the Aragonese working population and their attempts to improve their standard of living, which was very low for most of the population. A journalist from the conservative-Catholic **Heraldo de Aragon** visited lower Aragon in the summer of 1935 and noted "*[t]he hunger in many homes, where the men are not working, is beginning to encourage the youth to subscribe to misleading teachings.*" [cited by Kesley, **Ibid.**, p. 74]

Little wonder, then, the growth in C.N.T. membership and social struggle Kesley indicates:

*"Evidence of a different kind was also available that militant trade unionism in Aragon was on the increase. In the five months between mid-February and mid-July 1936 the province of Zaragoza experienced over seventy strikes, more than had previously been recorded in any entire year, and things were clearly no different in the other two provinces . . . the great majority of these strikes were occurring in provincial towns and villages. Strikes racked the provinces and in at least three instances were actually transformed into general strikes."* [**Ibid.**, p. 76]

Therefore, in the spring and summer of 1936, we see a massive growth in C.N.T. membership which reflects growing militant struggle by the urban and rural population of Aragon. Years of C.N.T. propaganda and organising had ensured this growth in C.N.T. influence, a growth which is also reflected in the creation of collectives in liberated Aragon during the revolution. Therefore, the construction of a collectivised society was founded directly upon the emergence, during the five years of the Second Republic, of a mass trade-union movement infused by libertarian, anarchist principles. These collectives were constructed in accordance with the programme agreed at the Aragon C.N.T. conference of April 1936 which reflected the wishes of the rural membership of the unions within Aragon (and due to the rapid growth of the C.N.T. afterwards obviously reflected popular feelings in the area).

In the words of Graham Kesley, "*libertarian dominance in post-insurrection Aragon itself reflected the predominance that anarchists had secured before the war; by the summer of 1936 the C.N.T. had succeeded in establishing throughout Aragon a mass trade-union movement of strictly libertarian orientation, upon which widespread and well-supported network the extensive collective experiment was to be founded.*" [**Ibid.**, p. 61]

Additional evidence that supports a high level of C.N.T. support in rural Aragon can be provided by the fact that it was Aragon that was the centre of the December 1933 insurrection organised by the C.N.T. As Bookchin notes, "*only Aragon rose on any significant scale, particularly Saragossa . . . many of the villages declared libertarian communism and perhaps the heaviest fighting took place between the vineyard workers in Rioja and the authorities*" [M. Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 238]



It is unlikely for the C.N.T. to organise an insurrection in an area within which it had little support or influence. According to Kesley's in-depth social history of Aragon, *"it was precisely those areas which had most important in December 1933 . . . which were now [in 1936], in seeking to create a new pattern of economic and social organisation, to form the basis of libertarian Aragon."* [G. Kesley, **Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State**, p. 161] After the revolt, thousands of workers were jailed, with the authorities having to re-open closed prisons and turn at least one disused monastery into a jail due to the numbers arrested.

Therefore, it can be seen that the majority of collectives in Aragon were the product of C.N.T. (and UGT) influenced workers taking the opportunity to create a new form of social life, a form marked by its voluntary and directly democratic nature. For from being unknown in rural Aragon, the C.N.T. was well established and growing at a fast rate - *"Spreading out from its urban base... the C.N.T., first in 1933 and then more extensively in 1936, succeeded in converting an essentially urban organisation into a truly regional confederation."* [**Ibid.**, p. 184]

Therefore the evidence suggests that historians like Fraser are wrong to imply that the Aragon collectives were created by the C.N.T. militia and enforced upon a unwilling population. The Aragon collectives were the natural result of years of anarchist activity within rural Aragon and directly related to the massive growth in the C.N.T. between 1930 and 1936. Thus Kesley is correct to state that:

*"Libertarian communism and agrarian collectivisation were not economic terms or social principles enforced upon a hostile population by special teams of urban anarchosyndicalists . . ."* [G. Kesley, **Op. Cit.**, p. 161]

This is not to suggest that there were **no** examples of people joining collectives involuntarily because of the *"coercive climate"* of the front line. And, of course, there were villages which did not have a C.N.T. union within them before the war and so created a collective because of the existence of the C.N.T. militia. But these can be considered as exceptions to the rule.

Moreover, the way the C.N.T. handled such a situation is noteworthy. Fraser indicates such a situation in the village of Alloza. In the autumn of 1936, representatives of the C.N.T. district committee had come to suggest that the villagers collectivise (we would like to stress here that the C.N.T. militia which had passed through the village had made no attempt to create a collective there).

A village assembly was called and the C.N.T. explained their ideas and suggested how to organise the collective. However, who would join and how the villagers would organise the collective was left totally up to them (the C.N.T. representatives *"stressed that no one was to be maltreated"*). Within the collective, self-management was the rule.

According to one member, *"[o]nce the work groups were established on a friendly basis and worked their own lands, everyone got on well enough,"* he recalled. *"There was no need for coercion, no need for discipline and punishment. . . A collective wasn't a bad idea at all."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 360] This

collective, like the vast majority, was voluntary and democratic - *"I couldn't oblige him to join; we weren't living under a dictatorship."* [Op. Cit., p. 362] In other words, **no** force was used to create the collective and the collective was organised by local people directly.

Of course, as with any public good (to use economic jargon), all members of the community had to pay for the war effort and feed the militia. As Kesely notes, *"[t]he military insurrection had come at a critical moment in the agricultural calendar. Throughout lower Aragon there were fields of grain ready for harvesting. . . . At the assembly in Albalate de Cinca the opening clause of the agreed programme had required everyone in the district, independent farmers and collectivists alike, to contribute equally to the war effort, thereby emphasising one of the most important considerations in the period immediately following the rebellion."*

In addition, the collectives controlled the price of crops in order to ensure that speculation and inflation were controlled. However, these policies as with the equal duties of individualists and collectivists in the war effort were enforced upon the collectives by the war.

Lastly, in support of the popular nature of the rural collectives, we will indicate the effects of the suppression of the collectives in August 1937 by the Communists, namely the collapse of the rural economy. This sheds considerable light on the question of popular attitudes to the collectives.

In October, the Communist-controlled Regional Delegation of Agrarian Reform acknowledged that *"in the majority of villages agricultural work was paralysed causing great harm to our agrarian economy."* This is confirmed by Jose Silva, a Communist Party member and general secretary of the Institute of Agrarian Reform, who commented that after Lister had attacked Aragon, *"labour in the fields was suspended almost entirely, and a quarter of the land had not been prepared at the time for sowing."* At a meeting of the agrarian commission of the Aragonese Communist Party (October 9th, 1937), Jose Silva emphasised *"the little incentive to work of the entire peasant population"* and that the situation brought about by the dissolution of the collectives was *"grave and critical."* [quoted by Bolloten, **Op. Cit.**, p. 530]

Jose Peirats explains the reasons for this economic collapse as a result of popular boycott:

*"When it came time to prepare for the next harvest, smallholders could not by themselves work the property on which they had been installed [by the communists]. Dispossessed peasants, intransigent collectivists, refused to work in a system of private property, and were even less willing to rent out their labour."* [**Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 258]

If the collectives were unpopular, created by anarchist force, then why did the economy collapse after the suppression? If Lister had overturned a totalitarian anarchist regime, why did the peasants not reap the benefit of their toil? Could it be because the collectives were essentially a spontaneous Aragonese development and supported by most of the population there? This analysis is backed up by Yaacov

Oved's statement (from a paper submitted to the XII Congress of Sociology, Madrid, July 1990):

*"Those who were responsible for this policy [of "freeing" the Aragon Collectivists], were convinced that the farmers would greet it joyfully because they had been coerced into joining the collectives. But they were proven wrong. Except for the rich estate owners who were glad to get their land back, most of the members of the agricultural collectives objected and lacking all motivation they were reluctant to resume the same effort of in the agricultural work. This phenomenon was so widespread that the authorities and the communist minister of agriculture were forced to retreat from their hostile policy."* [Yaacov Oved, **Communismo Libertario and Communalism in the Spanish Collectivisations (1936-1939)**]

Even in the face of Communist repression, most of the collectives kept going. This, if nothing else, proves that the collectives were popular institutions. As Yaacov Oved argues in relation to the breaking up of the collectives:

*"Through the widespread reluctance of collectivists to co-operate with the new policy it became evident that most members had voluntarily joined the collectives and as soon as the policy was changed a new wave of collectives was established. However, the wheel could not be turned back. An atmosphere of distrust prevailed between the collectives and the authorities and every initiative was curtailed"* [Op. Cit.]

Jose Peirats sums up the situation after the communist attack on the collectives and the legalisation of the collectives as follows:

*"It is very possible that this second phase of collectivisation better reflects the sincere convictions of the members. They had undergone a sever test and those who had withstood it were proven collectivists. Yet it would be facile to label as anti-collectivists those who abandoned the collectives in this second phase. Fear, official coercion and insecurity weighed heavily in the decisions of much of the Aragonese peasantry."* [Op. Cit., p. 258]

While the collectives had existed, there was a 20% increase in production (and this is compared to the pre-war harvest which had been *"a good crop."* [Fraser, p. 370]); after the destruction of the collectives, the economy collapsed. Hardly the result that would be expected if the collectives were forced upon an unwilling peasantry. The forced collectivisation by Stalin in Russia resulted in a famine. Only the victory of fascism made it possible to restore the so-called *"natural order"* of capitalist property in the Spanish countryside. The same land-owners who welcomed the Communist repression of the collectives also, we are sure, welcomed the fascists who ensured a lasting victory of property over liberty.

So, overall, the evidence suggests that the Aragon collectives, like their counterparts in the Levante, Catalonia and so on, were **popular** organisations, created by and for the rural population and, essentially, an expression of a spontaneous and popular social revolution. Claims that the anarchist

militia created them by force of arms are **false**. While acts of violence **did** occur and some acts of coercion **did** take place (against C.N.T. policy, we may add) these are the exceptions to the rule. Bollothen's summary best fits the facts:

*"But in spite of the cleavages between doctrine and practice that plagued the Spanish Anarchists whenever they collided with the realities of power, it cannot be overemphasised that notwithstanding the many instances of coercion and violence, the revolution of July 1936 distinguished itself from all others by the generally spontaneous and far-reaching character of its collectivist movement and by its promise of moral and spiritual renewal. Nothing like this spontaneous movement had ever occurred before."* [Op. Cit., p. 78]

## I.8.8 But did the Spanish collectives innovate?

Yes. In contradiction to the old capitalist claim that no one will innovate unless private property exists, the workers and peasants exhibited much more incentive and creativity under libertarian socialism than they had under the private enterprise system. This is apparent from Gaston Leval's description of the results of collectivisation in Cargagente:

*"Carcagente is situated in the southern part of the province of Valencia. The climate of the region is particularly suited for the cultivation of oranges. . . . All of the socialised land, without exception, is cultivated with infinite care. The orchards are thoroughly weeded. To assure that the trees will get all the nourishment needed, the peasants are incessantly cleaning the soil. 'Before,' they told me with pride, 'all this belonged to the rich and was worked by miserably paid labourers. The land was neglected and the owners had to buy immense quantities of chemical fertilisers, although they could have gotten much better yields by cleaning the soil. . . .' With pride, they showed me trees that had been grafted to produce better fruit.*

*"In many places I observed plants growing in the shade of the orange trees. 'What is this?,' I asked. I learned that the Levant peasants (famous for their ingenuity) have abundantly planted potatoes among the orange groves. The peasants demonstrate more intelligence than all the bureaucrats in the Ministry of Agriculture combined. They do more than just plant potatoes. Throughout the whole region of the Levant, wherever the soil is suitable, they grow crops. They take advantage of the four month [fallow period] in the rice fields. Had the Minister of Agriculture followed the example of these peasants throughout the Republican zone, the bread shortage problem would have been overcome in a few months."* [cited in Dolgoff, **Anarchist Collectives**, p. 153]

This is just one from a multitude of examples presented in the accounts of both the industrial and rural collectives (for more see [section C.2.3](#) in which we present more examples to refute that charge that "workers' control would stifle innovation" and [I.8.6](#)). The available evidence proves that the membership

of the collectives showed a keen awareness of the importance of investment and innovation in order to increase production and to make work both lighter and more interesting **and** that the collectives allowed that awareness to be expressed freely. The Spanish collectives indicate that, given the chance, everyone will take an interest in their own affairs and express a desire to use their minds to improve their surroundings. In fact, capitalism distorts what innovation exists under hierarchy by channelling it purely in how to save money and maximise investor profit, ignoring other, more important, issues.

As Gaston Leval argues, self-management encouraged innovation:

*"The theoreticians and partisans of the liberal economy affirm that competition stimulates initiative and, consequently, the creative spirit and invention without which it remains dormant. Numerous observations made by the writer in the Collectives, factories and socialised workshops permit him to take quite the opposite view. For in a Collective, in a grouping where each individual is stimulated by the wish to be of service to his fellow beings research, the desire for technical perfection and so on are also stimulated. But they also have as a consequence that other individuals join those who were first to get together. Furthermore, when, in present society, an individualist inventor discovers something, it is used only by the capitalist or the individual employing him, whereas in the case of an inventor living in a community not only is his discovery taken up and developed by others, but is immediately applied for the common good. I am convinced that this superiority would very soon manifest itself in a socialised society."* [**Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 247]

Therefore the actual experiences of self-management in Spain supports the points made in [section I.4.11](#). Freed from hierarchy, individuals will creatively interact with the world to improve their circumstances. This is not due to "market forces" but because the human mind is an active agent and unless crushed by authority it can no more stop thinking and acting than the Earth stop revolving round the Sun. In addition, the Collectives indicate that self-management allows ideas to be enriched by discussion, as Bakunin argued:

*"The greatest intelligence would not be equal to a comprehension of the whole. Thence results... the necessity of the division and association of labour. I receive and I give - such is human life. Each directs and is directed in his turn. Therefore there is no fixed and constant authority, but a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination"* [**God and the State**, p. 33]

The experience of self-management proved Bakunin's point that society is more intelligent than even the most intelligent individual simply because of the wealth of viewpoints, experience and thoughts contained there. Capitalism impoverishes individuals and society by its artificial boundaries and authority structures.

## I.8.9 Why, if it was so good, did it not survive?

Just because something is good does not mean that it will survive.

For example, the Warsaw Ghetto uprising against the Nazis failed but that does not mean that the uprising was a bad cause or that the Nazi regime was correct, far from it. Similarly, while the experiments in workers' self-management and communal living undertaken across Republican Spain is one of the most important social experiments in a free society ever undertaken, this cannot change the fact that Franco's forces and the Communists had access to more and better weapons.

Faced with the aggression and terrorism of Franco, and behind him the military might of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, the treachery of the Communists, and the aloofness of the Western bourgeois "republics" (whose policy of "non-intervention" was strangely ignored when their citizens aided Franco) it is amazing the revolution lasted as long as it did.

This does not excuse the actions of the anarchists themselves. As is well known, the C.N.T. co-operated with the other anti-fascist parties and trade unions on the Republican side (see [next section](#)). This co-operation led to the C.N.T. joining the anti-fascist government and "anarchists" becoming ministers of state. This co-operation, more than anything, helped ensure the defeat of the revolution. While much of the blame can be placed at the door of the would-be "leaders," who like most leaders started to think themselves irreplaceable and spokespersons for the organisations there were members of, it must be stated that the rank-and-file of the movement did little to stop them. Most of the militant anarchists were at the front-line (and so excluded from union and collective meetings) and so could not influence their fellow workers (it is no surprise that the "Friends of Durruti" group were mostly ex-militia men). However, it seems that the mirage of anti-fascist unity proved too much for the majority of C.N.T. members (see [section I.8.12](#)).

Some anarchists still maintain that the Spanish anarchist movement had no choice and that collaboration (while having unfortunate effects) was the only choice available. This view was defended by Sam Dolgoff and finds some support in the writings of Gaston Leval, August Souchy and many other anarchists. However, most anarchists today oppose collaboration and think it was a terrible mistake (at the time, this position was held by the majority of non-Spanish anarchists plus a large minority of the Spanish movement, becoming a majority as the implications of collaboration became clear). This viewpoint finds its best expression in Vernon Richard's **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution** and, in part, in such works as **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution** by Jose Peirats and **Anarchist Organisation: The History of the F.A.I** by Juan Gomaz Casas as well as in a host of pamphlets and articles written by anarchists ever since.

So, regardless of how good a social system is, objective facts will overcome that experiment. Saturnino Carod (a leader of a C.N.T. Militia column at the Aragon Front) sums up the successes of the revolution as well as its objective limitations:

*"Always expecting to be stabbed in the back, always knowing that if we created problems,*

*only the enemy across the lines would stand to gain. It was a tragedy for the anarcho-syndicalist movement; but it was a tragedy for something greater -- the Spanish people. For it can never be forgotten that it was the working class and peasantry which, by demonstrating their ability to run industry and agriculture collectively, allowed the republic to continue the struggle for thirty-two months. It was they who created a war industry, who kept agricultural production increasing, who formed militias and later joined the army. Without their creative endeavour, the republic could not have fought the war . . ."* [quoted by Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 394]

## I.8.10 Why did the C.N.T. collaborate with the state?

As is well known, in September 1936 the C.N.T joined the Catalan government, followed by the central government in November. This followed on from the decision made on July the 21st to not speak of Libertarian Communism until after Franco had been defeated. In other words, to collaborate with other anti-fascist parties and unions in a common front against fascism.

This, initially, involved the C.N.T agreeing to join a "*Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias*" proposed by the leader of the Catalan government, Louis Companys. This committee was made up of representatives of various anti-fascist parties and groups. From this it was only a matter of time until the C.N.T joined an official government as no other means of co-ordinating activities existed (see [section I.8.13](#)).

The question must arise, **why** did the C.N.T decide to collaborate with the state, forsaking its principles and, in its own way, contribute to the counter-revolution and the losing of the war. This is an important question. Indeed, it is one Marxists always throw up in arguments with anarchists or in anti-anarchist diatribes. Does the failure of the C.N.T to implement anarchism after July 19th mean that anarchist politics are flawed? Or, rather, does the experience of the C.N.T and F.A.I during the Spanish revolution indicate a failure of **anarchists** rather than of **anarchism**, a mistake made under difficult objective circumstances and one which anarchists have learnt from? Needless to say, anarchists argue that the latter answer is the correct one. In other words, as Vernon Richards argues, "*the basis of [his] criticism is not that anarchist ideas were proved to be unworkable by the Spanish experience, but that the Spanish anarchists and syndicalists failed to put their theories to the test, adopting instead the tactics of the enemy.*" [**Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, p. 14] The writers of this FAQ agree.

So, why **did** the CNT collaborate with the state during the Spanish Civil War? Simply put, rather than being the fault of anarchist theory (as Marxists like to claim), its roots can be discovered in the situation facing the Catalan anarchists on July 20th. The objective conditions facing the leading militants of the CNT and FAI influenced the decisions they took, decisions which they later justified by **mis**-using anarchist theory.

What was the situation facing the Catalan anarchists on July 20th? Simply put, it was an unknown situation. Jose Peirats quotes from the report made by the C.N.T to the **International Workers**

**Association** as follows:

*"Levante was defenceless and uncertain . . . We were in a minority in Madrid. The situation in Andalusia was unknown . . . There was no information from the North, and we assumed the rest of Spain was in the hands of the fascists. The enemy was in Aragon, at the gates of Catalonia. The nervousness of foreign consular officials led to the presence of a great number of war ships around our ports."* [quoted in **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 180]

He also notes that:

*"According to the report, the CNT was in absolute control of Catalonia in July 19, 1936, but its strength was less in Levante and still less in central Spain where the central government and the traditional parties were dominant. In the north of Spain the situation was confused. The CNT could have mounted an insurrection on its own 'with probable success' but such a takeover would have led to a struggle on three fronts: against the fascists, the government and foreign capitalism. In view of the difficulty of such an undertaking, collaboration with other antifascist groups was the only alternative."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 179]

In the words of the CNT report itself:

*"The CNT showed a conscientious scrupulousness in the face of a difficult alternative: to destroy completely the State in Catalonia, to declare war against the Rebels [i.e. the fascists], the government, foreign capitalism, and thus assuming complete control of Catalan society; or collaborating in the responsibilities of government with the other antifascist fractions."* [quoted by Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 2, p. 1156]

Moreover, as Gaston Leval later argued, given that the *"general preoccupation [of the majority of the population was] to defeat the fascists . . . the anarchists would, if they came out against the state, provoke the antagonism . . . of the majority of the people, who would accuse them of collaborating with Franco."* Implementing an anarchist revolution would, in all likelihood, also *"result . . . [in] the instant closing of the frontier and the blockade by sea by both fascists and the democratic countries. The supply of arms would be completely cut off, and the anarchists would rightly be held responsible for the disastrous consequences."* [quoted in **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 52 and p. 53]

While the supporters of Lenin and Trotsky will constantly point out the objective circumstances in which their heroes made their decisions during the Russian Revolution, they rarely mention those facing the anarchists in Spain on the 20th of July, 1936. It seems hypocritical to point to the Russian Civil War as the explanation of all of Bolshevism's crimes against the working class (indeed, humanity) while remaining silent on the forces facing the C.N.T-F.A.I at the start of the Spanish Civil War. The fact that



if the CNT had decided to implement libertarian communism in Catalonia they would have to face the fascists (commanding the bulk of the Spanish army), the Republican government (commanding the rest) **plus** those sections in Catalonia which supported it is rarely mentioned. Moreover, when the decision to collaborate was made it was **immediately after the defeat of the army uprising in Barcelona** -- the situation in the rest of the country was uncertain and when the social revolution was in its early days.

Stuart Christie indicates the dilemma facing the leadership of the CNT at the time:

*"The higher committees of the CNT-FAI-FIJJL in Catalonia saw themselves caught on the horns of a dilemma: social revolution, fascism or bourgeois democracy. Either they committed themselves to the solutions offered by social revolution, regardless of the difficulties involved in fighting both fascism and international capitalism, or, through fear of fascism (or of the people), they sacrificed their anarchist principles and revolutionary objectives to bolster, to become, part of the bourgeois state . . . Faced with an imperfect state of affairs and preferring defeat to a possibly Pyrrhic victory, the Catalan anarchist leadership renounced anarchism in the name of expediency and removed the social transformation of Spain from their agenda.*

*"But what the CNT-FAI leaders failed to grasp was that the decision whether or not to implement Libertarian Communism, was not theirs to make. Anarchism was not something which could be transformed from theory into practice by organisational decree . . . [the] spontaneous defensive movement of 19 July had developed a political direct of its own."* [We, the Anarchists!, p. 99]

Given that the pro-fascist army still controlled a third or more of Spain (including Aragon) and that the CNT was not the dominant force in the centre and north of Spain, it was decided that a war on three fronts would only aid Franco. Moreover, it was a distinct possibility that by introducing libertarian communism in Catalonia, Aragon and elsewhere, the workers' militias and self-managed industries would have been starved of weapons, resources and credit. That isolation was a real problem can be seen from De Santillan's later comments on why the CNT joined the government:

*"The Militias Committee guaranteed the supremacy of the people in arms . . . but we were told and it was repeated to us endlessly that as long as we persisted in retaining it, that is, as long as we persisted in propping up the power of the people, weapons would not come to Catalonia, now would we be granted the foreign currency to obtain them from abroad, nor would we be supplied with the raw materials for our industry. And since losing the war meant losing everything and returning to a state like that prevailed in the Spain of Ferdinand VII, and in the conviction that the drive given by us and our people could not vanish completely from the new economic life, we quit the Militias Committee to join the Generalidad government."* [quoted by Stuart Christie, **Op. Cit.**, p. 109]

It was decided to collaborate and reject the basic ideas of anarchism until the war was over. A terrible

mistake, but one which can be understood given the circumstances in which it was made. This is not, we stress, to justify the decision but rather to explain it and place it in context. Ultimately, the **experience** of the Civil War saw a blockade of Republic by both "democratic" and fascist governments, the starving of the militias and self-managed collectives of resources and credit as well as a war on two fronts when the State felt strong enough to try and crush the CNT and the semi-revolution its members had started. Unfortunately, the anarchist movement did not have a crystal-ball with which to see the future. Ultimately, even faced with the danger of fascism, the liberals, the right-wing socialists and communists preferred to undermine the anti-fascist struggle by attacking the CNT. In this, history proved Durruti totally correct:

*"For us it is a matter of crushing Fascism once and for all. Yes, and in spite of the Government.*

*"No government in the world fights Fascism to the death. When the bourgeoisie sees power slipping from its grasp, it has recourse to Fascism to maintain itself. The liberal government of Spain could have rendered the fascist elements powerless long ago. Instead it compromised and dallied. Even now at this moment, there are men in this Government who want to go easy on the rebels. You can never tell, you know-- he laughed -- the present Government might yet need these rebellious forces to crush the workers' movement . . .*

*"We know what we want. To us it means nothing that there is a Soviet Union somewhere in the world, for the sake of whose peace and tranquillity the workers of Germany and China were sacrificed to Fascist barbarians by Stalin. We want revolution here in Spain, right now, not maybe after the next European war. We are giving Hitler and Mussolini far more worry to-day with our revolution than the whole Red Army of Russia. We are setting an example to the German and Italian working class on how to deal with fascism.*

*"I do not expect any help for a libertarian revolution from any Government in the world. Maybe the conflicting interests of the various imperialisms might have some influence in our struggle. That is quite possible . . . But we expect no help, not even from our own Government, in the last analysis."*

*"You will be sitting on a pile of ruins if you are victorious,"* said [the journalist] van Paasen.

Durruti answered: *"We have always lived in slums and holes in the wall. We will know how to accommodate ourselves for a time. For, you must not forget, we can also build. It is we the workers who built these palaces and cities here in Spain and in America and everywhere. We, the workers, can build others to take their place. And better ones! We are not in the least afraid of ruins. We are going to inherit the earth; there is not the slightest doubt about that. The bourgeoisie might blast and ruin its own world before it leaves the*

*stage of history. We carry a new world here, in our hearts. That world is growing this minute.*" [quoted by Vernon Richards, **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, pp. 193-4f]

Isolation, the uneven support for a libertarian revolution across Spain and the dangers of fascism were real problems, but they do not excuse the libertarian movement for its mistakes. As we discuss in sections [I.8.11](#) and [I.8.13](#), the biggest of these mistakes was forgetting basic anarchist ideas and an anarchist approach to the problems facing the Spanish people. If these ideas had been applied in Spain, the outcome of the Civil War and Revolution would have been different.

In summary, while the decision to collaborate is one that can be understood (due to the circumstances under which it was made), it cannot be justified in terms of anarchist theory. Indeed, as we argue in the [next section](#), attempts by the CNT leadership to justify the decision in terms of anarchist principles are not convincing and cannot be done without making a mockery of anarchism.

## **I.8.11 Was the decision to collaborate a product of anarchist theory, so showing anarchism is flawed?**

As we indicated in the [last section](#), the decision to collaborate with the state was made by the CNT due to the fear of isolation. The possibility that by declaring libertarian communism, the CNT would have had to fight the Republican government and foreign interventions **as well as** the military coup influenced the decision reached by the militants of Catalan anarchism. They argued that such a situation would only aid Franco.

Rather than being the product of anarchist ideology, the decision was made in light of the immediate danger of fascism and the situation in other parts of the country. The fact is that the circumstances in which the decision to collaborate was made are rarely mentioned by Marxists, who prefer to quote CNT militant Garcia Oliver's comment from over a year later:

*"The CNT and the FAI decided on collaboration and democracy, renouncing revolutionary totalitarianism which would lead to the strangulation of the revolution by the anarchist and Confederal dictatorship. We had to choose, between Libertarian Communism, which meant anarchist dictatorship, and democracy, which meant collaboration."* [quoted by Vernon Richards, **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, p. 34]

It is this quote, and quotes like it, which is ritualistically trotted out by Marxists when attacking anarchist ideas. They argue that they expose the bankruptcy of anarchist theory. So convinced of this, they rarely bother discussing the problems facing the CNT after the defeat of the military coup we discussed in the [last section](#) nor do they compare these quotes to the anarchist theory they claim inspired them. There are good reasons for this. Firstly, if they presented the objective circumstances the CNT found itself in then their readers may see that the decision, while wrong, is understandable and had nothing to do with anarchist theory. Secondly, by comparing these quotes to anarchist theory they would soon see how at

odds they are with it. Indeed, they invoke anarchism to justify conclusions the exact opposite of that theory.

So what can be made of Garcia Oliver's argument?

As Abel Paz notes, "*[i]t is clear that the explanations given . . . were designed for their political effect, hiding the atmosphere in which these decisions were taken. These declarations were made a year later when the CNT were already far removed from their original positions It is also the period when they had become involved in the policy of collaboration which lead taking part in the Central Government. But in a certain way they shed light on the unknown factors which weighted so heavily on these who took part in the historic Plenum.*" [Durruti: **The People Armed**, p. 215]

For example, when the decision was made, the revolution had not started yet. The street fighting had just ended and the Plenum decided "*not to speak about Libertarian Communism as long as part of Spain was in the hands of the fascists.*" [Mariano R. Vesquez, quoted by Paz, **Op. Cit.**, p.214] The revolution took place **from below** in the days following the decision, independently of the wishes of the Plenum. In the words of Abel Paz:

*"When the workers reached their workplaces . . . they found them deserted . . . The major centres of production had been abandoned by their owners . . . The CNT and its leaders had certainly not foreseen this situation; if they had, they had, they would have given appropriate guidance to the workers when they called off the General Strike and ordered a return to work. What happened next was the result of the workers' spontaneous decision to take matters into their own hands.*

*"Finding the factories deserted, and no instructions from their unions, they resolved to operate the machines themselves."* [**The Spanish Civil War**, pp. 54-5]

The rank and file of the CNT, on their own initiative, took advantage of the collapse of state power to transform the economy and social life of Catalonia. Paz stresses that "*no orders were given for expropriation or colectivisation -- which proved that the union, which represented the will of the their members until July 18th, had now been overtaken by events*" and the "*union leaders of the CNT committees were confronted with a revolution that they had not foreseen . . . the workers and peasants had bypassed their leaders and taken collective action.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 40 and p. 56]

As the revolution had not yet begun and the CNT Plenum had decided **not** to call for its start, it is difficult to see how "*libertarian communism*" (i.e. the revolution) could "*lead to the strangulation of the revolution*" (i.e. libertarian communism). In other words, this particular rationale put forward by Garica Oliver could not reflect the real thoughts of those present at the CNT plenum and so, in fact, was a later justification for the CNT's actions.

Similarly, Libertarian Communism is based on self-management, by its nature opposed to dictatorship.

According to the CNT's resolution at its congress in Zaragoza in May, 1936, "*the foundation of this administration will be the Commune*" which is "*autonomous*" and "*federated at regional and national levels.*" The commune "*will undertake to adhere to whatever general norms [that] may be agreed by majority vote after free debate.*" It stressed the free nature of society aimed at by the CNT:

*"The inhabitants of a commune are to debate among themselves their internal problems . . . Federations are to deliberate over major problems affecting a country or province and all communes are to be represented at their reunions and assemblies, thereby enabling their delegates to convey the democratic viewpoint of their respective communes . . . every commune which is implicated will have its right to have its say . . . On matters of a regional nature, it is the duty of the regional federation to implement agreements . . . So the starting point is the individual, moving on through the commune, to the federation and right on up finally to the confederation."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 106-7]

Hardly a picture of "*anarchist dictatorship*"! Indeed, it is far more "*democratic*" than the capitalist state Oliver describes as "*democracy.*"

Clearly, these often quoted words of Garcia Oliver cannot be taken at face value. Made in 1937, they present an attempt to misuse anarchist ideals to defend the anti-anarchist activities of the CNT leadership rather than a meaningful explanation of the decisions made on the 20th of July, 1936.

Moreover, the decision made then clearly stated that Libertarian Communism would be back on the agenda once Franco was defeated. Oliver's comments were applicable **after** Franco was defeated just as much as when they were made. The real reasons for the decision to collaborate lies elsewhere, namely in the objective circumstances facing the CNT after the defeat of the army in Barcelona, July 20th, 1936, and **not** in anarchist theory.

This can clearly be seen from the report made by the CNT to the **International Workers Association** to justify the decision to forget anarchist theory and collaborate with bourgeois parties and join the government. The report states that "*the CNT, loyal to its ideals and its purely anarchist nature, did not attack the forms of the State, nor try publicly to penetrate or dominate it . . . none of the political or juridical institutions were abolished.*" [quoted by Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 2, p. 1156]

In other words, according to this report, "anarchist" ideals do not, in fact, mean the destruction of the state, but rather the **ignoring** of the state. That this is nonsense, concocted to justify the CNT leaderships' betrayal of its ideals, is clear. To do so we just need to look at Bakunin and Kropotkin and look at the activities of the CNT **before** the start of the war.

Bakunin had argued that "*the revolution must set out from the first to radically and totally destroy the State*" and that the "*natural and necessary consequence of this destruction*" will include the "*dissolution*

*of army, magistracy, bureaucracy, police and priesthood.*" Capital would be expropriated (i.e. the *"confiscation of all productive capital and means of production on behalf of workers' associations, who are to put them to use"*) and the state replaced by *"the federative Alliance of all working men's associations"* which *"will constitute the Commune."* [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, p. 170] Similarly, Kropotkin had stressed that the *"Commune . . . must break the State and replace it by the Federation."* [Words of a Rebel, p. 83]

Thus anarchism has always been clear on what to do with the state, and it is obviously not what the CNT did to it! Nor had the CNT always taken this perspective. Before the start of the Civil War, the CNT had organised numerous insurrections against the state. For example, in the spontaneous revolt of CNT miners in January 1932, the workers *"seized town halls, raised the black-and-red flags of the CNT, and declared **comunismo libertario**."* In Tarassa, the same year, the workers again *"seiz[ed] town halls"* and the town *"swept by street fighting."* The revolt in January 1933 began with *"assaults by Anarchist action groups . . . on Barcelona's military barracks . . . Serious fighting occurred in working-class **barrios** and the outlying areas of Barcelona . . . Uprising occurred in Tarassa, Sardanola-Ripollet, Lerida, in several **pueblos** in Valencia province, and in Andalusia."* In December 1933, the workers *"reared barricades, attacked public buildings, and engaged in heavy street fighting . . . many villages declared libertarian communism."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 225, p. 226, p. 227 and p. 238]

It seems that the CNT leadership's loyalty to *"its ideals and its purely anarchist nature"* which necessitated *"not attack[ing] the forms of the State"* was a very recent development! That enemies of anarchism quote Garcia Oliver's words from 1937 or from this document and others like it in order to draw conclusions about anarchist theory says more about their politics than about anarchism!

As can be seen, the rationales later developed to justify the betrayal of anarchist ideas and the revolutionary workers of Spain have no real relationship to anarchist theory. They were created to justify a non-anarchist approach to the struggle against fascism, an approach based on ignoring struggle from below and instead forging alliances with parties and unions at the top (in the style of the UGT *"Workers' Alliance"* the CNT had correctly argued against before the war).

Rather than trying to cement a unity with other organisations at the top level, the leadership of the CNT should have applied their anarchist ideas by inciting the oppressed to enlarge and consolidate their gains (which they did anyway). This would have liberated all the potential energy within the country (and elsewhere), energy that clearly existed as can be seen from the spontaneous collectivisations that occurred after the fateful Plenum of July 20th and the creation of volunteer workers' militia columns sent to liberate those parts of Spain which had fallen to Franco.

The role of anarchists, therefore, was that of *"inciting the people to abolish capitalistic property and the institutions through which it exercises its power for the exploitation of the majority by a minority"* and *"to support, to incite and encourage the development of the social revolution and to frustrate any attempts by the bourgeois capitalist state to reorganise itself, which it would seek to do."* This would

involve "*seeking to destroy bourgeois institutions through the creation of revolutionary organisms.*" [Vernon Richards, **Op. Cit.**, p. 44, p. 46 and p. 193]

In other words, to encourage, what Bakunin called the "*federation of the standing barricades,*" made up of "*delegates . . . vested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times*") which could have been the initial framework for both defending and extending the revolution (to "*defend the revolution*" a "*communal militia*" would be organised, the revolution would "*radiate . . . outwards*" and communes would "*federate . . . for common defence.*") [Michael Bakunin, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 155 and p. 142] The equivalent of the "*Sections*" of the French Revolution, what Kropotkin argued "*laid the foundations of a new, free, social organisation*" and expressed "*the principles of anarchism.*" [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 206 and p. 204] Indeed, such an organisation already existing in embryo in the CNT's **barrios** defence committees which had led and co-ordinated the struggle against the military coup throughout the city.

Later, a delegate meeting from the various workplaces (CNT and UGT organised as well as unorganised ones) would have to had been arranged to organise, to again quote Bakunin, "*the federal Alliance of workers associations*" which would "*constitute the Commune*" and complement the "*federation of the standing barricades.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 155] In more modern terminology, a federation of workers' councils combined with a federation of workers' militias and community assemblies. Without this, the revolution was doomed as was the war against Franco's forces.

Such a development, applying the basic ideas of anarchism (and as expounded in the CNT's May resolution on Libertarian Communism), was not an impossibility. After all, the CNT-FAI organised something similar in Aragon. The fear that if libertarian communism was implemented then a civil war within the anti-fascist forces would occur (so aiding Franco) was a real one. Unfortunately, the conclusion draw from that fear, namely to win the war against Franco before talking about the revolution, was the wrong one. After all, a civil war within the Republican side **did** occur, when the state had recovered enough to do start it. Similarly, with the fear of a blockade by foreign governments. This happened away, confirming Durruti's comment that he "*did not expect help for a libertarian revolution from any government in the world . . . not even from our own government in the last analysis.*" [quoted by Vernon Richards, **Op. Cit.**, p. 194f] Organising a full and proper delegate meeting in the first days of the revolution would have allowed these ideas to be discussed by the whole membership of the CNT and, perhaps, a different decision may have been reached on the subject of collaboration.

By thinking they could postpone the revolution until after the war, the CNT leadership made two mistakes. Firstly, they should have known that their members would hardly miss this opportunity to implement their ideas so making their decision redundant (and a statist backlash inevitable). Secondly, they abandoned their anarchist ideas, failing to understand that the struggle against fascism would never be effective without the active participation of the working class. Such participation could never be achieved by placing the war before the revolution and by working in top-down, statist structures or within a state.

Indeed, the mistake made by the CNT, while understandable, cannot be justified given that their consequences had been predicted by numerous anarchists beforehand, including Kropotkin decades previously in an essay on the Paris Commune. In that essay he refutes the two assumptions of the CNT leadership -- first, of placing the war before the revolution and, second, that the struggle could be waged by authoritarian structures or a state.

Kropotkin had explicitly attacked the mentality and logic behind the official CNT line of not mentioning Libertarian Communism *"until such time as we had captured that part of Spain that was in the hands of the rebels."* Kropotkin had lambasted those who had argued *"Let us first make sure of victory, and then see what can be done."* His comments are worth quoting at length:

*"Make sure of victory! As if there were any way of transforming society into a free commune without laying hands upon property! As if there were any way of defeating the enemy so long as the great mass of the people is not directly interested in the triumph of the revolution, in witnessing the arrival of material, moral and intellectual well-being for all! They sought to consolidate the Commune first of all while postponing the social revolution for later on, while the only effective way of proceeding was **to consolidate the Commune by the social revolution!**"*

*"It was the same with the governmental principle. In proclaiming the free Commune, the people of Paris proclaimed an essential anarchist principle . . . If we admit, in fact, that a central government is absolutely useless to regulate the relations of communes between each other, why do we grant its necessity to regulate the mutual relations of the groups that constitute the Commune? . . . A government within the Commune has no more right to exist than a government over the Commune." [Words of a Rebel, p. 97]*

Kropotkin's argument was sound, as the CNT discovered. By waiting until victory in the war they were defeated. Kropotkin also indicated the inevitable effects of the CNT's actions in co-operating with the state and joining representative bodies. In his words:

*"Paris . . . sent her devoted sons to the Hotel-de-Ville [the town hall]. Indeed, immobilised there by fetters of red tape, forced to discuss when action was needed, and losing the sensitivity that comes from continual contact with the masses, they saw themselves reduced to impotence. Paralysed by their distancing from the revolutionary centre -- the people -- they themselves paralysed the popular initiative." [Op. Cit., pp. 97-8]*

Which, in a nutshell, was what happened to the leading militants of the CNT who collaborated with the state. Kropotkin was proved right, as was anarchist theory from Bakunin onwards. As Vernon Richards argues, *"there can be no excuse"* for the CNT's decision, as *"they were not mistakes of judgement but the deliberate abandonment of the principles of the CNT."* [Lessons of the Spanish Revolution, pp. 41-2] It seems difficult to blame anarchist theory for the decisions of the CNT when that theory argues the opposite position.



However, while the experience of Spain confirms anarchist theory **negatively**, it also confirms it **positively** by the Council of Aragon. The Council of Aragon was created by a meeting of delegates from CNT unions, village collectives and militia columns to protect the new society the people of Aragon were building. Its creation exposes as false the claim that anarchism failed in during the Spanish Civil War. In Aragon, the CNT **did** follow the ideas of anarchism, abolishing both the state and capitalism. If they had followed this example in Catalonia, the outcome of the Civil War may have been different.

In spite of opposition from the two Catalan militia leaders, the Aragonese delegates at the Bujaraloz assembly, encouraged by Durruti, supported the proposals and the Regional Defence Council of Aragón was born with the specific objective of implementing libertarian communism. The meeting also decided to press for the setting up of a National Defence Committee which would link together a series of regional bodies that were organised on principles similar to the one now established in Aragon.

The formation of the Regional Defence Council was an affirmation of commitment to the principles of libertarian communism. This principled stand for revolutionary social and economic change stands at odds with the claims that the Spanish Civil War indicates the failure of anarchism. After all, in Aragon the CNT **did** act in accordance with anarchist theory and its own history and politics.

Therefore, the activities of the CNT during the Civil War cannot be used to discredit anarchism although it can be used to show that anarchists can and do make terrible decisions in difficult circumstances. That Marxists always point to this event in anarchist history is unsurprising, for it was a terrible mistake.

However, to use this to generalise about anarchism is false as it, firstly, requires a dismissal of the objective circumstances the decision was made in (see [last section](#)) and, secondly, it means ignoring anarchist theory and history. It also gives the impression that anarchism as a revolutionary theory must be evaluated purely from one event in its history. The experiences of the Makhnovists in the Ukraine, the U.S.I and U.A.I. in the factory occupations of 1920 and fighting fascism in Italy, the insurrections of the C.N.T. during the 1930s, the Council of Aragon created by the CNT in the Spanish Revolution and so on, are all ignored when evaluating anarchism. Hardly convincing, although handy for Marxists. As is clear from, for example, the experiences of the Makhnovists and the Council of Aragon, that anarchism has been applied successfully on a large scale, both politically and economically, in revolutionary situations.

As Emma Goldman argued, the *"contention that there is something wrong with Anarchism . . . because the leading comrades in Spain failed Anarchism seems to be very faulty reasoning . . . the failure of one or several individuals can never take away from the depth and truth of an ideal."* [**Vision on Fire**, p. 299] This is even more the case when anarchists can point to anarchist theory and other examples of anarchism in action which fully followed anarchist ideas. That opponents of anarchism fail to mention these examples suggests their case against anarchism, based on the experience of the CNT in the Spanish Civil War, is deeply flawed.

Rather than show the failure of anarchism, the experience of the Spanish Revolution indicates the failure

of anarchists to apply their ideas in practice. Faced with extremely difficult circumstances, they compromised their ideas in the name of anti-fascist unity. Sadly, their compromises **confirmed** (rather than refuted) anarchist theory as they led to the defeat of both the revolution **and** the civil war.

## I.8.12 Was the decision to collaborate imposed on the CNT's membership?

A few words have to be said about the development of the CNT and FAI post 19th of July. It is clear that the CNT and FAI changed in nature and were the not same organisations as they were **before** July 1936. Both organisations became more centralised and bureaucratic, with the membership excluded from many major decisions. As Peirats argues:

*"In the CNT and among militant anarchists there had been a tradition of the most scrupulous respect for the deliberations and decisions of the assemblies, the grassroots of the federalist organisation. Those who held administrative office had been merely the mandatories of those decisions. The regular motions adopted by the National congresses spelled out to the Confederation and its representative committees ineluctable obligations of a basic and general nature incumbent upon very affiliated member regardless of locality or region. And the forming of such general motions was the direct responsibility of all of the unions by means of motions adopted at their respective general assemblies. Similarly, the Regional or Local Congresses would establish the guidelines of requirement and problems that obtained only at regional or local levels. In both instances, sovereignty resided always with the assemblies of workers whether in their unions or in their groups.*

*"This sense of rigorous, everyday federalist procedure was abruptly amended from the very outset of the revolutionary phase. . . This amendment of the norms of the organisation was explained away by reference to the exceptional turn of events, which required a greater agility of decisions and resolutions, which is to say a necessary departure from the circuitous procedures of federalist practice which operated from the bottom upwards." [The CNT in the Spanish Revolution, vol. 1, p. 213]*

In other words, the CNT had become increasingly hierarchical, with the higher committees becoming transformed into executive bodies rather than administrative ones (*"it is safe to assert that the significant resolutions in the organisation were adopted by the committees, very rarely by the mass constituency. Certainly, circumstances required quick decisions from the organisation, and it was necessary to take precautions to prevent damaging leaks. These necessities tempted the committees to abandon the federalist procedures of the organisation."* [Jose Peirats, **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 188]).

Ironically, rather than the *"anarchist leaders"* of the CNT failing to *"seize power"* as Trotsky and his followers lament, they did -- **in their own organisations**. Such a development proved to be a disaster and re-enforced the anarchist critique against hierarchical and centralised organisations. The CNT higher

committees became isolated from the membership, pursued their own policies and compromised and paralysed the creative work being done by the rank and file -- as predicted in anarchist theory. However, be that as it may, as we will indicate below, it would be false to assert that these higher committees simply imposed the decision to collaborate on their memberships (as, for example, Vernon Richards seems to imply in his **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**). While it **is** true that the committees presented many decisions as a **fait accompli** the rank-and-file of the C.N.T and F.A.I did not simply follow orders and ratify all decisions blindly.

In any revolutionary situation decisions have to be made fast and sometimes without consulting the base of the organisation. However, such decisions must be accountable to the membership who must discuss and ratify them (this was the policy within the CNT militias, for example). The experience of the CNT and FAI in countless strikes, insurrections and campaigns had proven the decentralised, federal structure was more than capable of pursuing the class war -- revolution is no exception as it is the class war in its most concentrated form. In other words, the organisational principles of the CNT and FAI were more than adequate for a revolutionary situation.

The centralising tendencies, therefore, cannot be blamed on the exception circumstances of the war. Rather, it is the policy of collaboration which explains them. Unlike the numerous strikes and revolts that occurred before July 19th, 1936, the CNT higher committees had started to work within the state structure. This, by its very nature, must generate hierarchical and centralising tendencies as those involved must adapt to the states basic structure and form. The violations of CNT policy flowed from the initial decision to compromise in the name of "*anti-fascist unity*" and a vicious circle developed -- each compromise pushed the CNT leadership further into the arms of the state, which increased hierarchical tendencies, which in turn isolated these higher committees of the CNT from the masses, which in turn encouraged a conciliatory policy by those committees.

This centralising and hierarchical tendency did not mean that the higher committees of the CNT simply imposed their will on the rest of the organisation. It is very clear that the decision to collaborate had, initially, the passive support of the majority of the CNT and FAI (probably because they thought the war would be over after a few weeks or months). This can be seen from various facts. As visiting French anarchist Sebastian Faure noted, while "*effective participation in central authority has had the approval of the majority within the unions and in the groups affiliated to the FAI, that decision has in many places encountered the opposition of a fairly substantial minority. Thus there has been no unanimity.*" [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 183]

In the words of Peirats:

*"Were all of the militants of the same mind? . . . Excepting some vocal minorities which expressed their protests in their press organs and through committees, gatherings, plenums and assemblies, the dismal truth is that the bulk of the membership was in thrall to a certain fatalism which was itself a direct consequence of the tragic realities of the war."* [Op. Cit., p. 181]

And:

*"We have already seen how, on the economic plane, militant anarchism forged ahead, undaunted, with its work of transforming the economy. It is not to be doubted -- for to do so would have been to display ignorance of the psychology of libertarian rank and file of the CNT -- that a muffled contest, occasionally erupting at plenums and assemblies and manifest in some press organs broke out as soon as the backsliding began. In this connection, the body of opinion hostile to any possible deviation in tactics and principles was able to count throughout upon spirited champions." [Op. Cit., p. 210]*

Thus, within the libertarian movement, there was a substantial minority who opposed the policy of collaboration and made their opinions known in various publications and meetings. While many (if not most) revolutionary anarchists volunteered for the militias and so were not active in their unions as before, there were various groups (such as Catalan Libertarian Youth, the Friends of Durruti, other FAI groups, and so on) which were opposed to collaboration and argued their case openly in the streets, collectives, organisational meetings and so on. Moreover, outside the libertarian movement the two tiny Trotskyist groups also argued against collaboration, as did sections of the POUM. Therefore it is impossible to state that the CNT membership were unaware of the arguments against the dominant policy. Also the Catalan CNT's higher committees, for example, after the May Days of 1937 could not get union assemblies or plenums to expel the Friends of Durruti nor to get them to withhold financial support for the Libertarian Youth, who opposed collaboration vigorously in their publications, nor get them to call upon various groups of workers to stop distributing opposition publications in the public transit system or with the daily milk. [Abe Bluestein in Gomez Casas's **Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI**, p. 10]

This suggests that in spite of centralising tendencies, the higher committees of the CNT were still subject to some degree of popular influence and control and should not be seen as having dictatorial powers over the organisation. While many decisions **were** presented as **fait accompli** to the union plenums (often called by the committees at short notice), in violation of past CNT procedures, the plenums could not be railroaded into any ratifying any decision the committees wanted. The objective circumstances associated with the war against Franco and fascism convinced most C.N.T. members and libertarian activists that working with other parties and unions within the state was the only feasible option. To do otherwise was to weaken the war effort by provoking another Civil War in the anti-Franco camp. While such a policy did not work (when it was strong enough the Republican state did start a civil war against the C.N.T. which gutted the struggle against fascism) it cannot be argued that it was imposed upon the membership nor that they did not hear opposing positions. Sadly, the call for anti-fascist unity dominated the minds of the libertarian movement.

In the early stages, the majority of rank-and-file militants believed that the war would be over in a matter of weeks. After all, a few days had been sufficient to rout the army in Barcelona and other industrial centres. This inclined them to, firstly, tolerate (indeed, support) the collaboration of the CNT with the "*Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias*" and, secondly, to start expropriating capitalism in the belief

that the revolution would soon be back on track (the opportunity to start introducing anarchist ideas was simply too good to waste, regardless of the wishes of the CNT Plenum). They believed that the revolution and libertarian communism, as debated and adopted by the CNT's Zaragoza Congress of May that year, was an inseparable aspect of the struggle against economic and social oppression and proceeded appropriately. The ignoring of the state, rather than its destruction, was seen as a short-term compromise, soon to be corrected. Sadly, they were wrong -- collaboration had a logic all its own, one which got worse as the war dragged on (and soon it was too late).

Which, we must note indicates the superficial nature of most Marxist attacks on anarchism using the CNT as the key evidence. After all, it was the anarchists and anarchist influenced members of the CNT who organised the collectives, militias and started the transformation of Spanish society. They did so inspired by anarchism and in an anarchist way. To praise their actions, while attacking "anarchism", shows a lack of logic -- it was anarchism which inspired these actions. Indeed, these actions have more in common with anarchist ideas than the actions and rationales of the CNT leadership. Thus, to attack "anarchism" by pointing to the anti-anarchist actions of a few leaders while ignoring the anarchist actions of the majority is flawed.

Therefore, to summarise, it is clear that while the internal structure of the CNT was undermined and authoritarian tendencies increased by its collaboration with the state, the CNT was not transformed into a mere appendage to the higher committees of the organisation. The union plenums could and did reject the calls made by the leadership of the CNT. Support for "*anti-fascist unity*" was widespread among the CNT membership (in spite of the activities and arguments of large minority of anarchists) and was reflected in the policy of collaboration pursued by the organisation. While the CNT higher committees were transformed into a bureaucratic leadership, increasingly isolated from the rank and file, it cannot be argued that their power was absolute nor totally at odds with the wishes of the membership. Ironically, but unsurprisingly, the divergences from the C.N.T's previous libertarian organisational principles confirmed anarchist theory and became a drag on the revolution and a factor in its defeat.

As we argued in [section I.8.11](#), the initial compromise with the state, the initial betrayal of anarchist theory and CNT policy, contained all the rest. Moreover, rather than refute anarchism, the experience of the CNT after it had rejected anarchist theory confirmed the principles of anarchism -- centralised, hierarchical organisations hindered and ultimately destroyed the revolution.

The experience of the C.N.T and F.A.I suggests that those, like Leninists, who argue for **more** centralisation and for "*democratic*" hierarchical structures have refused to understand, let alone learn from, history. The increased centralisation within the C.N.T aided and empowered the leadership (a minority) and disempowered the membership (the majority). Rather than federalism hindering the revolution, it, as always, was centralism which did so.

Therefore, in spite of a sizeable minority of anarchists **within** the C.N.T and F.A.I arguing against the dominate policy of "*anti-fascist unity*" and political collaboration, this policy was basically agreed to by the C.N.T membership and was not imposed upon them. The membership of the C.N.T could, and did,

reject suggestions of the leadership and so, in spite of the centralisation of power that occurred in the C.N.T due to the policy of collaboration, it cannot be argued that this policy was alien to the wishes of the rank-and-file.

## I.8.13 What political lessons were learned from the revolution?

The most important political lesson learned from the Spanish Revolution is that a revolution cannot compromise with existing power structures. In this, it just confirmed anarchist theory.

The Spanish Revolution is a clear example of the old maxim, "*those who only make half a revolution dig their own graves.*" Essentially, the most important political lesson of the Spanish Revolution is that a social revolution will only succeed if it follows an anarchist path and does not seek to compromise in the name of fighting a "*greater evil.*" As Kropotkin put it, a "*revolution that stops half-way is sure to be soon defeated.*" [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. 2, p. 553]

On the 20th of July, after the fascist coup had been defeated in Barcelona, the C.N.T. sent a delegation of its members to meet the leader of the Catalan Government. A plenum of C.N.T union shop stewards, in the light of the fascist coup, agreed that libertarian communism would be "*put off*" until Franco had been defeated (the rank and file ignored them and collectivised their workplaces). They organised a delegation to visit the Catalan president to discuss the situation:

*"The delegation. . . was intransigent . . . Either Companys [the Catalan president] must accept the creation of a Central Committee [of Anti-Fascist Militias] as the ruling organisation or the C.N.T. would **consult the rank and file and expose the real situation to the workers.** Companys backed down."* [Abel Paz, **Durruti: the people Armed**, p. 216, our emphasis]

The C.N.T committee members used their new-found influence in the eyes of Spain to unite with the leaders of other organisations/parties but not the rank and file. This process led to the creation of the "*Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias*", in which political parties as well as labour unions were represented. This committee was not made up of mandated delegates from workplaces, communities or barricades, but of representatives of existing organisations, nominated by committees. Instead of a genuine confederal body (made up of mandated delegates from workplace, militia and neighbourhood assemblies) the C.N.T. created a body which was not accountable to, nor could reflect the ideas of, ordinary working class people expressed in their assemblies. The state and government was not abolished by self-management, only ignored.

This first betrayal of anarchist principles led to all the rest, and so to the defeat of the revolution and the civil war. As Emma Goldman argued, the Spanish anarchists had "*come to realise that once they went into the so-called united-front, they could do nothing else but go further. In other words, the one mistake, the one wrong step inevitably led to others as it always does. I am more than ever convinced that if the comrades had remained firm on their own grounds they would have remained stronger than*

*they are now. But I repeat, once they had made common cause for the period of the anti-Fascist war, they were driven by the logic of events to go further.*" [**Vision on Fire**, pp. 100-1]

The most obvious problem, of course, was that collaboration with the state ensured that a federation of workers' associations could not be created to co-ordinate the struggle against fascism and the social revolution. As Stuart Christie argues, "*[b]y imposing their leadership from above, these partisan committees suffocated the mushrooming popular autonomous revolutionary centres -- the grass-roots factory and local revolutionary committees -- and prevented them from proving themselves as an efficient and viable means of co-ordinating communications, defence and provisioning. They also prevented the Local Revolutionary committees from integrating with each other to form a regional, provincial and national federal network which would facilitate the revolutionary task of social and economic reconstruction.*" [**We, the Anarchists!**, pp. 99-100] Without such a federation, it was only a matter of time before the C.N.T joined the bourgeois government.

Rather than being an example of "*dual power*" as many Trotskyists maintain, the "*Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias*" created on July 20th, 1936, was, in fact, an organ of class collaboration and a handicap to the revolution. Stuart Christie was correct to call it an "*artificial and hybrid creation,*" a "*compromise, an artificial political solution, an officially sanctioned appendage of the Generalidad government*" which "*drew the CNT-FAI leadership inexorably into the State apparatus, until then its principal enemy.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 105] Only a true federation of delegates from the fields, factories and workplaces could have been the framework of a true organisation of (to use Bakunin's expression) "*the social (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses.*" [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 197-8]

Therefore, the C.N.T forgot a basic principle of anarchism, namely "*the destruction . . . of the States.*" Instead, like the Paris Commune, the C.N.T thought that "*in order to combat . . . reaction, they had to organise themselves in reactionary Jacobin fashion, forgetting or sacrificing what they themselves knew were the first conditions of revolutionary socialism.*" The real basis of the revolution, the basic principle of anarchism, was that the "*future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal.*" [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 198, p. 202 and p. 204] By not doing this, by working in a top-down compromise body rather than creating a federation of workers' councils, the C.N.T leadership could not help eventually sacrificing the revolution in favour of the war.

Of course, if a full plenum of CNT unions and **barrios** defence committees, with delegates invited from UGT and unorganised workplaces, had taken place there is no guarantee that the decision reached would have been in line with anarchist theory. The feelings for antifascist unity were strong. However, the decision would have been fully discussed by the rank and file of the union, under the influence of the revolutionary anarchists who were later to join the militias and leave for the front. It is likely, given the wave of collectivisation and what happened in Aragon, that the decision would have been different and the first step would have made to turn this plenum into the basis of a free federation of workers associations -- i.e. the framework of an anarchist and self-managed society -- which could have smashed

the state and ensured no other appeared to take its place.

The basic idea of anarchism, the need to create a federation of workers councils, was ignored. In the name of "*antifascist*" unity, the C.N.T worked with parties and classes which hated both them and the revolution. In the words of Sam Dolgoff "*both before and after July 19th, an unwavering determination to crush the revolutionary movement was the leitmotif behind the policies of the Republican government; irrespective of the party in power.*" [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 40] Without creating a means to organise the "*social power*" of the working class, the CNT was defenceless against these parties once the state had re-organised itself.

To justify their collaboration, the leaders of the C.N.T-F.A.I argued that not collaborating would have lead to a civil war within the civil war, so allowing Franco easy victory. In practice, while paying lip service to the revolution, the Communists and republicans attacked the collectives, murdered anarchists, cut supplies to collectivised industries (even **war** industries) and disbanded the anarchist militias after refusing to give them weapons and ammunition (preferring to arm the Civil Guard in the rearguard in order to crush the C.N.T. and so the revolution). By collaborating, a civil war was not avoided. One occurred anyway, with the working class as its victims, as soon as the state felt strong enough.

Garcia Oliver (the first ever, and hopefully last, "anarchist" minister of justice) stated in 1937 that collaboration was necessary and that the C.N.T. had "*renounc[ed] revolutionary totalitarianism, which would lead to the strangulation of the revolution by anarchist and Confederal [C.N.T.] dictatorship. We had confidence in the word and in the person of a Catalan democrat*" Companys (who had in the past jailed anarchists). Which means that only by working with the state, politicians and capitalists can an anarchist revolution be truly libertarian! Furthermore, in the words of Vernon Richards:

*"This argument contains . . . two fundamental mistakes, which many of the leaders of the CNT-FAI have since recognised, but for which there can be no excuse, since they were not mistakes of judgement but the deliberate abandonment of the principles of the CNT. Firstly, that an armed struggle against fascism or any other form of reaction could be waged more successfully within the framework of the State and subordinating all else, including the transformation of the economic and social structure of the country, to winning the war. Secondly, that it was essential, and possible, to collaborate with political parties -- that is politicians -- honestly and sincerely, and at a time when power was in the hands of the two workers organisations. . .*

*"All the initiative . . . was in the hands of the workers. The politicians were like generals without armies floundering in a desert of futility. Collaboration with them could not, by any stretch of the imagination, strengthen resistance to Franco. On the contrary, it was clear that collaboration with political parties meant the recreation of governmental institutions and the transferring of initiative from the armed workers to a central body with executive powers. By removing the initiative from the workers, the responsibility for the conduct of the struggle and its objectives were also transferred to a governing*



*hierarchy, and this could not have other than an adverse effect on the morale of the revolutionary fighters.*" [Lessons of the Spanish Revolution, p. 42]

The dilemma of "*anarchist dictatorship*" or "*collaboration*" raised in 1937 was fundamentally wrong. It was never a case of banning parties, and other organisations under an anarchist system, far from it. Full rights of free speech, organisation and so on should have existed for all but the parties would only have as much influence as they exerted in union, workplace, community and militia assemblies, as should be the case! "*Collaboration*" yes, but within the rank and file and within organisations organised in an anarchist manner. Anarchism does not respect the "freedom" to be a boss or politician.

In his history of the F.A.I., Juan Gomaz Casas (an active F.A.I. member in 1936) makes this clear:

*"How else could libertarian communism be brought about? It would always signify dissolution of the old parties dedicated to the idea of power, or at least make it impossible for them to pursue their politics aimed at seizure of power. There will always be pockets of opposition to new experiences and therefore resistance to joining 'the spontaneity of the unanimous masses.' In addition, the masses would have complete freedom of expression in the unions and in the economic organisations of the revolution as well as their political organisations in the district and communities."* [Anarchist Organisation: the History of the F.A.I., p. 188f]

Instead of this "*collaboration*" from the bottom up, by means of a federation of workers' associations, community assemblies and militia columns as argued for by anarchists from Bakunin onwards, the C.N.T. and F.A.I. committees favoured "*collaboration*" from the top down. The leaders ignored the state and co-operated with other trade unions officials as well as political parties in the **Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias**. In other words, they ignored their political ideas in favour of a united front against what they considered the greater evil, namely fascism. This inevitably led the way to counter-revolution, the destruction of the militias and collectives, as they was no means by which these groups could co-ordinate their activities independently of the state.

In particular, the continued existence of the state ensured that economic confederalism between collectives (i.e. extending the revolution under the direction of the syndicates) could not develop naturally nor be developed far enough in all places. Due to the political compromises of the C.N.T. the tendencies to co-ordination and mutual aid could not develop freely (see [next section](#)).

It is clear that the defeat in Spain was due to a failure not of anarchist theory and tactics but a failure of anarchists to **apply** their theory and tactics. Instead of destroying the state, the C.N.T.-F.A.I. ignored it. For a revolution to be successful it needs to create organisations which can effectively replace the state and the market; that is, to create a widespread libertarian organisation for social and economic decision-making through which working class people can start to set their own agendas. Only by going this route can the state and capitalism be effectively smashed.

In building the new world we must destroy the old one. Revolutions are authoritarian by their very nature, but only in respect to structures and social relations which promote injustice, hierarchy and inequality. It is not "*authoritarian*" to destroy authority and not tyrannical to dethrone tyrants! Revolutions, above all else, must be libertarian in respect to the oppressed. That is, they must develop structures that involve the great majority of the population, who have previously been excluded from decision-making about social and economic issues. As such, a revolution is the most **libertarian** thing ever.

As the **Friends of Durruti** argued a "*revolution requires the absolute domination of the workers' organisations.*" ["*The Friends of Durruti accuse*", from **Class War on the Home Front**, p. 34] Only this, the creation of viable anarchist social organisations, can ensure that the state and capitalism can be destroyed and replaced with a just system based on liberty, equality and solidarity. Just as Bakunin, Kropotkin and a host of other anarchist thinkers had argued decades previously.

Thus the most important lesson gained from the Spanish Revolution is simply the correctness of anarchist theory on the need to organise the "*social power*" of the working class by a free federation of workers associations to destroy the state. Without this, no revolution can be lasting. As Gomez Casas correctly argues, "*if instead of condemning that experience [of collaboration], the movement continues to look for excuses for it, the same course will be repeated in the future . . . exceptional circumstances will again put . . . anarchism on [its] knees before the State.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 251]

The second important lesson is on the nature of anti-fascism. The C.N.T. leadership, along with many (if not most) of the rank-and-file, were totally blinded by the question of anti-fascist unity, leading them to support a "*democratic*" state against a "*fascist*" one. While the basis of a new world was being created around them by the working class, inspiring the fight against fascism, the C.N.T. leaders collaborated with the system that spawns fascism. Indeed, while the anti-fascist feelings of the CNT leadership were sincere, the same cannot be said of their "*allies*" (who seemed happier attacking the gains of the semi-revolution than fighting fascism). As the Friends of Durruti make clear, "*Democracy defeated the Spanish people, not Fascism.*" [**Class War on the Home Front**, p. 30]

To be opposed to fascism is not enough, you also have to be anti-capitalist. As Durruti stressed, "*[n]o government in the world fights fascism to the death. When the bourgeoisie sees power slipping from its grasp, it has recourse to fascism to maintain itself.*" [quoted Vernon Richards, **Op. Cit.**, p. 193f]

In Spain, anti-fascism destroyed the revolution, not fascism. As the Scottish Anarchist Ethal McDonald argued at the time, "*Fascism is not something new, some new force of evil opposed to society, but is only the old enemy, Capitalism, under a new and fearful sounding name . . . Anti-Fascism is the new slogan by which the working class is being betrayed.*" [**Workers Free Press**, Oct 1937]

Thirdly, the argument of the CNT that Libertarian Communism can wait until after the war was a false one. Fascism can only be defeated by ending the system that spawned it (i.e. capitalism). In addition, in terms of morale and inspiration, the struggle against fascism could only be effective if it was also a

struggle **for** something better -- namely a free society. To fight fascism for a capitalist democracy which had repressed the working class would hardly inspire those at the front. Similarly, the only hope for workers' self-management was to push the revolution as far as possible, i.e. to introduce libertarian communism while fighting fascism. The idea of waiting for libertarian communism ultimately meant sacrificing it for the war effort.

Fourthly, the role of anarchists in a social revolution is to always encourage organisation "*from below*" (to use one of Bakunin's favourite expressions), revolutionary organisations which can effectively smash the state. Bakunin himself argued (as noted above) in favour of workers' councils, complemented by community assemblies (the federation of the barricades) and a self-managed militia. This model is still applicable today and was successfully applied in Aragon by the CNT.

Therefore, the political lessons gained from the experience of the C.N.T come as no surprise. They, in general, confirm anarchist theory. As Bakunin argued, no revolution is possible unless the state is smashed, capital expropriated and a free federation of workers' associations created as the framework of libertarian socialism. Rather than refuting anarchism, the experience of the Spanish Revolution confirms it.

## I.8.14 What economic lessons were learned from the revolution?

The most important lesson from the revolution is the fact that ordinary people took over the management of industry and did an amazing job of keeping (and improving!) production in the face of the direst circumstances. Not only did workers create a war industry from almost nothing in Catalonia, they also improved working conditions and innovated with new techniques and processes. The Spanish Revolution shows that self-management is possible and that the constructive powers of ordinary people inspired by an ideal can transform society.

From the point of view of individual freedom, it's clear that self-management allowed previously marginalised people to take an active part in the decisions that affected them. Egalitarian organisations provided the framework for a massive increase in participation and individual self-government, which expressed itself in the extensive innovations carried out by the Collectives. The Collectives indicate, in Stirner's words, that "*[o]nly in the union can you assert yourself as unique, because the union does not possess you, but you possess it or make it of use to you.*" [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 312] A fact Emma Goldman confirmed from her visits to collectives and discussions with their members:

*"I was especially impressed with the replies to my questions as to what actually had the workers gained by the collectivisation . . . the answer always was, first, greater freedom. And only secondly, more wages and less time of work. In two years in Russia [1920-21] I never heard any workers express this idea of greater freedom."* [**Vision on Fire**, p. 62]

As predicted in anarchist theory, and borne out by actual experience, there exists large untapped reserves of energy and initiative in the ordinary person which self-management can call forth. The collectives proved Kropotkin's argument that co-operative work is more productive and that if the economists wish to prove *"their thesis in favour of **private property** against all other forms of **possession**, should not the economists demonstrate that under the form of communal property land never produces such rich harvests as when the possession is private. But this they could not prove; in fact, it is the contrary that has been observed."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 146]

Therefore, five important lessons from the actual experience of a libertarian socialist economy can be derived:

Firstly, that an anarchist society cannot be created overnight, but is a product of many different influences as well as the objective conditions. In this the anarchist collectives confirmed the ideas of anarchist thinkers like Bakunin and Kropotkin (see [section I.2](#)).

The lesson from every revolution is that the mistakes made in the process of liberation by people themselves are always minor compared to the results of creating institutions **for** people. The Spanish Revolution is a clear example of this, with the *"collectivisation decree"* causing more harm than good. Luckily, the Spanish anarchists recognised the importance of having the freedom to make mistakes, as can be seen by the many different forms of collectives and federations tried.

The actual process in Spain towards industrial co-ordination and so socialisation was dependent on the wishes of the workers involved -- as would be expected in a true social revolution. As Bakunin argued, the *"revolution should not only be made for the people's sake; it should also be made by the people."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 141] The problems faced by a social revolution will be solved in the interests of the working class only if working class people solve them themselves. For this to happen it requires working class people to manage their own affairs directly -- and this implies anarchism, not centralisation or state control/ownership. The experience of the collectives in Spain supports this basic idea of anarchism.

Secondly, that self-management allowed a massive increase in innovation and new ideas.

The Spanish Revolution is clear proof of the anarchist case against hierarchy and validates Isaac Puente words that in *"a free collective each benefits from accumulated knowledge and specialised experiences of all, and vice versa. There is a reciprocal relationship wherein information is in continuous circulation."* [cited in **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 32]

Thirdly, the importance of decentralisation of management.

The woodworkers' union experience indicates that when an industry becomes centralised, the administration of industry becomes constantly merged in fewer hands which leads to ordinary workers being marginalised. This can happen even in democratically run industries and soon result in apathy

developing within it. This was predicted by Kropotkin and other anarchist theorists (and by many F.A.I. members in Spain at the time). While undoubtedly better than capitalist hierarchy, such democratically run industries are only close approximations to anarchist ideas of self-management. Importantly, however, the collectivisation experiments also indicate that co-operation need not imply centralisation (as can be seen from the Badelona collectives).

Fourthly, the importance of building links of solidarity between workplaces as soon as possible.

While the importance of starting production after the fascist uprising made attempts at co-ordination seem of secondary importance to the collectives, the competition that initially occurred between workplaces helped the state to undermine self-management. Because there was no People's Bank or other communistic body to co-ordinate credit and production, state control of credit and the gold reserves made it easier for the Republican state (through its monopoly of credit) to undermine the revolution and control the collectives and (effectively) nationalise them in time (Durruti and a few others planned to seize the gold reserves but were advised not to by De Santillan).

This attack on the revolution started when the Catalan State issued a decree legalising (and so controlling) the collectives in October 1936 (the famous "*Collectivisation Decree*"). The counter-revolution also withheld funds for collectivised industries, even war industries, until they agreed to come under state control. The industrial organisation created by this decree was a compromise between anarchist ideas and those of other parties (particularly the communists) and in the words of Gaston Leval, "*the decree had the baneful effect of preventing the workers' syndicates from extending their gains. It set back the revolution in industry.*" [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 54]

And lastly, that an economic revolution can only succeed if the existing state is destroyed. As Kropotkin argued, "*a new form of economic organisation will necessarily require a new form of political structure*" -- capitalism needs the state, socialism needs anarchy. [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 181] Without the new political structure, the new economic organisation cannot develop to its full potential.

Due to the failure to consolidate the revolution **politically**, it was lost **economically**. The decree "*legalising collectivisation*" "*distorted everything right from the start*" [**Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 227] and helped undermine the revolution by ensuring that the mutualism of the collectives did not develop freely into libertarian communism ("*The collectives lost the economic freedom they had won at the beginning*" due to the decree, as one participant put it. [Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 230]).

As Fraser notes, it "*was doubtful that the C.N.T. had seriously envisaged collectivisation of industry. . . before this time.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 212] C.N.T. policy was opposed to the collectivisation decree. As an eyewitness pointed out, the C.N.T.'s "*policy was thus not the same as that pursued by the decree.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 213] Indeed, leading anarchists like Abad de Santillan opposed it and urged people to ignore it:

*"I was an enemy of the decree because I considered it premature . . . when I became*

*councillor, I had no intention of taking into account or carrying out the decree: I intended to allow our great people to carry on the task as they best saw fit, according to their own inspiration.*" [Op. Cit., p. 212]

However, with the revolution lost politically, the C.N.T. was soon forced to compromise and support the decree (the C.N.T. did propose more libertarian forms of co-ordination between workplaces but these were undermined by the state). A lack of effective mutual aid organisations allowed the state to gain power over the collectives and so undermine and destroy self-management. Working class control over the economy (important as it is) does not automatically destroy the state. In other words, the economic aspects of the revolution cannot be considered in isolation from its political ones.

However, these points do not diminish the successes of the Spanish revolution. As Gaston Leval argued, *"in spite of these shortcomings [caused lack of complete socialisation] . . . the important fact is that the factories went on working, the workshops and works produced without the owners, capitalists, shareholders and without high management executives."* [Collectives in the Spanish Revolution, p. 228]

Beyond doubt, these months of economic liberty in Spain show not only that libertarian socialism **works** and that working class people can manage and run society ourselves but that it can improve the quality of life and increase freedom. Given the time and breathing space, the experiment would undoubtedly have ironed out its problems. Even in the very difficult environment of a civil war (and with resistance of almost all other parties and unions) the workers and peasants of Spain showed that a better society is possible. They gave a concrete example of what was previously just a vision, a world which was more humane, more free, more equitable and more civilised than that run by capitalists, managers, politicians and bureaucrats.

# Marxists and Spanish Anarchism

In this appendix of our FAQ we discuss and reply to various analyses of Spanish anarchism put forward by Marxists, particularly Marxist-Leninists of various shades. The history and politics of Spanish Anarchism is not well known in many circles, particularly Marxist ones, and the various misrepresentations and distortions that Marxists have spread about that history and politics are many. This appendix is an attempt to put the record straight with regards the Spanish Anarchist movement and point out the errors associated with the standard Marxist accounts of that movement, its politics and its history.

Hopefully this appendix will go some way towards making Marxists (and others) investigate the actual facts of anarchism and Spanish anarchist history rather than depending on inaccurate secondary material (usually written by their comrades).

Part of this essay is based on the article "*Trotskyist Lies on Anarchism*" which appeared in **Black Flag** issue no. 211 and Tom Wetzel's article **Workers' Power and the Spanish Revolution**.

## 1. Were the Spanish Anarchists "*Primitive Rebels*"?

The thesis that the Spanish Anarchists were "*primitive rebels*," with a primitive understanding of the nature of revolution is a common one amongst Marxists. One of the main sources for this kind of argument is Eric Hobsbawm's **Primitive Rebels**, who was a member of the British Communist Party at the time. While the obvious Stalinist nature of the author may be thought enough to alert the intelligent of its political biases, its basic thesis is repeated by many Marxists.

Before discussing Hobsbawm in more detail, it would be useful to refute some of the more silly things so-called serious historians have asserted about Spanish Anarchism. Indeed, it would be hard to find another social or political movement which has been more misrepresented or its ideas and activities so distorted by historians whose attitudes seem more supported by ideological conviction rather than history or investigation of social life.

One of the most common descriptions of Spanish anarchism is that it was "*religious*" or "*millenarium*" in nature. Hobsbawm himself accepts this conceptualisation, along with historians and commentators like Gerald Brenan and Franz Brokenau (who, in fact, did state "*Anarchism is a religious movement*"). Such use of religion was largely due to the influence of Juan Diaz del Moral, a lawyer and historian who was also a landowner. As Jerome R. Mintz points out, "*according to Diaz del Moral, the moral and passionate obreros conscientes [conscious workers -- i.e. workers who considered themselves to be anarchists] absorbed in their pamphlets and newspapers were akin to frenzied believers in a new religion.*" [**The Anarchists of Casas Viejas**, p. 5f] However, such a perspective was formed by his class position and privileges which could not help but reflect them:

*"Diaz del Moral ascribed to the campesinos [of Andalusia] racial and cultural stereotypes that were common saws of his class. The sole cause for the waves of rural unrest, Diaz del Moral asserted, could be found in the psychology of the campesinos . . . He believed that the Andalusian field workers had inherited a Moorish tendency toward ecstasy and millenarianism that accounted for their attraction to anarchist teaching. Diaz del Moral was mystified by expressions of animosity directed toward him, but the workers considered him to be a seniorito, a landowner who does not labour . . . Although he was both scholarly and sympathetic, Diaz del Moral could not comprehend the hunger and the desperation of the campesinos around him . . . To Diaz del Moral, campesino ignorance, passion, ecstasy, illusion, and depression, not having a legitimate basis in reality, could be found only in the roots of their racial heritage." [Op. Cit., pp. 5-6]*

Hence the "religious" nature of anarchism -- it was one of the ways an uncomprehending member of the middle-class could explain working class discontent and rebellion. Unfortunately, this "explanation" has become common place in history books (partly reflected academics class interest too and lack of understanding of working class interests, needs and hopes).

As Mintz argues, *"at first glance the religious model seems to make anarchism easier to understand, particularly in the absence of detailed observation and intimate contact. The model was, however, also used to serve the political ends of anarchism's opponents. Here the use of the terms 'religious' and 'millenarium' stamp anarchist goals as unrealistic and unattainable. Anarchism is thus dismissed as a viable solution to social ills."* He continues by arguing that the *"oversimplifications posited became serious distortions of anarchist belief and practice"* (as we shall see). [Op. Cit., p. 5 and p. 6]

Temma Kaplan's critique of the "religious" view is also worth mentioning. She argues that *"the millenarium theory is too mechanistic to explain the complex pattern of Andalusian anarchist activity. The millenarian argument, in portraying the Andalusian anarchists as fundamentally religious, overlooks their clear comprehension of the social sources of their oppression."* She concludes that *"the degree of organisation, not the religiosity of workers and the community, accounts for mass mobilisations carried on by the Andalusian anarchists at the end of the nineteenth century."* She also notes that the *"[i]n a secular age, the taint of religion is the taint of irrationality."* [**Anarchists of Andalusia: 1868-1903**, pp. 210-12 and p. 211] Thus, the Andalusian anarchists had a clear idea who their enemies were, namely the ruling class of the region. She also points out that, for all their revolutionary elan, the anarchists developed a rational strategy of revolution, channelling their energies into organising a trade union movement that could be used as a vehicle for social and economic change. Moreover, as well as a clear idea of how to change society they had a clear vision of what sort of society they desired -- one built around collective ownership and federations of workers' associations and communes.

Therefore the idea that anarchism can be explained in "religious" terms is fundamentally flawed. It basically assumes that the Spanish workers were fundamentally irrational, unable to comprehend the sources of their unhappiness nor able to define their own political goals and tactics and instead looked to



naive theories which reinforced their irrationalities. In actuality, like most people, they were sensible, intelligent human beings who believed in a better life and were willing to apply their ideas in their everyday life. That historians apply patronising attitudes towards them says more about the historians than the campesinos.

This uncomprehending attitude to historians can be seen from some of the more strange assertions they make against the Spanish Anarchists. Gerald Brenan, Eric Hobsbawm and Raymond Carr, for example, all maintained that there was a connection between anarchist strikes and sexual practices. Carr's description gives a flavour:

*"Austere puritans, they sought to impose vegetarianism, sexual abstinence, and atheism on one of the most backward peasantries of Europe . . . Thus strikes were moments of exaltation as well as demands for better conditions; spontaneous and often disconnected they would bring, not only the abolition of piece-work, but 'the day,' so near at hand that sexual intercourse and alcohol were abandoned by enthusiasts till it should dawn."* [Spain: 1808-1975, p. 444]

Mintz, an American anthropologist who actually stayed with the campesino's for a number of years after 1965, actually asked them about such claims. As he put it, the *"level-headed anarchists were astonished by such descriptions of supposed Spanish puritanism by over-enthusiastic historians."* [Op. Cit., p. 6] As one anarchist put it, *"[o]f course, without any work the husband couldn't provide any food at dinnertime, and so they were angry at each other, and she wouldn't have anything to do with him. In that sense, yes, there were no sexual relations."* [quoted, Op. Cit., p. 7]

Mintz traces the citations which allowed the historians to arrive at such ridiculous views to a French social historian, Angel Maraud, who observed that during the general strike of 1902 in Moron, marriages were postponed to after the promised division of the lands. As Mintz points out, *"as a Frenchman, Maraud undoubtedly assumed that everyone knew a formal wedding ceremony did not necessarily govern the sexual relations of courting couples."* [Op. Cit., p. 6f]

As for abstinence and puritanism, nothing could be further from the truth. As Mintz argues, the anarchists considered alcoholism as being *"responsible for much of the social malaise among many workers . . . Excessive drinking robbed the worker of his senses and deprived his family of food. Anarchist newspapers and pamphlets hammered out the evil of this vice."* However, *"[p]roscriptions were not of a puritanical order"* (and so there was no desire to "impose" such things on people) and quotes an anarchist who stated that *"coffee and tobacco were not prohibited, but one was advised against using them. Men were warned against going to a brothel. It was not a matter of morality but of hygiene."* As for vegetarianism, it *"attracted few adherents, even among the obreros conscientes."* [Op. Cit., pp. 86-7 and p. 88]

Moreover, academic mockery of anarchist attempts to combat alcoholism (and **not** alcohol as such) forgets the social context. Being academics they may not have experienced wage labour directly and so

do not realise the misery it can cause. People turn to drink simply because their jobs are so bad and seek escape from the drudgery of their everyday lives. As Bakunin argued, "*confined in their life like a prisoner in his prison, without horizon, without outlet . . . the people would have the singularly narrow souls and blunted instincts of the bourgeois if they did not feel a desire to escape; but of escape there are but three methods -- two chimerical and a third real. The first two are the dram-shop and the church, debauchery of the body or debauchery of the mind; the third is social revolution.*" [**God and the State**, p. 16] So to combat alcoholism was particularly important as many workers turned to alcohol as a means of escaping the misery of life under capitalism. Thus Bookchin:

*"[T]o abstain from smoking, to live by high moral standards, and to especially adjure the consumption of alcohol was very important at the time. Spain was going through her own belated industrial revolution during the period of anarchist ascendancy with all its demoralising features. The collapse of morale among the proletariat, with rampant drunkenness, venereal disease, and the collapse of sanitary facilities, was the foremost problem which Spanish revolutionaries had to deal with . . . On this score, the Spanish anarchists were eminently successful. Few CNT workers, much less a committed anarchist, would have dared show up drunk at meetings or misbehave overtly with their comrades. If one considers the terrible working and living conditions of the period, alcoholism was not as serious a problem in Spain as it was in England during the industrial revolution."* ["Introductory Essay", **The Anarchist Collectives**, Sam Dolgoff (ed.), pp. xix-xxf]

Mintz sums up by stating "*[c]ontrary to exaggerated accounts of anarchist zeal, most thoughtful obreros conscientes believed in moderation, not abstinence.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 88] Unfortunately Mintz's work, the product of years of living with and talking to the people actually involved in the movement, does not seem to have made much impact on the historians. Unsurprising, really, as history is rarely about the actions, ideas and hopes of working people.

As can be seen, historians seem to delight in misrepresenting the ideas and actions of the Spanish Anarchists. Sometimes, as just seen, the distortions are quite serious, extremely misleading and ensure that anarchism cannot be understood or viewed as a serious political theory (we can understand why Marxists historians would seek this). Sometimes they can be subtle as when Ronald Fraser states that at the CNT's Saragossa congress in 1936 "*the proposal to create a libertarian militia to crush a military uprising was rejected almost scornfully, in the name of traditional anti-militarism.*" [**Blood of Spain**, p. 101] Hugh Thomas makes the same claim, stating at "*there was no sign that anyone [at the congress] realised that there was a danger of fascism; and no agreement, in consequence, on the arming of militias, much less the organisation of a revolutionary army as suggested by Juan Garcia Oliver.*" [**The Spanish Civil War**, p. 181]

However, what Fraser and Thomas omit to tell the reader is that this motion "*was defeated by one favouring the idea of guerrilla warfare.*" [Peter Marshal, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 460] The Saragossa resolution itself stated that a "*permanent army constitutes the greatest danger for the revolution . . . The armed people will be the best guarantee against all attempts to restore the destroyed*

*regime by interior or exterior forces . . . Each Commune should have its arms and elements of defence.*" [quoted by Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 1, p. 64]

Fraser's and Hugh's omission is extremely serious -- it gives a radically false impression of anarchist politics. Their comments could lead a reader to think that anarchists, as Marxists claim, do not believe in defending a revolution. As can be seen from the actual resolutions of the Saragossa conference, this is not the case. Indeed, given that the congress was explicitly discussing, along with many other issues, the question of "*defence of the revolution*" their omission seriously distorts the CNT's position and anarchist theory. As seen, the congress supported the need to arm the people and to keep those arms under the control of the communes (as well as the role of "*Confederal Defence Forces*" and the efficient organisation of forces on a national level). Given that Thomas quotes extensively from the Saragossa resolution on libertarian communism we can only surmise that he forgot to read the section entitled "*Defence of the Revolution.*"

Hugh and Thomas omissions, however, ensure that anarchism is presented as an utopian and naive theory, unaware of the problems facing society. In reality, the opposite is the case -- the Spanish anarchists were well aware of the need to arm the people and resist counter-revolution and fascism by force. Regardless of Thomas' claims, it is clear that the CNT and FAI realised the danger of fascism existed and passed appropriate resolutions outlining how to organise an effective means of self-defence (indeed, as early as February 14 of that year, the CNT had issued a prophetic manifesto warning that right-wing elements were ready to provoke a military coup [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 273]). To state otherwise, while quoting from the document that discusses the issue, must be considered a deliberate lie.

However, to return to our main point -- Eric Hobsbawm's thesis that the Spanish anarchists were an example of "*pre-political*" groups -- the "*primitive rebels*" of his title.

Essentially, Hobsbawm describes the Spanish Anarchists -- particularly the Andalusian anarchists -- as modern-day secular mystics who, like the millenarians of the Middle Ages, were guided by the irrational belief that it was possible to will profound social change. The actions of the Spanish anarchist movement, therefore, can be explained in terms of millenarian behaviour -- the belief that it was able to jump start to utopia via an act of will.

The Spanish farm and industrial workers, it is argued, were unable to grasp the complexities of the economic and political structures that dominated their lives and so were attracted to anarchism. According to Hobsbawm, anarchism is marked by "*theoretical primitivism*" and a primitive understanding of revolution and this explained why anarchism was popular with Spanish workers, particularly farm workers. According to Hobsbawm, anarchism told the workers that by spontaneously rising up together they could overthrow the forces of repression and create the new millennium.

Obviously, we cannot refute Hobsbawm's claims of anarchism's "*theoretical primitivism*" in this appendix, the reader is invited to consult the main FAQ. Moreover, we cannot stress more that

Hobsbawm's assertion that anarchists believe in spontaneous, overnight uprisings is false. Rather, we see revolution as a **process** in which day-to-day struggle and organisation play a key role -- it is not seen as occurring independently of the on-going class struggle or social evolution. While we discuss in depth the nature of an anarchist social revolution in [section J.7](#), we can present a few quotes by Bakunin to refute Hobsbawm's claim:

*"Revolutions are not improvised. They are not made at will by individuals. They come about through the force of circumstances and are independent of any deliberate ill or conspiracy."* [quoted by Brian Morris, **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 139]

*"It is impossible to rouse people by artificial means. Popular revolutions are born by the actual force of events . . . It is impossible to bring about such a revolution artificially. It is not even possible to speed it up at all significantly . . . There are some periods in history when revolutions are quite simply impossible; there are other periods when they are inevitable."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 183]

As Brian Morris correctly argues, *"Bakunin denies that a social revolution could be made by the will of individuals, independent of social and economic circumstances. He was much less a voluntarist than his Marxist critics make out . . . he was . . . aware that the social revolution would be a long process that may take many years for its realisation."* [**Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, pp. 138-9] To aid the process of social revolution, Bakunin supported the need for *"pioneering groups or associations of advanced workers who were willing to initiate this great movement of self-emancipation."* However, more is needed -- namely popular working class organisations -- *"what is the organisation of the masses? . . . It is the organisation by professions and trades . . . The organisation of the trade sections . . . bear in themselves the living seed of the new society which is to replace the old world. They are creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 252 and p. 255]

Therefore, Bakunin saw revolution as a process which starts with day-to-day struggle and creation of labour unions to organise that struggle. As he put it himself:

*"What policy should the International [Workers' Association] follow during th[e] somewhat extended time period that separates us from this terrible social revolution . . . the International will give labour unrest in all countries an **essentially economic** character, with the aim of reducing working hours and increasing salary, by means of the **association of the working masses** . . . It will [also] propagandise its principles . . . Lastly, the International will expand and organise across frontiers of all countries, so that when the revolution -- brought about by the force of circumstances -- breaks out, the International will be a real force and will know what it has to do. Then it will be able to take the revolution into its own hands and give it a direction that will benefit the people: an earnest international organisation of workers' associations from all countries, capable of replacing this departing world of States and bourgeoisie."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, pp.

109-10]

However, while quoting Bakunin refutes part of his thesis, Hobsbawm does base his case on some actual events of Spanish Anarchist history. Therefore we need to look at these cases and show how he gets these wrong. Without an empirical basis, his case obviously falls even without quotes by Bakunin. Luckily the important examples he uses have been analysed by people without the ideological blinkers inherent in Leninism.

While we shall concentrate on just two cases -- Casa Viejas in 1933 and the Jerez rising of 1892 -- a few general points should be mentioned. As Jerome Mintz notes, Hobsbawms' *"account is based primarily on a preconceived evolutionary model of political development rather than on data gathered in field research. The model scales labour movements in accord with their progress toward mass parties and central authority. In short, he explains how anarchosyndicalists were presumed to act rather than what actually took place, and the uprising at Casa Viejas was used to prove an already established point of view. Unfortunately, his evolutionary model misled him on virtually every point."* [Op. Cit., p. 271] We should also note his "model" is essentially Marxist ideology -- namely, Marx's assertion that his aim for mass political parties expressed the interests of the working class and all other visions were the products of sectarians. Mintz also points out that Hobsbawm does not live up to his own model:

*"While Hobsbawm's theoretical model is evolutionary, in his own treatment anarchism is often regarded as unchanging from one decade to the other. In his text, attitudes and beliefs of 1903-5, 1918-20, 1933, and 1936 are lumped together or considered interchangeable. Of course during these decades the anarchosyndicalists had developed their programs and the individuals involved had become more experienced."* [Op. Cit., p. 271f]

Hobsbawm believed that Casas Viejas was the classic "anarchist" uprising -- *"utopian, millenarian, apocalyptic, as all witnesses agree it to have been."* [Primitive Rebels, p. 90] As Mintz states, *"the facts prove otherwise. Casas Viejas rose not in a frenzy of blind millenarianism but in response to a call for a nation-wide revolutionary strike. The insurrection of January 1933 was hatched by faistas [members of the FAI] in Barcelona and was to be fought primarily there and in other urban centres. The uprisings in the countryside would be diversionary and designed to keep the civil guard from shifting reinforcements. The faista plot was then fed by intensive newspaper propaganda, by travelling orators, and by actions undertaken by the [CNT] defence committees. Representatives of the defence committees from Casas Viejas and Medina had received instructions at a regional meeting held days before. On January 11, the anarchosyndicalists of Casas Viejas believed that they were joining their companeros who had already been at the barricades since January 8."* [Op. Cit., p. 272]

Hobsbawm argued that the uprising occurred in accordance with an established economic pattern:

*"Economic conditions naturally determined the timing and periodicity of the revolutionary outbreaks -- for instance, social movements tended to reach a peak intensity during the*

worse months of the year -- January to March, when farm labourers have least work (the march on Jerez in 1892 and the rising of Casas Viejas in 1933 both occurred early in January), March-July, when the proceeding harvest has been exhausted and times are lean." [Op. Cit., p. 79]

Mintz states the obvious:

*"In reality, most agricultural strikes took place in May and June, the period of the harvest and the only time of the year when the campesinos had any leverage against the landowners. The uprising at Casas Viejas occurred in January precisely because it was not an agricultural strike. The timing of the insurrection, hurriedly called to coincide with a planned railway strike that would make it difficult for the government to shift its forces, was determined by strategic rather than economic considerations."* [Op. Cit., p. 273]

As for the revolt itself, Hobsbawm asserts that:

*"Secure from the outside world, [the men] put up the red and black flag of anarchy and set about dividing the land. They made no attempt to spread the movement or kill anyone."* [Op. Cit., p. 274]

Which, as Mintz clearly shows, was nonsense:

*"As is already evident, rather than securing themselves from the rest of world, the uprising at Casas Viejas was a pathetic attempt to join in an ill-fated national insurrection. With regard to his second point, there was neither the time nor the opportunity to 'set about dividing the land.' The men were scattered in various locations guarding roads and paths leading to the town. There were no meetings or discussions during this brief period of control. Only a few hours separated the shooting at the barracks and the entrance of the small [government] rescue force from Alcala. Contrary to Hobsbawm's description of peaceful enterprise, at the outset the anarchists surrounding the barracks had fired on the civil guards, mortally wounding two men."* [Op. Cit., p. 274]

As can be seen, Hobsbawm was totally wrong about the uprising itself and so it cannot be used as evidence for his thesis. On other, less key issues, he was equally wrong. Mintz gives an excellent summary:

*"Since kinship is a key feature in 'primitive' societies, according to Hobsbawm, it was a major factor in the leadership of the sindicato [union] in Casas Viejas.*

*"There is no evidence that kinship had anything to do with leadership in the anarchist movement in Casa Viejas or anywhere else. The reverse would be closer to the truth.*

*Since the anarchists expressed belief in universal brotherhood, kinship ties were often undermined. In times of strike or in carrying out any decision of the collective membership, obreros conscientes sometimes had to act counter to their kinship demands in order to keep faith with the movement and with their companeros.*

*"Hobsbawm's specific examples are unfortunately based in part on errors of fact. . .*

*"Hobsbawm's model [also] requires a charismatic leader. Accordingly, the inspired leader of the uprising is said to be 'old Curro Cruz ('Six Fingers') who issued the call for revolution . . . '*

[. . .]

*"This celebration of Seisdedo's role ['Six Fingers'], however, ignores the unanimous view of townspeople of every class and political persuasion, who assert that the old man was apolitical and had nothing to do with the uprising . . . every observer and participant in the uprising agrees that Seisdedos was not the leader and was never anything other than a virtuous charcoal burner with but a slight interest in anarchosyndicalism.*

[. . .]

*"Should the role of charismatic leader be given to someone else in the town? This was not a case of mistaken identity. No single person in Casas Viejas could lay claim to dominating the hearts and minds of the men. . . The sindicato was governed by a junta. Among the cast of characters there is no sign of charismatic leadership . . ." [Op. Cit., pp. 274-6]*

Mintz sums up by stating *"Hobsbawm's adherence to a model, and the accumulation of misinformation, led him away from the essential conflicts underlying the tragedy and from the reality of the people who participated in it."* [Op. Cit., p. 276]

The Jerez uprising of 1892 also fails to provide Hobsbawm with any empirical evidence to support his claims. Indeed, as in Casas Viejas, the evidence actually works against him. The actual events of the uprising are as follows. Just before midnight of 8th January 1892, several hundred workers entered the town of Jerez crying *"Long live the revolution! Long live Anarchy!"* Armed with only rocks, sticks, scythes and other farm equipment, they marched toward the city jail with the evident intention of releasing its prisoners -- who included many political prisoners, victims of the government's recent anti-anarchist campaign. A few people were killed and the uprising dispersed by a regiment of mounted troops.

Hobsbawm claims this revolt as evidence for his *"primitive rebels"* thesis. As historian George R. Esenwein argues:

*"[T]he Jerez incident cannot be explained in terms of this model. What the millenarian view fails to do in this instance is to credit the workers with the ability to define their own political goals. This is not to deny that there were millenarian aspects of the rising, for the mob action of the workers on the night of 8 January indicates a degree of irrationalism that is consistent with millenarian behaviour. But . . . the agitators seem to have had a clear motive in mind when they rose: they sought to release their comrades from the local jail and thereby demonstrate their defiance of the government's incessant persecution of the International [Workers' Association] movement. However clumsily and crudely they expressed their grievance, the workers were patently aiming to achieve this objective and not to overthrow the local government in order to inaugurate the birth of a libertarian society."* [**Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain: 1868-1898**, p. 184]

Similarly, many Marxists (and liberal historians) point to the *"cycle of insurrections"* that occurred during the 1930s. They usually portray these revolts as isolated insurrections organised by the FAI who appeared in villages and proclaimed libertarian communism. The picture is one of disorganisation, millenarianism and a believe in spontaneous revolution inspired by a few militants and their daring actions. Nothing could be further from the truth. The *"cycle of insurrections"* was far more complex than this, as Juan Gomez Casas makes clear:

*"Between 1932 and 1934 . . . the Spanish anarchists tried to destroy the existing social order through a series of increasingly violent strikes and insurrections, which were at first spontaneous, later co-ordinated."* [**Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI**, p. 135]

Stuart Christie stresses this point when he wrote *"[i]t has been widely assumed that the cycle of insurrections which began in . . . January 1933 were organised and instigated by the FAI . . . In fact the rising had nothing to do with the FAI. It began as an entirely spontaneous local affair directed against a local employer, but quickly mushroomed into a popular movement which threatened to engulf the whole of Catalonia and the rest of Spain . . . [CNT militant] Arturo Parera later confirmed that the FAI had not participated in the aborted movement 'as an organisation.'"* [**We, the Anarchists**, p. 66] While the initial revolts, such as those of the miners of Alto Llobregat in January 1932, were spontaneous acts which caught the CNT and FAI by surprise, the following insurrections became increasingly organised and co-ordinated by those organisations. The January 1933 revolt, as noted above, was based around a planned strike by the CNT railway workers union. The revolt of December 1933 was organised by a National Revolutionary Committee. Both revolts aimed at uprisings all across Spain, based on the existing organisations of the CNT -- the unions and their "Defence committees". Such a degree of planning belies any claims that Spanish Anarchists were *"primitive rebels"* or did not understand the complexities of modern society or what was required to change it.

Ultimately, Hobsbawm's thesis and its underlying model represents Marxist arrogance and sectarianism. His model assumes the validity of the Marxist claim that true working class movements are based on



mass political parties based on hierarchical, centralised, leadership and those who reject this model and political action (electioneering) are sects and sectarians. It was for this reason that Marx, faced with the increased influence of Bakunin, overturned the First International's original basis of free discussion with his own concept of what a real workers' movement should be.

Originally, because the various sections of the International worked under different circumstances and had attained different degrees of development, the theoretical ideals which reflected the real movement would also diverge. The International, therefore, was open to all socialist and working class tendencies. The general policies of the International would be, by necessity, based on conference decisions that reflected the free political development that flowed from local needs. These decisions would be determined by free discussion within and between sections of all economic, social and political ideas. Marx, however, replaced this policy with a common program of "*political action*" (i.e. electioneering) by mass political parties via the fixed Hague conference of 1872. Rather than having this position agreed by the normal exchange of ideas and theoretical discussion in the sections guided by the needs of the practical struggle, Marx imposed what **he** considered as the future of the workers movement onto the International -- and denounced those who disagreed with him as sectarians. The notion that what Marx considered as necessary might be another sectarian position imposed on the workers' movement did not enter his head nor that of his followers -- as can be seen, Hobsbawm (mis)interpreted anarchism and its history thanks to this Marxist model and vision.

However, once we look at the anarchist movement without the blinkers created by Marxism, we see that rather than being a movement of "*primitive rebels*" Spanish Anarchism was a movement of working class people using valid tactics to meet their own social, economic and political goals -- tactics and goals which evolved to meet changing circumstances. Seeing the rise of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism as the political expression of the class struggle, guided by the needs of the practical struggle they faced naturally follows when we recognise the Marxist model for what it is -- just one possible interpretation of the future of the workers' movement rather than **the** future of that movement. Moreover, as the history of Social Democracy indicates, the predictions of Bakunin and the anarchists within the First International were proved correct. Therefore, rather than being "*primitive rebels*" or sectarian politics forced upon the working class, anarchism reflected the politics required to built a **revolutionary** workers' movement rather than a reformist mass party.

## 2. How accurate is Felix Morrow's book on the Spanish Revolution?

It is fair to say that most Marxists in Britain base their criticisms of the Spanish Anarchism, particularly the revolution of 1936, on the work of Trotskyist Felix Morrow. Morrow's book **Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain**, first published in 1938, actually is not that bad -- for some kinds of information. However, it is basically written as Trotskyist propaganda. All too often Morrow is inaccurate, and over-eager to bend reality to fit the party line. This is particularly the case when discussing the actions and ideas of the CNT and FAI and when discussing the activities of his fellow Trotskyists in Spain, the Bolshevik-Leninists. We discuss the first set of inaccuracies in the following

sections, here we mention the second, Morrow's comments on the Spanish Trotskyists.

The Bolshevik-Leninists, for example, an obscure sect who perhaps numbered 20 members at most, are, according to Morrow, transformed into the only ones who could save the Spanish Revolution -- because they alone were members of the Fourth International, Morrow's own organisation. As he put it:

*"Only the small forces of the Bolshevik-Leninists. . . clearly pointed the road for the workers."* [Felix Morrow, **Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain**, p. 191]

*"Could that party [the party needed to lead the revolution] be any but a party standing on the platform of the Fourth International?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 248]

And so on. As we will make clear in the following discussion, Morrow was as wrong about this as he was about anarchism.

The POUM -- a more significant Marxist party in Spain, though still tiny compared to the anarchists -- is also written up as far more important than it was, and slagged off for failing to lead the masses to victory (or listening to the Bolshevik-Leninists). The Fourth Internationalists *"offered the POUM the rarest and most precious form of aid: a consistent Marxist analysis"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 105] (never mind Spanish workers needing guns and solidarity!). But when such a programme -- prepared in advance -- was offered to the POUM by the Fourth International representative -- only two hours after arriving in Spain, and a quarter of an hour after meeting the POUM [**Op. Cit.**, p. 139] -- the POUM were not interested. The POUM have been both attacked (and claimed as their own) by Trotskyists ever since.

It is Morrow's attacks on anarchism, though, that have most readily entered leftist folklore -- even among Marxists who reject Leninism. Some of Morrow's criticisms are fair enough -- but these were voiced by anarchists long before Morrow put pen to paper. Morrow, in fact, quotes and accepts the analyses of anarchists like Camillo Berneri (*"Berneri had been right"* etc. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 153]), and praises anarchists like Durruti (*"the greatest military figure produced by the war"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 224]) -- then sticks the boot into anarchism. Indeed, Durruti's analysis is praised but he is transformed into *"no theoretician, but an activist leader of masses. . . his words express the revolutionary outlook of the class-conscious workers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 250] Of course, his words, activity and *"outlook"* (i.e. political analysis) did not spring out of thin air but rather, to state the obvious, were informed by and reflected his anarchist politics, history, activity and vision (which in turn reflected his experiences and needs as a member of the working class). Morrow obviously wanted to have his cake and eat it.

Typically for today's left, perhaps, the most quoted sections of Morrow's book are the most inaccurate. In the next eight sections we discuss some of the most inaccurate claims. After that we point out that Morrow's analysis of the militias is deeply ironic given Trotsky's actions as leader of the Red Army. Then we discuss some of Morrow's inaccurate assertions about anarchism in general.

Of course, some of the errors we highlight in Morrow's work are the product of the conditions in which

it was written -- thousands of miles from Spain in America, dependent on papers produced by Spanish Marxists, Anarchists and others. We cannot blame him for such mistakes (although we can blame the Trotskyist publisher who reprints his account without indicating his factual errors and the Marxist writers who repeat his claims without checking their accuracy). We **do**, however, blame Morrow for his errors and misrepresentations of the activities and politics of the Spanish Anarchists and anarchism in general. These errors derive from his politics and inability to understand anarchism or provide an honest account of it.

By the end of our discussion we hope to show why anarchists argue that Morrow's book is deeply flawed and its objectively skewed by the authors politics and so cannot be taken at face value. Morrow's book may bring comfort to those Marxists who look for ready-made answers and are prepared to accept the works of hacks at face-value. Those who want to learn from the past -- instead of re-writing it -- will have to look elsewhere.

### 3. Did a "*highly centralised*" FAI control the CNT?

According to Morrow, "*Spanish Anarchism had in the FAI a highly centralised party apparatus through which it maintained control of the CNT*" [Op. Cit., p. 100]

In reality, the FAI -- the Iberian Anarchist Federation -- was founded, in 1927, as a confederation of regional federations (including the Portuguese Anarchist Union). These regional federations, in turn, coordinated local and district federations of highly autonomous anarchist affinity groups. In the words of Murray Bookchin:

*"Like the CNT, the FAI was structured along confederal lines: the affinity groups were linked together in a Local Federation and the Local Federation in District and Regional Federations. A Local Federation was administered by an ongoing secretariat, usually of three persons, and a committee composed of one mandated delegate from each affinity group. This body comprised a sort of local executive committee. To allow for a full expression of rank-and-file views, the Local Federation was obliged to convene assemblies of all the **faistas** in its area. The District and Regional Federations, in turn, were simply the Local federation writ large, replicating the structure of the lower body. All the Local Districts and Regional Federations were linked together by a Peninsular Committee whose tasks, at least theoretically, were administrative. . . [A FAI secretary] admits that the FAI 'exhibited a tendency towards centralism' . . . Yet it must also be emphasised that the affinity groups were far more independent than any comparable bodies in the Socialist Party, much less the Communist. . . the FAI was not an internally repressive organisation . . . Almost as a matter of second nature, dissidents were permitted a considerable amount of freedom in voicing and publishing material against the leadership and established policies."* [The Spanish Anarchists, pp. 197-8]

And:

*"Most writers on the Spanish labour movement seem to concur in the view that, with the departure of the moderates, the CNT was to fall under the complete domination of the FAI . . . But is this appraisal correct? The FAI . . . was more loosely jointed as an organisation than many of its admirers and critics seem to recognise. It has no bureaucratic apparatus, no membership cards or dues, and no headquarters with paid officials, secretaries, and clerks. . . They jealously guarded the autonomy of their affinity groups from the authority of higher organisational bodies -- a state of mind hardly conducive to the development of a tightly knit, vanguard organisation.*

*"The FAI, moreover, was not a politically homogeneous organisation which followed a fixed 'line' like the Communists and many Socialists. It had no official program by which all **faistas** could mechanically guide their actions."* [Op. Cit., p. 224]

So, while the FAI may have had centralising tendencies, a *"highly centralised"* political party it was not. Further, many anarcho-syndicalists and affinity groups were not in the FAI (though most seem to have supported it), and many FAI members put loyalty to the CNT (the anarcho-syndicalist union confederation) first. For instance, according to the minutes of the FAI national plenum of January-February 1936:

*"The Regional Committee [of Aragon, Rioja, and Navarra] is completely neglected by the majority of the militants because they are absorbed in the larger activities of the CNT"*

And:

*"One of the reasons for the poor condition of the FAI was the fact that almost all the comrades were active in the defence groups of the CNT"* (report from the Regional Federation of the North).

These are internal documents and so unlikely to be lies. [Juan Gomez Casas, **Anarchist Organisation: the History of the FAI**, p. 165 and p. 168]

Anarchists were obviously the main influence in the CNT. Indeed, the CNT was anarcho-syndicalist long before the FAI was founded -- from its creation in 1910 the CNT had been anarcho-syndicalist and remained so for 17 years before the FAI existed. However, Morrow was not the only person to assert *"FAI control"* of the CNT. In fact, the claim of *"FAI control"* was an invention of a reformist minority within the organisation -- people like Angel Pestana, ex-CNT National Secretary, who wanted to turn the CNT into a politically *"neutral"* union movement. Pestana later showed what he meant by forming the Syndicalist Party and standing for Parliament (the Cortes). Obviously, in the struggle against the reformists, anarcho-syndicalists -- inside the FAI or not -- voted for people they trusted to run CNT committees. The reformists (called **Treinistas**) lost, split from the CNT (taking about 10% of the membership with them), and the myth of *"FAI dictatorship"* was born. Rather than accept that the

membership no longer supported them, the **Treinistas** consoled themselves with tales that a minority, the FAI, had taken control of the CNT.

In fact, due to its decentralised and federal structure, the FAI could not have had the sort of dominance over the CNT that is often attributed to it. At union congresses, where policies and the program for the movement were argued out:

*"[D]elegates, whether or not they were members of the FAI, were presenting resolutions adopted by their unions at open membership meetings. Actions taken at the congress had to be reported back to their unions at open meetings, and given the degree of union education among the members, it was impossible for delegates to support personal, non-representative positions."* [Juan Gomez Casas, **Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI**, p. 121]

The union committees were typically rotated out of office frequently and committeemen continued to work as wage-earners. In a movement so closely based on the shop floor, the FAI could not maintain influence for long if they ignored the concerns and opinions of co-workers. Moreover, only a minority of the anarcho-syndicalist activists in the CNT belonged to the FAI and, as Juan Gomez Casas points out in his history of the FAI, FAI militants frequently had a prior loyalty to the CNT. Thus his summation seems correct:

*"As a minority organisation, the FAI could not possibly have had the kind of control attributed to it . . . in 1931 . . . there were fifty CNT members for each member of a FAI group. The FAI was strongly federalist, with its groups at the base freely associated. It could not dominate an organisation like the CNT, which had fifty times as many members and was also opposed to hierarchy and centralism. We know that FAI militants were also CNT militants, and frequently they were loyal first to the CNT. Their influence was limited to the base of the organisation through participation in the plenums of militants or unions meetings."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 133]

He sums up by arguing:

*"The myth of the FAI as conqueror and ruler of the CNT was created basically by the **Treinistas**"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 134]

Therefore, Morrow is re-cycling an argument which was produced by the reformist wing of the CNT after it had lost influence in the union rank-and-file. Perhaps he judges the FAI by his own standards? After all, the aim of Leninists is for the vanguard party to control the labour unions in their countries. Anarchists reject such a vision and believe in union autonomy -- influence of political parties and groups should only exist in as much as they influence the rank-and-file who control the union. Rather than aim to control the CNT, the FAI worked to influence its membership. In the words of Francisco Ascaso (friend of Durruti and an influential anarchist militant in the CNT and FAI in his own right):

*"There is not a single militant who as a 'FAIista' intervenes in union meetings. I work, therefore I am an exploited person. I pay my dues to the workers' union and when I intervene at union meetings I do it as someone who is exploited, and with the right which is granted me by the card in my possession, as do the other militants, whether they belong to the FAI or not."* [cited by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 137]

In other words, the FAI "*controlled*" the CNT only to the extent it influenced the membership -- who, in fact, controlled the organisation. We must also note that Ascaso's comment echoes Bakunin's that the "*purpose of the Alliance [i.e. anarchist federation] is to promote the Revolution . . . it will combat all ambition to dominate the revolutionary movement of the people, either by cliques or individuals. The Alliance will promote the Revolution only through the NATURAL BUT NEVER OFFICIAL INFLUENCE of all members of the Alliance.*" [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 387]

Regardless of Morrow's claims, the FAI was a federation of autonomous affinity groups in which, as one member put it, "*[e]ach FAI group thought and acted as it deemed fit, without bothering about what the others might be thinking or deciding . . . they had no . . . opportunity or jurisdiction . . . to foist a party line upon the grass-roots.*" [Francisco Carrasquer, quoted by Stuart Christie, **We, the Anarchists!**, p. 28] There was co-ordination in a federal structure, of course, but that did not create a "*highly centralised*" party-like organisation. Morrow judged the FAI according to his own standards, squeezing it into his ideological vision of the world rather than reporting the reality of the situation (see Stuart Christie's work for a more detailed refutation of the usual Marxist and Liberal inventions of the activities and nature of the FAI).

In addition, Morrow's picture of the FAI implicitly paints the CNT as a mere "transmission belt" for that organisation (and so a re-production of the Bolshevik position on the relationship of the labour unions and the revolutionary party). Such a picture, however, ignores the CNT's character as a non-hierarchical, democratic (self-managed) mass movement which had many tendencies within it. It also fails to understand the way anarchists seek to influence mass organisations -- not by assuming positions of power but by convincing their fellow workers' of the validity of their ideas in policy making mass assemblies (see [section J.3.6](#) for more details).

In other words, Morrow's claims are simply false and express a total lack of understanding of the nature of the CNT, the FAI and their relationship.

## 4. What is the history of the CNT and the Communist International?

Morrow states that the "*tide of the October Revolution had, for a short time, overtaken the CNT. It had sent a delegate to the Comintern [Communist International] Congress in 1921. The anarchists had then resorted to organised fraction work and recaptured it.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 100] He links this to the FAI by stating "*[t]henceforward . . . the FAI . . . maintained control of the CNT.*" Given that the FAI was

formed in 1927 and the CNT disassociated itself with the Comintern in 1922, five years before the FAI was created, "*thenceforward*" does not do the FAI's ability to control the CNT before it was created justice!

Partly it is the inability of the Communist Party and its Trotskyist off-shoots to dominate the CNT which explains Morrow's comments. Seeing anarchism as "*petty bourgeois*" it is hard to combine this with the obvious truth that a mass, revolutionary, workers' union could be so heavily influenced by anarchism rather than Marxism. Hence the need for FAI (or anarchist) "control" of the CNT. It allows Trotskyists ignore dangerous ideological questions. As J. Romero Maura notes, the question why anarchism influenced the CNT "*in fact raises the problem why the reformist social democratic, or alternatively the communist conceptions, did not impose themselves on the CNT as they managed to in most of the rest of Europe. This question . . . is based on the false assumption that the anarcho-syndicalist conception of the workers' struggle in pre-revolutionary society was completely at odds with what the **real** social process signified (hence the constant reference to religious', 'messianic', models as explanations).*" He argues that the "*explanation of Spanish anarcho-syndicalist success in organising a mass movement with a sustained revolutionary **elan** should initially be sought in the very nature of the anarchist concept of society and of how to achieve revolution.*" [J. Romero Maura, "*The Spanish Case*", in **Anarchism Today**, D. Apter and J. Joll (eds.), p. 78 and p. 65] Once we do that, we can see the weakness of Morrow's (and others) "*Myth of the FAI*" -- having dismissed the obvious reason for anarchist influence, namely its practicality and valid politics, there can only be "control by the FAI."

However, the question of affiliation of the CNT to the Comintern is worth discussing as it indicates the differences between anarchists and Leninists. As will be seen, the truth of this matter is somewhat different to Morrow's claims and indicates well his distorted vision.

Firstly to correct a factual error. The CNT in fact sent two delegations to the Comintern. At its 1919 national congress, the CNT discussed the Russian Revolution and accepted a proposition that stated it "*declares itself a staunch defender of the principles upheld by Bakunin in the First International. It declares further that it affiliates provisionally to the Third International on account of its predominantly revolutionary character, pending the holding of the International Congress in Spain, which must establish the foundations which are to govern the true workers' International.*" [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, pp. 220-1]

In June 1920, Angel Pestana arrived in Moscow and represented the CNT at the Second Congress of the Communist International. He was arrested when he arrived back in Spain and so could not give his eye-witness account of the strangulation of the revolution and the deeply dishonest manipulation of the congress by the Communist Party. A later delegation arrived in April 1921, headed by Andres Nin and Joaquin Maurin professing to represent the CNT. Actually, Nin and Maurin represented virtually no one but the Lerida local federation (their stronghold). Their actions and claims were disavowed by a plenum of the CNT the following August.

How did Nin and Maurin manage to get into a position to be sent to Russia? Simply because of the

repression the CNT was under at the time. This was the period when Catalan bosses hired gun men to assassinate CNT militants and members and the police exercised the notorious practice known as **ley de fugas** (shot while trying to escape). In such a situation, the normal workings of the CNT came under must stress and *"with the best known libertarian militants imprisoned, deported, exiled, if not murdered outright, Nin and his group managed to hoist themselves on to the National Committee . . . Pestana's report not being available, it was decided that a further delegation should be sent . . . in response to Moscow's invitation to the CNT to take part in the foundation of the Red International of Labour Unions."* [Igaio de Llorens, **The CNT and the Russian Revolution**, p. 8] Juan Gomez Casas confirms this account:

*"At a plenum held in Lerida in 1921, while the CNT was in disarray [due to repression] in Catalonia, a group of Bolsheviks was designated to represent the Spanish CNT in Russia . . . The restoration of constitutional guarantees by the Spanish government in April 1922, permitted the anarcho-syndicalists to meet in Saragossa in June 11 . . . [where they] confirmed the withdrawal of the CNT from the Third International and the entrance on principle into the new [revolutionary syndicalist] International Working Men's Association."* [**Anarchist Organisation: History of the FAI**, p. 61]

We should note that along with pro-Bolshevik Nin and Maurin was anarchist Gaston Leval. Leval quickly got in touch with Russian and other anarchists, helping some imprisoned Russia anarchists get deported after bringing news of their hunger strike to the assembled international delegates. By embarrassing Lenin and Trotsky, Leval helped save his comrades from the prison camp and so saved their lives.

By the time Leval arrived back in Spain, Pestana's account of his experiences had been published -- along with accounts of the Bolshevik repression of workers, the Kronstadt revolt, the anarchist movement and other socialist parties. These accounts made it clear that the Russian Revolution had become dominated by the Communist Party and the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* little more that dictatorship by the central committee of that party.

Moreover, the way the two internationals operated violated basic libertarian principles. Firstly, the *"Red Labour International completely subordinated trade unions to the Communist Party."* [Peirats, **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 38] This completely violated the CNT principle of unions being controlled by their members (via self-management from the bottom up). Secondly, the congresses' methodology in its debates and decision-making were alien to the CNT tradition. In that organisation self-management was its pride and glory and its gatherings and congresses reflected this. Pestana could not fathom the fierce struggle surrounding the make-up of the chairmanship of the Comintern congress:

*"Pestana says that he was particularly intrigued by the struggle for the chairmanship. He soon realised that the chair **was** the congress, and that the Congress was a farce. The chairman made the rules, presided over deliberations, modified proposals at will, changed the agenda, and presented proposals of his own. For a start, the way the chair*



*handled the gavel was very inequitable. For example, Zinoviev gave a speech which lasted one and one-half hours, although each speaker was supposedly limited to ten minutes. Pestana tried to rebut the speech, but was cut off by the chairman, watch in hand. Pestana himself was rebutted by Trotsky who spoke for three-quarters of an hour, and when Pestana wanted to answer Trotsky's attack on him, the chairman declared the debate over."* [Op. Cit., pp. 37-8]

In addition, "*[i]n theory, every delegate was free to table a motion, but the chair itself selected the ones that were 'interesting.'* Proportional voting [by delegation or delegate] had been provided for, but was not implemented. The Russian Communist Party ensured that it enjoyed a comfortable majority." Peirats continues by noting that "*[t]o top it all, certain important decisions were not even made in the congress hall, but were made begin the scenes.*" That was how the resolution that "*[i]n forthcoming world congresses of the Third International, the national trade union organisations affiliated to it are to be represented by delegates from each country's Communist Party*" was adopted. He also noted that "*[o]bjections to this decision were quite simply ignored.*" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, p. 224]

Many of the syndicalist delegates to this "*pantomime*" congress later meet in Berlin and founded the anarcho-syndicalist **International Workers Association** based on union autonomy, self-management and federalism. Unsurprisingly, once Pestana and Leval reported back to their organisation, the CNT rejected the Bolshevik Myth and re-affirmed the libertarian principles it had proclaimed at its 1919 congress. At a plenum of the CNT in 1922, the organisation withdrew its provisional affiliation and voted to join the syndicalist International formed in Berlin.

Therefore, rather than the anarchists conducting "*fraction work*" to "*recapture*" the CNT, the facts are the pro-Bolshevik National Committee of 1921 came about due to the extreme repression the CNT was suffering at the time. Militants were being assassinated in the streets, including committee members. In this context it is easy to see how an unrepresentative minority could temporarily gain influence in the National Committee. Moreover, it was CNT plenary session which revoked the organisations provisional affiliation to the Comintern -- that is, a regular meeting of mandated and accountable delegates. In other words, by the membership itself who had been informed of what had actually been happening under the Bolsheviks. In addition, it was this plenum which agreed affiliation to the anarcho-syndicalist **International Workers Association** founded in Berlin during 1922 by syndicalists and anarchists horrified by the Bolshevik dictatorship, having seen it at first hand.

Thus the decision of the CNT in 1922 (and the process by which this decision was made) follow exactly the decisions and processes of 1919. That congress agreed to provisionally affiliate to the Comintern until such time as a real workers' International inspired by the ideas of Bakunin was created. The only difference was that this International was formed in Germany, not Spain. Given this, it is impossible to argue that the anarchists "*recaptured*" the CNT.

As can be seen, Morrow's comment presents radically false image of what happened during this period. Rather than resort to "*fraction work*" to "*recapture*" the CNT, the policies of the CNT in 1919 and 1922

were identical. Moreover, the decision to disaffiliate from the Comintern was made by a confederal meeting of mandated delegates representing the rank-and-file as was the original. The anarchists did not "capture" the CNT, rather they continued to influence the membership of the organisation as they had always done. Lastly, the concept of "capture" displays no real understanding of how the CNT worked -- each syndicate was autonomous and self-managed. There was no real officialdom to take over, just administrative posts which were unpaid and conducted after working hours. To "capture" the CNT was impossible as each syndicate would ignore any unrepresentative minority which tried to do so.

However, Morrow's comments allow us to indicate some of the key differences between anarchists and Leninists -- the CNT rejected the Comintern because it violated its principles of self-management, union autonomy and equality and built party domination of the union movement in its place.

## 5. Why did the CNT not join the Workers' Alliance?

Morrow in his discussion of the struggles of the 1930s implies that the CNT was at fault in not joining the Socialist UGT's "*Workers' Alliance*" (**Alianza Obrera**). These were first put forward by the Marxist-Leninists of the BOC (Workers and Peasants Bloc -- later to form the POUM) after their attempts to turn the CNT into a Bolshevik vanguard failed [Paul Preston, **The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 154]. Socialist Party and UGT interest began only after their election defeat in 1933. By 1934, however, there existed quite a few alliances, including one in Asturias in which the CNT participated. Nationally, however, the CNT refused to join with the UGT and this, he implies, led to the defeat of the October 1934 uprising (see [next section](#) for a discussion of this rebellion).

However, Morrow fails to provide any relevant historical background to understand the CNT's decision. Moreover, their reasons **why** they did not join have a striking similarity to Morrow's own arguments against the "Workers' Alliance" (which may explain why Morrow does not mention them). In effect, the CNT is damned for having policies similar to Morrow's but having principles enough to stick to them.

First, we must discuss the history of UGT and CNT relationships in order to understand the context within which the anarchists made their decision. Unless we do this, Morrow's claims may seem more reasonable than they actually are. Once we have done this we will discuss the politics of that decision.

From 1931 (the birth of the Second Spanish Republic) to 1933 the Socialists, in coalition with Republicans, had attacked the CNT (a repeat, in many ways, of the UGT's collaboration with the quasi-fascist Primo de Rivera dictatorship of 1923-30). Laws were passed, with Socialist help, making lightning strikes illegal and state arbitration compulsory. Anarchist-organised strikes were violently repressed, and the UGT provided scabs -- as against the CNT Telephone Company strike of 1931. This strike gives an indication of the role of the socialists during its time as part of the government (Socialist Largo Caballero was the Minister of Labour, for example):

*"The UGT . . . had its own bone to pick with the CNT. The telephone syndicate, which the CNT had established in 1918, was a constant challenge to the Socialists' grip on the*

*Madrid labour movement. Like the construction workers' syndicate, it was a CNT enclave in a solidly UGT centre. Accordingly, the government and the Socialist Party found no difficulty in forming a common front to break the strike and weaken CNT influence.*

*"The Ministry of Labour declared the strike illegal and the Ministry of the Interior called out the Civil Guard to intimidate the strikers . . . Shedding all pretence of labour solidarity, the UGT provided the **Compania Telefonica** with scabs while **El Socialista**, the Socialist Party organ, accused the CNT of being run by **pistoleros**. Those tactics were successful in Madrid, where the defeated strikers were obliged to enrol in the UGT to retain their jobs. So far as the Socialists were concerned, the CNT's appeals for solidarity had fallen on deaf ears. . .*

*"In Seville, however, the strike began to take on very serious dimensions. . . on July 20, a general strike broke out in Seville and serious fighting erupted in the streets. This strike . . . stemmed from the walkout of the telephone workers . . . pitched battles took place in the countryside around the city between the Civil Guard and the agricultural workers. Maura, as minister of interior, decided to crush the 'insurrection' ruthlessly. Martial law was declared and the CNT's headquarters was reduced to shambles by artillery fire. After nine days, during which heavily armed police detachments patrolled the streets, the Seville general strike came to an end. The struggle in the Andalusian capital left 40 dead and some 200 wounded." [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, pp. 221-2]*

Elsewhere, "[d]uring a Barcelona building strike CNT workers barricaded themselves in and said they would only surrender to regular troops. The army arrived and then machine-gunned them as soon as they surrendered." [Antony Beevor, **The Spanish Civil War**, p. 33] In other words, the republican-socialist government repressed the CNT with violence as well as using the law to undermine CNT activities and strikes.

Morrow fails to discuss this history of violence against the CNT. He mentions in passing that the republican-socialist coalition government "[i]n crushing the CNT, the troops broadened the repression to the whole working class." He states that "[u]nder the cover of putting down an anarchist putsch in January 1933, the Civil Guard 'mopped up' various groups of trouble makers. And encounter with peasants at Casas Viejas, early in January 1933, became a **cause celebre** which shook the government to its foundations." However, his account of the Casas Viejas massacre is totally inaccurate. He states that "the little village . . ., after two years of patient waiting for the Institute of Agrarian Reform to divide the neighbouring Duke's estate, the peasants had moved in and begun to till the soil for themselves." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 22]

Nothing could be further from the truth. Firstly, we must note that the land workers (who were not, in the main, peasants) were members of the CNT. Secondly, as we pointed in [section 1](#), the uprising had nothing to do with land reform. The CNT members did not "till the soil", rather they rose in insurrection

as part of a planned CNT-FAI uprising based on an expected rail workers strike (the "*anarchist putsch*" Morrow mentions). The workers were too busy fighting the Civil and Assault Guards to till anything. He is correct in terms of the repression, of course, but his account of the events leading up to it is not only wrong, it is misleading (indeed, it appears to be an invention based on Trotskyist ideology rather than having any basis in reality). Rather than being part of a "*broadened . . . repression [against] the whole working class,*" it was actually part of the "*putting down*" of the anarchist revolt. CNT members were killed -- along with a dozen politically neutral workers who were selected at random and murdered. Thus Morrow downplays the role of the Socialists in repressing the CNT and FAI -- he presents it as general repression rather than a massacre resulting from repressing a CNT revolt.

He even quotes a communist paper stating that 9 000 political prisoners were in jail in June 1933. Morrow states that they were "*mostly workers.*" [p. 23] Yes, they were mostly workers, CNT members in fact -- "*[i]n mid-April [1933]. . . the CNT launched a massive campaign to release imprisoned CNT-FAI militants whose numbers had now soared to about 9 000.*" [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 231-2]

Moreover, during and after CNT insurrections in Catalonia in 1932, and the much wider insurrections of January 1933 (9 000 CNT members jailed) and December 1933 (16 000 jailed) Socialist solidarity was nil. Indeed, the 1932 and January 1933 revolts had been repressed by the government which the Socialist Party was a member of.

In other words, and to state the obvious, the socialists had been part of a government which repressed CNT revolts and syndicates, imprisoned and killed their members, passed laws to restrict their ability to strike and use direct action and provided scabs during strikes. Little wonder that Peirats states "*[i]t was difficult for the CNT and the FAI to get used to the idea of an alliance with their Socialist oppressors.*" [**Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 94]

It is **only** in this context can we understand the events of 1934 and the refusal of the CNT to run into the UGT's alliance. Morrow, needless to say, does not present this essential context and so the reader cannot understand why the CNT acted as it did in response to Socialist appeals for "unity." Instead, Morrow implies that CNT-FAI opposition to "workers alliances" were due to them believing "*all governments were equally bad.*" [p. 29] Perhaps if Morrow had presented an honest account of the repression the republican-socialist government had inflicted on the CNT then the reader could make an informed judgement on why anarchist opposition to the socialist proposals existed. Rather than being sectarian or against labour unity, they had been at receiving end of extensive socialist scabbing and state repression.

Moreover, as well as the recent history of socialist repression and scabbing, there was also the experience of a similar alliance between the CNT and UGT that had occurred in 1917. The first test of the alliance came with a miners strike in Andalusia, and a "*CNT proposal for a joint general strike, to be initiated by UGT miners and railway workers, had been rejected by the Madrid Socialists . . . the miners, after striking for four months, returned to work in defeat.*" Little wonder that "*the pact was in shreds. It was to be eliminated completely when a general strike broke out in Barcelona over the arrests of the CNT leaders and the assassination of Layret. Once again the CNT called upon the UGT for*

*support. Not only was aid refused but it was denied with an arrogance that clearly indicated the Socialists had lost all interest in future collaboration. . . The strike in Catalonia collapsed and, with it, any prospect of collaboration between the two unions for years to come."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 175-6]

Of course, such historical context would confuse readers with facts and so goes unmentioned by Morrow.

In addition, there was another reason for opposing the "workers' alliances" -- particularly an alliance between the UGT and CNT. Given the history of UGT and CNT pacts plus the actions of the UGT and socialists in the previous government it was completely sensible and politically principled. This reason was political and flowed from the CNT's libertarian vision. As Durruti argued in 1934:

*"The alliance, to be revolutionary, must be genuinely working class. It must be the result of an agreement between the workers' organisation, and those alone. No party, however, socialist it may be, can belong to a workers' alliance, which should be built from its foundations, in the enterprises where the workers struggle. Its representative bodies must be the workers' committee chosen in the shops, the factories, the mines and the villages. We must reject any agreement on a national level, between National Committees, but rather favour an alliance carried out at the base by the workers themselves. Then and only then, can the revolutionary drive come to life, develop and take root."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 154]

In the Central Region, Orobon Fernandez argued along similar lines in Madrid's **La Tierra**:

*"Revolutionary proletarian democracy is direct management of society by the workers, a certain bulwark against party dictatorships and a guarantee of the development of the revolution's forces and undertakings. . . what matters must is that general guidelines are laid down so that these may serve as a platform of the alliance and furnish a combative and constructive norm for the united forces . . . [These include:] acceptance of revolutionary proletarian democracy, which is to say, the will of the majority of the proletariat, as the common denominator and determining factor of the new order of things. . . immediate socialisation of the means of production, transportation, exchange, accommodation and finance . . . federated according to their area of interest and confederated at national level, the municipal and industrial organisations will maintain the principle of unity in the economic structure."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 74-5]

The May 1936 Saragossa congress of the CNT passed a resolution concerning revolutionary alliances which was obviously based on these arguments. It stated that in order *"to make the social revolution an effective reality, the social and political system regulating the life of the country has to be utterly destroyed"* and that the *"new revolutionary order will be determined by the free choice of the working*

*class.*" [quoted by Jose Peirats, **Op. Cit.**, p. 100]

Only such an alliance, from the bottom up and based on workers' self-management could be a revolutionary one. Indeed, any pact not based on this but rather conducted between organisations would be a pact the CNT and the bureaucracy of the UGT -- and remove any possibility of creating genuine bodies of working class self-management (as the history of the Civil War proved). Indeed, Morrow seems to agree:

*"The broad character of the proletarian insurrection was explained by the Communist Left (Trotskyist). It devoted itself to efforts to build the indispensable instrument of the insurrection: workers' councils constituted by delegates representing all the labour parties and unions, the shops and streets; to be created in every locality and joined together nationally . . . Unfortunately, the socialists failed to understand the profound need of these Workers' Alliances. The bureaucratic traditions were not to be so easily overcome . . . the socialist leaders thought that the Workers' Alliances meant they would have merely to share leadership with the Communist Left and other dissident communist groups . . . actually in most cases they [Workers' Alliances] were merely 'top' committees, without elected or lower-rank delegates, that is, little more than liaison committees between the leadership of the organisations involved."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 27-8]

As can be seen, this closely follows Durruti's arguments. Bar the reference of "*labour parties*," Morrow's "*indispensable instrument*" is identical to Durruti's and other anarchist's arguments against taking part in the "Workers' Alliances" created by the UGT and the creation of genuine alliances from the bottom-up. Thus Morrow faults the CNT for trying to force the UGT to form a **real** workers' alliance by not taking part in what Morrow himself admits were "*little more than liaison committees between the leadership*"! Also, Morrow argues that "[w]ithout developing soviets -- workers' councils -- it was inevitable that even the anarchists and the POUM would drift into governmental collaboration with the bourgeoisie" and he asks "[h]ow could party agreements be the substitute for the necessary vast network of workers' councils?" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 89 and p. 114] Which was, of course, the CNT-FAI's argument. It seems strange that Morrow faults the CNT for trying to create real workers' councils, the "*indispensable instrument*" of the revolution, by not taking part in a "*party agreements*" urged by the UGT which would undermine real attempts at rank-and-file unity from below.

Of course, Morrow's statement that "*labour parties and unions*" should be represented by delegates as well as "*the shop and street*" contradicts claims it would be democratic. After all, that it would mean that some workers would have multiple votes (one from their shop, their union and their party). Moreover, it would mean that parties would have an influence greater than their actual support in the working class -- something a minuscule group like the Spanish Trotskyists would obviously favour as would the bureaucrats of the Socialist and Communist Parties. Little wonder the anarchists urged a workers' alliance made up of actual workers rather than an organisation which would allow bureaucrats, politicians and sects more influence than they actually had or deserved.

In addition, the "Workers' Alliances" were not seen by the UGT and Socialist Party as an organisation of equals. Rather, in words of historian Paul Preston, *"from the first it seemed that the Socialists saw the Alianza Obrera was a possible means of dominating the workers movement in areas where the PSOE and UGT were relatively weak."* [Op. Cit., p. 154] The Socialist Party only allowed regional branches of the Alianza Obrera to be formed only if they could guarantee Party control would never be lost. [Adrian Schubert *"The Epic Failure: The Asturian Revolution of October 1934"*, in **Revolution and War in Spain**, Paul Preston (ed.), p. 127] Raymond Carr argues that the Socialists, *"in spite of professions to the contrary, wished to keep socialist domination of the Alianza Obrera"* [Spain: 1808-1975, pp. 634-5f] And only one month after the first alliance was set up, one of its founder members -- the Catalan **Socialist Union** -- left in protest over PSOE domination. [Preston, **The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 157] In Madrid, the Alianza was *"dominated by the Socialists, who imposed their own policy."* [Op. Cit., p. 154] Indeed, as Jose Peirats notes, in Asturias where the CNT had joined the Alliance, *"despite the provisions of the terms of the alliance to which the CNT had subscribed, the order for the uprising was issued by the socialists. In Oviedo a specifically socialist, revolutionary committee was secretly at work in Oviedo, which contained no CNT representatives."* [The CNT in the Spanish Revolution, vol. 1, p. 78] Largo Caballero's desire for trade union unity in 1936 was from a similar mould -- *"[t]he clear implication was that proletarian unification meant Socialist take-over."* Little wonder Preston states that *"[i]f the use that he [Caballero] made of the Alianza Obreras in 1934 had revealed anything, it was that the domination of the working class movement by the UGT meant far more to Largo Caballero than any future prospect of revolution."* [Preston, Op. Cit., p. 270]

As can be seen, the CNT's position seemed a sensible one given the nature and activities of the "Workers' Alliance" in practice. Also it seems strange that, if unity was the UGT's aims, that a CNT call, made by the national plenary in February 1934, for information and for the UGT to clearly and publicly state its revolutionary objectives, met with no reply. [Peirats, Op. Cit., p. 75] In addition, the Catalan Workers' Alliance called a general strike in March 1934 the day **after** the CNT's -- hardly an example of workers' unity. [Norman Jones, *"Regionalism and Revolution in Catalonia"*, **Revolution and War in Spain**, Paul Preston (ed.), p. 102]

Thus, the reasons why the CNT did not join in the UGT's "Workers' Alliance" are clear. As well as the natural distrust towards organisations that had repressed them and provided scabs to break their strikes just one year previously, there were political reasons for opposing such an alliance. Rather than being a force to ensure revolutionary organisations springing from the workplace, the "Workers' Alliance" was little more than pacts between the bureaucrats of the UGT and various Marxist Parties. This was Morrow's own argument, which also provided the explanation why such an alliance would weaken any real revolutionary movement. To requote Morrow, *"[w]ithout developing soviets -- workers' councils -- it was inevitable that even the anarchists and the POUM would drift into governmental collaboration with the bourgeoisie."* [Op. Cit., p. 89]

That is exactly what happened in July, 1936, when the CNT did forsake its anarchist politics and joined in a "Workers' Alliance" type organisation with other anti-fascist parties and unions to set up the *"Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias"* (see [section 20](#)). Thus Morrow himself provides the explanation of the CNT's **political** rationale for being wary of the UGT's "Workers' Alliance" while, of

course, refusing to provide the historical context the decision was made.

However, while the CNT's refusal to join the "Workers' Alliance" outside of Asturias may have been principled (and sensible), it may be argued that they were the only organisation with revolutionary potential (indeed, this would be the only argument Trotskyists could put forward to explain their hypocrisy). Such an argument would be false for two reasons.

Firstly, such Alliances may have potentially created a revolutionary situation but they would have hindered the formation of working class organs of self-management such as workers' councils (soviets). This was the experience of the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias and of the Asturias revolt -- in spite of massive revolutionary upheaval such councils based on delegates from workplace and community assemblies were **not** formed.

Secondly, the CNT policy of "Unity, yes, but by the rank-and-file" was a valid method of "from the bottom up solidarity." This can be seen from just two examples -- Aragon in 1934 and Madrid in 1936. In Aragon, there was a *"general strike that had totally paralysed the Aragonese capital throughout April 1935, ending . . . on 10 May. . . the Zaragoza general strike had been a powerful advertisement of the value of a united working-class front . . . [However,] no formal agreement . . . had been reached in Zaragoza. The pact there has been created on a purely circumstantial basis with a unity of trade-union action achieved in quite specific circumstances and generated to a considerable extent by the workers themselves."* [Graham Kelsey, **Anarchism in Aragon**, p. 72] In Madrid, April 1936 (in the words of Morrow himself) *"the CNT declared a general strike in Madrid . . . The UGT had not been asked to join the strike, and at first had denounced it . . . But the workers came out of all the shops and factories and public services . . . because they wanted to fight, and only the anarchists were calling them to struggle."* [Op. Cit., p. 41]

Thus Morrow's comments against the CNT refusing to join the Workers' Alliance do not provide the reader with the historical context required to make an informed judgement of the CNT's decision. Moreover, they seem hypocritical as the CNT's reasons for refusing to join is similar to Morrow's own arguments against the Workers' Alliance. In addition, the CNT's practical counter-proposal of solidarity from below had more revolutionary potential as it was far more likely to promote rank-and-file unity plus the creation of self-managed organisations such as workers' councils. The Workers' Alliance system would have hindered such developments.

## 6. Was the October 1934 revolt sabotaged by the CNT?

Again, following Morrow, Marxists have often alleged that the Socialist and Workers Alliance strike wave, of October 1934, was sabotaged by the CNT. To understand this allegation, you have to understand the background to October 1934, and the split in the workers' movement between the CNT and the UGT (unions controlled by the reformist Socialist Party, the PSOE).

Socialist conversion to "revolution" occurred only after the elections of November 1933. In the face of



massive and bloody repression (see [last section](#)), the CNT-FAI had agitated for a mass abstention at the polling booth. Faced with this campaign, the republicans and socialists lost and all the laws they had passed against the CNT were used against themselves. When cabinet seats were offered to the non-republican (fascist or quasi-fascist) right, in October 1934, the PSOE/UGT called for a general strike. If the CNT, nationally, failed to take part in this -- a mistake recognised by many anarchist writers -- this was not (as reading Morrow suggests) because the CNT thought "*all governments were equally bad*" [Morrow, **Op. Cit.**, p. 29], but because of well-founded, as it turned out, mistrust of Socialist aims.

A CNT call, on the 13th of February 1934, for the UGT to clearly and publicly state its revolutionary objectives, had met with no reply. As Peirats argues, "*[t]hat the absence of the CNT did not bother them [the UGT and Socialist Party] is clear from their silence in regards to the [CNT's] National Plenary's request.*" [Peirats, **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 96] Rhetoric aside, the Socialist Party's main aim in October seems to have been to force new elections, so they could again form a (mildly reformist) coalition with the Republicans (their programme for the revolt was written by right-wing socialist Indalecio Prieto and seemed more like an election manifesto prepared by the Liberal Republicans than a program for revolutionary change). This was the viewpoint of the CNT, for example. Thus, the CNT, in effect, was to be used as cannon-fodder to help produce another government that would attack the CNT.

As we discussed in the [last section](#), the UGT backed "Workers Alliances" were little better. To repeat our comments again, the Socialist Party (PSOE) saw the alliances as a means of dominating the workers movement in areas where the UGT was weak. The Socialist "Liaison Committee", for instance, set up to prepare for insurrection, only allowed regional branches to take part in the alliances if they could guarantee Party control (see [last section](#)). Raymond Carr argues that the Socialists, "*in spite of professions to the contrary, wished to keep socialist domination of the **Alianza Obrera.***" [**Spain: 1808-1975**, pp. 634-5f] Only one month after the first alliance was set up, one of its founder members -- the Socialist Union of Catalonia -- left in protest over PSOE domination.

During October the only real centre of resistance was in Asturias (on the Spanish north coast). However, before discussing that area, we must mention Madrid and Barcelona. According to Morrow, Catalonia "*should have been the fortress of the uprising*" and that "*[t]errribly discredited for their refusal to join the October revolt, the anarchists sought to apologise by pointing to the repression they were undergoing at the time from Companys.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 30 and p. 32] Morrow fails, however and yet again, to mention a few important facts.

Firstly, the uprising in Catalonia was pushed for and lead by Estat Catala which had "*temporary ascendancy over the other groups in the Esquerra*" (the Catalan Nationalist Party which was the Catalan government). "*Companys felt obliged to yield to Dencas' [the leader of Estat Catala] demand that Catalonia should take this opportunity for breaking with Madrid.*" [Gerald Brenan, **The Spanish Labyrinth**, pp. 282-3] Estat Catala "*was a Youth movement . . . and composed mostly of workmen and adventurers -- men drawn from the same soil as the **sindicatos libres** [boss created anti-CNT yellow unions] of a dozen years before -- with a violent antagonism to the Anarcho-Syndicalists. It had a small*

military organisation, the *escamots*, who wore green uniforms. It represented Catalan Nationalism in its most intransigent form: it was in fact Catalan Fascism." [Op. Cit., p. 282] Gabriel Jackson calls Estat Catala a "quasi-fascist movement within the younger ranks of the Esquerra." [The Spanish Republic and the Civil War: 1931-1939, p. 150] Ronald Fraser terms it "the extreme nationalist and proto-fascist" wing of the party. [Blood of Spain, p. 535] Hugh Thomas notes "the fascist colouring of Dencas ideas." [The Spanish Civil War, p. 135]

In other words, Morrow attacks the CNT for not participating in a revolt organised and led by Catalan Fascists (or, at best, near fascists)!

Secondly, far from being apologetics, the repression the CNT was suffering from Dencas police forces was very real and was occurring right up to the moment of the revolt. In the words of historian Paul Preston:

*"[T]he Anarchists bitterly resented the way in which the Generalitat had followed a repressive policy against them in the previous months. This had been the work of the Generalitat's counsellor for public order, Josep Dencas, leader of the quasi-fascist, ultra-nationalist party Estat Catala."* [The Coming of the Spanish Civil War, p. 176]

This is confirmed by anarchist accounts of the rising. As Peirats points out:

*"On the eve of the rebellion the Catalan police jailed as many anarchists as they could put their hands on . . . The union offices had been shut for some time. The press censor had completely blacked out the October 6th issue of **Solidaridad Obrera** . . . When the woodworkers began to open their offices, they were attacked by the police, and a furious gunfight ensued. The official radio . . . reported . . . that the fight had already begun against the FAI fascists . . . In the afternoon large numbers of police and *escamots* turned out to attack and shut down the editorial offices of **Solidaridad Obrera**."* [Peirats, Op. Cit., pp. 98-9]

In other words, the first shots fired in the Catalan revolt were against the CNT by those in revolt against the central government!

Why were the first shots of the revolt directed at the members of the CNT? Simply because they were trying to take part in the revolt in an organised and coherent manner as urged by the CNT's Regional Committee itself. In spite of the mass arrests of anarchists and CNT militants the night before by the Catalan rebels, the CNT's Catalan Regional Committee issued a clandestine leaflet that stated that the CNT "must enter the battle in a manner consistent with its revolutionary anarchist principles . . . The revolt which broke out this morning must acquire the characteristics of a popular act through the actions of the proletariat . . . We demand the right to intervene in this struggle and we will take this." A leaflet had to be issued as **Solidaridad Obrera** was several hours late in appearing due censorship by the Catalan state. The workers had tried to open their union halls (all CNT union buildings had been

closed by the Catalan government since the CNT revolt of December 1933) because the CNT's leaflet had called for the "[i]mmediate opening of our union buildings and the concentration of the workers on those premises." [quoted by Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 85] The participation of the CNT in the revolt as an organised force was something the Catalan rebels refused to allow and so they fired on workers trying to open their union buildings. Indeed, after shutting down **Solidaridad Obrera**, the police then tried to break up the CNT's regional plenum that was then in session, but fortunately it was meeting on different premises and so they failed. [Peirats, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 85-6]

Juan Gomez Casas argues that:

*"The situation [in October 1934] was especially difficult in Catalonia. The Workers' Alliance . . . declared a general strike. Luis Companys, president of the Catalan Parliament, proclaimed the Catalan State within the Spanish Federal Republic . . . But at the same time, militants of the CNT and the FAI were arrested . . . Solidaridad Obrera was censored. The Catalan libertarians understood that the Catalan nationalists had two objectives in mind: to oppose the central government and to destroy the CNT. Jose Dencas, Counsellor of Defence, issued a strict order: 'Watch out for the FAI' . . . Luis Companys broadcast a message on October 5 to all 'citizens regardless of ideology.' However, many anarchosyndicalist militants were held by his deputy, Dencas, in the underground cells of police headquarters." [Op. Cit., pp. 151-2]*

Hence the paradoxical situation in which the anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and FAI members found themselves in during this time. The uprising was organised by Catalan fascists who continued to direct their blows against the CNT. As Abel Paz argues, "[f]or the rank and file Catalan worker . . . the insurgents . . . were actually orienting their action in order to destroy the CNT. After that, how could they collaborate with the reactionary movement which was directing its blows against the working class? Here was the paradox of the Catalan uprising of October 6, 1934." [**Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 158]

In other words, during the Catalan revolt, *"the CNT had a difficult time because the insurgents were its worst enemies."* [Peirats, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 98] However, the complexity of the actual situation does not bother the reader of Morrow's work as it is not reported. Little wonder, as Peirats argues, the *"absurd contention according to which the confederal proletariat of Catalonia betrayed their brethren in Asturias melts away in the face of a truthful narration of the facts."* [**The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 86]

In summary, therefore, Morrow expected the membership of the Catalan CNT and FAI to join in a struggle started and directed by Catalan fascists, whose leaders in the government were arresting and shooting their members, censoring their press, closing their union offices and refusing them a role in the revolt as self-organised forces. We think that sums up the validity of Trotskyism as a revolutionary theory quite well.

In Madrid, the revolt was slightly less farcical. Here the CNT joined the general strike. However, the UGT gave the government 24 hours notice of the general strike, allowing the state to round up the Socialist "leaders," seize arm depots and repress the insurrection before it got started [Morrow, **Op. Cit.**, p. 30]. As Bookchin argues, the *"massive strike in Madrid, which was supported by the entire left, foundered for want of arms and a revolutionary sense of direction."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 245] He continues:

*"As usual, the Socialists emerged as unreliable allies of the Anarchists. A revolutionary committee, established by the CNT and FAI to co-ordinate their own operations, was denied direly needed weapons by the UGT. The arms, as it turned out, had been conveniently intercepted by government troops. But even if they had been available, it is almost certain that the Socialists would not have shared them with the Anarchists. Indeed, relationships between the two major sectors of the labour movement had already been poisoned by the failure of the Socialist Youth and the UGT to keep the CNT adequately informed of their plans or confer with Anarchosindicalist delegates. Despite heavy fighting in Madrid, the CNT and FAI were obliged to function largely on their own. When, at length, a UGT delegate informed the revolutionary committee that Largo Caballero was not interested in common action with the CNT, the committee disbanded."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 246]

Bookchin correctly states that *"Abad de Santillan was to observe with ample justification that Socialist attempts to blame the failure of the October Insurrection on Anarchist abstention was a shabby falsehood"* and quotes Santillan:

*"Can there be talk of abstention of the CNT and censure of it by those who go on strike without warning our organisation about it, who refuse to meet with the delegates of the National Committee [of the CNT], who consent to let the Lerroux-Gil Robles Government take possession of the arms deposits and let them go unused before handing them over to the Confederation and the FAI?"* [**Ibid.**]

Historian Paul Preston confirms that in Madrid *"Socialists and Anarchists went on strike . . ."* and that *"the Socialists actually rejected the participation of Anarchist and Trotskyist groups who offered to help make a revolutionary coup in Madrid."* [**The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 174] Moreover, *"when delegates travelled secretly to Madrid to try to co-ordinate support for the revolutionary Asturian miners, they were rebuffed by the UGT leadership."* [Graham Kelsey, **Anarchism in Aragon**, p. 73]

Therefore, in two of the three centres of the revolt, the uprising was badly organised. In Catalonia, the revolt was led by fascist Catalan Nationalists who arrested and shot at CNT militants. In Madrid, the CNT backed the strike and was ignored by the Socialists. The revolt itself was badly organised and quickly repressed (thanks, in part, to the actions of the Socialists themselves). Little wonder Peirats asks:

*"Although it seems absurd, one constantly has to ask whether the Socialists meant to start a true revolution [in October 1934] in Spain. If the answer is affirmative, the questions*

*keep coming: Why did they not make the action a national one? Why did they try to do it without the powerful national CNT? Is a peaceful general strike revolutionary? Was what happened in Asturias expected, or were orders exceeded? Did they mean only to scare the Radical-CEDA government with their action?"* [**The Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, pp 95-6]

The only real centre of resistance was in Asturias (on the Spanish north coast). Here, the CNT had joined the Socialists and Communists in a "Workers Alliance". But, against the alliance's terms, the Socialists alone gave the order for the uprising -- and the Socialist-controlled Provincial Committee starved the CNT of arms. This despite the CNT having over 22 000 affiliates in the area (to the UGT's 40 000). We discuss the activities of the CNT during the revolt in Asturias later (in [section 20](#)) and so will do so here.

Morrow states that the *"backbone of the struggle was broken . . . when the refusal of the CNT railroad workers to strike enabled the government to transport goods and troops."* [Morrow, **Op. Cit.**, p. 30] Yet in Asturias (the only area where major troop transportation was needed) the main government attack was from a sea borne landing of Foreign Legion and Moroccan troops - against the port and CNT stronghold (15 000 affiliates) of Gijon (and, we must stress, the Socialists and Communists refused to provide the anarchists of these ports with weapons to resist the troop landings). Hence his claim seems somewhat at odds with the actual events of the October uprising.

Moreover, he seems alone in this claim. No other historian (for example, Hugh Thomas in **The Spanish Civil War**, Raymond Carr in **Spain: 1808-1975**, Paul Preston in **The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, Gerald Brenan, **The Spanish Labyrinth**, Gabriel Jackson, **The Spanish Republic and the Civil War: 1931-1939**) makes this claim. But, of course, these are not Trotskyists and so can be ignored. However, for objective readers such an omission might be significant.

Indeed, when these other historians **do** discuss the crushing of the Asturias they all stress the fact that the troops came from the sea. For example, Paul Preston notes that *"[w]ith CEDA approval, Franco . . . insisted on the use of troops from Africa . . . they shipped Moorish mercenaries to Asturias."* [**The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 177] Gabriel Jackson argues that the government *"feared to send in the regular Army because of the strong possibility that the Spanish conscripts would refuse to fire on the revolutionaries -- or even desert to them. The War Minister . . . , acting on the advice of Generals Franco and Goded, sent in contingents of the Moorish **regulares** and of the Foreign Legions."* These troops arrived *"at the ports of Aviles and Gijon."* [**The Spanish Republic and the Civil War: 1931-1939**, p. 157]

Richard A. H. Robinson argues that it *"was soon decided that the [Asturias] rebellion could only be crushed by experienced, professional troops. The other areas of Spain could not be denuded of their garrisons in case there were other revolutionary outbreaks. Franco therefore called upon Colonel Yague to lead a force of Moorish regulars to help re-conquer the province from the rebels."* [**The Origins of Franco's Spain**, pp. 190-1] Stanley G. Payne gives a more detailed account of the state's

attack:

*"Army reinforcements were soon being rushed toward the region . . . Eduardo Lopez Ochoa . . . head[ed] the main relief column . . . he began to make his way eastward [from Galicia] with a modest force of some 360 troops in trucks, half of whom had to be detached on the way to hold the route open. Meanwhile . . . in the main Asturian coastal city of Gijon . . . reinforcements first arrived by sea on the seventh, followed by larger units from the Moroccan Protectorate on the tenth."* [**Spain's First Democracy**, p. 219]

No mention of trains in these accounts, so indicating that Morrow's assertions are false. The main attack on Asturias, and so the transportation of troops and goods, was by *sea*, not by trains.

In addition, these historians point to other reasons for the defeat of the revolt -- the amazingly bad organisation of it by the Socialist Party. Raymond Carr sums up the overwhelming opinion of the historians when he says that "*[a]s a national movement the revolution was a fiasco.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 633] Hugh Thomas states that the revolt in Catalonia was "*crushed nearly as quickly as the general strike had been in Madrid.*" [**The Spanish Civil War**, p. 136] Brenan correctly argues that "*[f]rom the moment that Barcelona capitulated and the rising in Madrid fizzled out, the miners were of course doomed.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 286] The failure of both these revolts was directly attributable to the policies and actions of the Socialists who controlled the "*Workers' Alliances*" in both areas. Hence historian Paul Heywood:

*"[A]n important factor which contributed to the strikes' collapse and made the state's task easier was the underlying attitude of the Socialists. For all the talk of united action by the Left, the Socialists still wished to dominate any combined moves. Unwilling to cede its traditional hegemony, the PSOE rendered the Alianza obrera necessarily ineffective . . .*

*"Thus, there was little genuine unity on the Spanish Left. Moreover, the strike was very poorly planned. Differences within the PSOE meant that there was no agreement even as to the programme of the strike. For the . . . leftists, it represented the initiation of a full-scale Socialist revolution; for . . . the centrists in the party, the aim of the strike was to force Alcala-Zamora to reconsider and invite the Socialists back into a coalition government with the Republicans."* [**Marxism and the Failure of Organised Socialism in Spain 1879-1936** pp. 144-5]

Significantly, Heywood argues that "*[o]ne thing, however, did emerge from the October strike. The example of Asturias provided a pointed lesson for the Left: crucially, the key to the relative success of the insurrection there was the participation of the CNT in an effective Alianza obrera. Without the CNT, the Asturian rising would have been as short-lived and as easily defeated as those in Madrid and Barcelona.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 145]

Having discussed both Madrid and Barcelona above, we leave it to the reader to conclude whether

Morrow's comments are correct or whether a more likely alternative explanation for the revolt's failure is possible.

However, even assuming Morrow's claims that the failure of the CNT rail workers' union to continue striking in the face of a completely farcical "revolt" played a key role in its defeat were true, it does not explain many facts. Firstly, the government had declared martial law -- placing the railway workers in a dangerous position. Secondly, as Jerome R. Mintz points out, railway workers *"were represented by two competing unions -- the Sindicato Nacional Ferroviario of the UGT . . . and the CNT-affiliated FNIFF . . . The UGT . . . controlled the large majority of the workers. [In 1933] Trifon Gomez, secretary of the UGT union, did not believe it possible to mobilise the workers, few of whom had revolutionary aspirations."* [**The Anarchists of Casa Viejas**, p. 178] Outside of Catalonia, the majority of the railway workers belonged to the UGT [Sam Dolgoff, **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 90f] Asturias (the only area where major troop transportation was needed) does not border Catalonia -- apparently the army managed to cross Spain on a rail network manned by a minority of its workers.

However, these points are of little import when compared to the fact that Asturias the main government attack was, as we mentioned above, from a sea borne landing of Foreign Legion and Moroccan troops. Troops from Morocco who land by sea do not need trains. Indeed, The ports of Aviles and Gijon were the principle military bases for launching the repression against the uprising.

The real failure of the Asturias revolt did not lie with the CNT, it lay (unsurprisingly enough) with the Socialists and Communists. Despite CNT pleas the Socialists refused arms, Gijon fell after a bloody struggle and became the main base for the crushing of the entire region (*"Arriving at the ports of Aviles and Gijon on October 8, these troops were able to overcome the resistance of the local fishermen and stevedores. The revolutionary committees here were Anarchist dominated. Though they had joined the rising and accepted the slogan UHP [Unity, Proletarian Brothers], the Socialists and Communists of Oviedo clearly distrusted them and had refused arms to their delegate the day before."* [Gabriel Jackson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 157]).

This Socialist and Communist sabotage of Anarchist resistance was repeated in the Civil War, less than two years later.

As can be seen, Morrow's account of the October Insurrection of 1934 leaves a lot to be desired. The claim that the CNT was responsible for its failure cannot withstand a close examination of the events. Indeed, by providing the facts which Morrow does not provide we can safely say that the failure of the revolt across Spain rested squarely with the PSOE and UGT. It was badly organised, they failed to cooperate or even communicate with CNT when aid was offered, they relied upon the enemies of the CNT in Catalonia and refused arms to the CNT in both Madrid and Asturias (so allowing the government force, the main force of which landed by sea, easy access to Asturias). All in all, even if the minority of railway workers in the CNT had joined the strike it would have, in all probability, resulted in the same outcome.

Unfortunately, Morrow's assertions have become commonplace in the ranks of the Left and have become even more distorted in the hands of his Trotskyist readers. For example, we find Nick Wrack arguing that the *"Socialist Party called a general strike and there were insurrectionary movements in Asturias and Catalonia, In Madrid and Catalonia the anarchist CNT stood to one side, arguing that this was a 'struggle between politicians' and did not concern the workers even though this was a strike against a move to incorporate fascism into the government."* He continues, *"[i]n Asturias the anarchist militants participated under the pressure of the masses and because of the traditions of unity in that area. However, because of their abstentionist stupidity, the anarchists elsewhere continued to work, even working trains which brought the Moorish troops under Franco to suppress the Asturias insurrection."* ["Marxism, Anarchism and the State", pp. 31-7, **Militant International Review**, no. 46, p. 34]

Its hard to work out where to start in this travesty of history. We will start with the simple errors. The CNT **did** take part in the struggle in Madrid. As Paul Preston notes, in Madrid the *"Socialists and Anarchists went on strike"* [**The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 174] In Catalonia, as indicated above, the "insurrectionary movement" in Catalonia was organised and lead by Catalan Fascists, who shot upon CNT members when they tried to open their union halls and who arrested CNT and FAI militants the night before the uprising. Moreover, the people organising the revolt had been repressing the CNT for months previously. Obviously attempts by Catalan Fascists to become a government should be supported by socialists, including Trotskyists. Moreover, the UGT and PSOE had worked with the quasi-fascist Primo do Rivera dictatorship during the 1920s. The hypocrisy is clear. So much for the CNT standing *"to one side, arguing that this was a 'struggle between politicians' and did not concern the workers even though this was a strike against a move to incorporate fascism into the government."*

His comments that *"the anarchists . . . work[ed] trains which brought the Moorish troops under Franco to suppress the Asturias insurrection"* is just plain silly. It was **not** anarchists who ran the trains, it was railway workers -- under martial law -- some of whom were in the CNT and some of whom were anarchists. Moreover, as noted above the Moorish troops under Franco arrived **by sea** and not by train. And, of course, no mention of the fact that the CNT-FAI in the strategically key port of Gijon was denied arms by the Socialists and Communists, which allowed the Moorish troops to disembark without real resistance.

Morrow has a lot to answer for.

## 7. Were the Friends of Durruti Marxists?

It is sometimes claimed that the **Friends of Durruti** Group which formed during the Spanish Revolution were Marxists or represented a "break" with anarchism and a move towards Marxism. Both these assertions are false. We discuss whether the Friends of Durruti (FoD) represented a "break" with anarchism in the [following section](#). Here we indicate that claims of the FoD being Marxists are false.

The Friends of Durruti were formed, in March 1937, by anarchist militants who had refused to submit to



Communist-controlled "militarisation" of the workers' militias. During the Maydays -- the government attack against the revolution two months later -- the Friends of Durruti were notable for their calls to stand firm and crush the counter-revolution. During and after the May Days, the leaders of the CNT asserted that the FoD were Marxists (which was quite ironic as it was the CNT leaders who were acting as Marxists in Spain usually did by joining with bourgeois governments). This was a slander, pure and simple.

The best source to refute claims that the FoD were Marxists (or becoming Marxist) or that they were influenced by, or moved towards, the Bolshevik-Leninists is Agustin Guillamon's book **The Friends of Durruti Group: 1937-1939**. Guillamon is a Marxist (of the "left-communist" kind) and no anarchist (indeed he states that the *"Spanish Revolution was the tomb of anarchism as a revolutionary theory of the proletariat."* [p. 108]). That indicates that his account can be considered objective and not anarchist wishful thinking. Here we use his work to refute the claims that the FoD were Marxists. [Section 9](#) discusses their links (or lack of them) with the Spanish Trotskyists.

So were the FoD Marxists? Guillamon makes it clear -- no, they were not. In his words, *"[t]here is nothing in the Group's theoretical tenets, much less in the columns of **El Amigo del Pueblo** [their newspaper], or in their various manifestos and handbills to merit the description 'marxist' being applied to the Group [by the CNT leadership]. They were simply an opposition to the CNT's leadership's collaborationist policy, making their stand within the organisation and upon anarcho-syndicalist ideology."* [p. 61] He stresses this in his conclusion:

*"The Friends of Durruti was an affinity group, like many another existing in anarcho-syndicalist quarters. It was not influenced to any extent by the Trotskyists, nor by the POUM. Its ideology and watchwords were quintessentially in the CNT idiom: it cannot be said that they displayed a marxist ideology at any time . . . They were against the abandonment of revolutionary objectives and of anarchism's fundamental and quintessential ideological principles, which the CNT-FAI leaders had thrown over in favour of anti-fascist unity and the need to adapt to circumstances."* [p. 107]

In other words, they wanted to return the CNT *"to its class struggle roots."* [**Ibid.**] Indeed, Balius (a leading member of the group and writer of its 1938 pamphlet **Towards a Fresh Revolution**) was moved to challenge the charges of "marxist" levelled at him:

*"I will not repay defamatory comment in kind. But what I cannot keep mum about is that a legend of marxism has been woven about my person and I should like the record put straight . . . It grieves me that at the present time there is somebody who dares call me a Marxist when I could refute with unanswerable arguments those who hang such an unjustified label on me. As one who attends our union assemblies and specific gatherings, I might speak of the loss of class sensibility which I have observed on a number of occasions. I have heard it said that we should be making politics -- in as many words, comrades -- in an abstract sense, and virtually no one protested. And I, who have been*

*aghast at countless such instances, am dubbed a marxist just because I feel, myself to be a one hundred percent revolutionary . . . On returning from exile in France in the days of Primo de Rivera . . . I have been a defender of the CNT and the FAI ever since. In spite of my paralysis, I have done time in prison and been taken in manacles to Madrid for my fervent and steadfast championship of our organisations and for fighting those who once were friends of mine Is that not enough? . . . So where is this marxism of mine? Is it because my roots are not in the factory? . . . The time has come to clarify my position. It is not good enough to say that the matter has already been agreed. The truth must shine through. As far as I am concerned, I call upon all the comrades who have used the press to hang this label upon me to spell out what makes me a marxist." [El Amigo del Pueblo, no. 4, p. 3]*

As can be seen, the FoD were not Marxists. Two more questions arise. Were they a "break" with anarchism (i.e. moving towards Marxism) and were they influenced by the Spanish Trotskyists. We turn to these questions in the next two sections.

## 8. Did the Friends of Durruti "*break with*" anarchism?

Morrow claims that the Friends of Durruti (FoD) "*represented a conscious break with the anti-statism of traditional anarchism. They explicitly declared the need for democratic organs of power, juntas or soviets, in the overthrow of capitalism.*" [Morrow, **Op. Cit.**, p. 247] The truth of the matter is somewhat different.

Before discussing his assertion in more detail a few comments are required. Typically, in Morrow's topsy-turvy world, all anarchists like the Friends of Durruti (Morrow also includes the Libertarian Youth, the "*politically awakened*" CNT rank and file, local FAI groups, etc.) who remained true to anarchism and stuck to their guns (often literally) -- represented a break with anarchism and a move towards Marxism, the revolutionary vanguard party (no doubt part of the 4th International), and a fight for the "workers state." Those anarchists, on the other hand, who compromised for "anti-fascist unity" (but mainly to try and get weapons to fight Franco) are the real anarchists because "*class collaboration . . . lies concealed in the heart of anarchist philosophy.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 101]

Morrow, of course, would have had a fit if anarchists pointed to the example of the Social Democrat's who crushed the German Revolution or Stalin's Russia as examples that "rule by an elite lies concealed in the heart of Marxist philosophy." It does not spring into Morrow's mind that those anarchists he praises are the ones who show the revolutionary heart of anarchism. This can best be seen from his comments on the Friends of Durruti, who we argue were not evolving towards "Marxism" but rather were trying to push the CNT and FAI back to its pre-Civil War politics and strategy. Moreover, as we argue in [section 12](#), anarchism has always argued for self-managed working class organisations to carry out and defend a revolution. The FoD were simply following in the tradition founded by Bakunin.

In other words, we will show that they did not "*break with*" anarchism -- rather they refused to

compromise their anarchism in the face of "comrades" who thought winning the war meant entering the government. This is clear from their leaflets, paper and manifesto. Moreover, as will become obvious, their "break" with anarchism actually just restates pre-war CNT policy and organisation.

For example, their leaflets, in April 1937, called for the unions and municipalities to "*replace the state*" and for no retreat:

*"We have the organs that must supplant a State in ruins. The Trade Unions and Municipalities must take charge of economic and social life."* [quoted by Agustin Guillamon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 38]

This clearly is within the CNT and anarcho-syndicalist tradition. Their manifesto, in 1938, repeated this call ("*the state cannot be retained in the face of the unions*"), and made three demands as part of their programme. It is worth quoting these at length:

*"I - Establishment of a Revolutionary Junta or National Defence Council.*

*"This body will be organised as follows: members of the revolutionary Junta will be elected by democratic vote in the union organisations. Account is to be taken of the number of comrades away at the front . . . The Junta will steer clear of economic affairs, which are the exclusive preserve of the unions.*

*"The functions of the revolutionary Junta are as follows:*

- "a) The management of the war*
- "b) The supervision of revolutionary order*
- "c) International affairs*
- "d) Revolutionary propaganda.*

*"Posts to come up regularly for re-allocation so as to prevent anyone growing attached to them. And the trade union assemblies will exercise control over the Junta's activities.*

*"II - All economic power to the syndicates.*

*"Since July the unions have supplied evidence of the great capacity for constructive labour. . . It will be the unions that structure the proletarian economy.*

*"An Economic Council may also be set up, taking into consideration the natures of the Industrial Unions and Industrial federations, to improve on the co-ordination of economic activities.*

*"III - Free municipality.*

[...]

*"The Municipality shall take charge of those functions of society that fall outside the preserve of the unions. And since the society we are going to build shall be composed exclusively of producers, it will be the unions, no less, that will provide sustenance for the municipalities. . .*

*"The Municipalities will be organised at the level of local, comarcal and peninsula federations. Unions and municipalities will maintain liaison at local, comarcal and national levels."* [**Towards a Fresh Revolution**]

This programme basically mimics the pre-war CNT policy and organisation and so cannot be considered as a "break" with anarchist or CNT politics or tradition.

Firstly, we should note that the "municipality" was a common CNT expression to describe a "commune" which was considered as *"all the residents of a village or hamlet meeting in assembly (council) with full powers to administer and order local affairs, primarily production and distribution."* In the cities and town the equivalent organisation was "the union" which *"brings individuals together, grouping them according to the nature of their work . . . First, it groups the workers of a factory, workshop or firm together, this being the smallest cell enjoying autonomy with regard to whatever concerns it alone . . . The local unions federate with one another, forming a local federation, composed of the committee elected by the unions, and of the general assembly that, in the last analysis, holds supreme sovereignty."* [Issac Puente, **Libertarian Communism**, p. 25 and p. 24]

In addition, the *"national federations [of unions] will hold as common property the roads, railways, buildings, equipment, machinery and workshops"* and the *"free municipality will federate with its counterparts in other localities and with the national industrial federations."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 29 and p. 26] Thus Puente's classic pre-war pamphlet is almost identical to points two and three of the FoD Programme.

Moreover, the "Economic Council" urged by the FoD in point two of their programme is obviously inspired by the work of Abad Diego de Santillan, particularly his book **After the Revolution (El Organismo Economico de la Revolucion)**. Discussing the role of the "Federal Council of Economy", de Santillan says that it *"receives its orientation from below and operates in accordance with the resolutions of the regional and national assemblies."* [p. 86] Just as the CNT Congresses were the supreme policy-making body in the CNT itself, they envisioned a similar body emanating from the rank-and-file assemblies to make the guiding decisions for a socialised economy.

This leaves point one of their programme, the call for a "Revolutionary Junta or National Defence Council." It is here that Morrow and a host of other Marxists claim the FoD broke with anarchism towards Marxism. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Firstly, anarchists have long supported the idea of workers' councils (or soviets) as an expression of working class power to control their own lives (and so society) -- indeed, far longer than Marxists. Thus we find Bakunin arguing that the *"future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* Anarchists *"attain this goal . . . by the development and organisation, not of the political but of the social (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses."* [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, p. 206 and p. 198] These councils of workers' delegates (workers' councils) would be the basis of the commune and defence of the revolution:

*"the federative Alliance of all working men's associations . . . constitute the Commune . . . Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades. . . [T]he federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces . . . [would] organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction . . . it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution."* [Op. Cit., pp. 170-1]

This perspective can be seen in the words of the German anarcho-syndicalist H. Ruediger (member of the IWA's secretariat in 1937) when he argued that for anarchists *"social re-organisation, like the defence of the revolution, should be concentrated in the hands of **working class organisations** -- whether labour unions or new organs of spontaneous creation, such as free councils, etc., which, as an expression of the will of the workers themselves, from **below up**, should construct the revolutionary social community."* [quoted in **The May Days in Barcelona**, Vernon Richards (ed.), p. 71]

Camillo Berneri sums up the anarchist perspective clearly when he wrote:

*"The Marxists . . . foresee the natural disappearance of the State as a consequence of the destruction of classes by the means of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat,' that is to say State Socialism, whereas the Anarchists desire the destruction of the classes by means of a social revolution which eliminates, with the classes, the State. The Marxists, moreover, do not propose the armed conquest of the Commune by the whole proletariat, but the propose the conquest of the State by the party which imagines that it represents the proletariat. The Anarchists allow the use of direct power by the proletariat, but they understand by the organ of this power to be formed by the entire corpus of systems of communist administration -- corporate organisations [i.e. industrial unions], communal institutions, both regional and national -- freely constituted outside and in opposition to all political monopoly by parties and endeavouring to a minimum administrative centralisation."* ["Dictatorship of the Proletariat and State Socialism", **Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review**, no. 4, p. 52]

In other words, anarchists **do** support democratic organs of power when they are **directly** democratic (i. e. self-managed). *"The basic idea of Anarchism is simple,"* argued Voline, *"no party . . . placed above or*

*outside the labouring masses . . . ever succeeds in emancipating them . . . Effective emancipation can only be achieved by the **direct, widespread, and independent action of those concerned, of the workers themselves**, grouped, not under the banner of a political party . . . but in their own class organisations (productive workers' unions, factory committees, co-operatives, et cetera) on the basis of concrete action and self-government." [The Unknown Revolution, p, 197]*

Anarchists oppose **representative** organs of power as these are governments and so based on minority power and subject to bureaucratic deformations which ensure **un**-accountability from below. Anarchists argue *"that, by its very nature, political power could not be exercised except by a very restricted group of men at the centre. Therefore this power -- the **real** power -- could not belong to the soviets. It would actually be in the hands of the party."* [Voline, **Op. Cit.**, p. 213]

Thus Morrow's argument is flawed on the basic point that he does not understand anarchist theory or the nature of an anarchist revolution (also see [section 12](#)).

Secondly, and more importantly given the Spanish context, the FoD's vision has a marked similarity to pre-Civil War CNT organisation, policy and vision. This means that the idea of a National Defence Council was not the radical break with the CNT that some claim. Before the civil war the CNT had long has its defence groups, federated at regional and national level. Historian Jerome Mintz provides a good summary:

*"The policies and actions of the CNT were conducted primarily by administrative juntas, beginning with the sindicato, whose junta consisted of a president, secretary, treasurer, and council members. At each step in the confederation, a representative [sic! -- delegate] was sent to participate at the next organisational level -- from sindicato to the district to the regional confederation, then to the national confederation. In addition to the juntas, however, there were two major committee systems established as adjuncts to the juntas that had developed some autonomy: the **comites pro presos**, or committees for political prisoners, which worked for the release of prisoners and raised money for the relief of their families; and the **comites de defensa**, or defence committees, whose task was to stockpile weapons for the coming battle and to organise the shock troops who would bear the brunt of the fighting." [The Anarchists of Casas Viejas, p. 141]*

Thus we see that the CNT had its *"juntas"* (which means council or committee and so does not imply any authoritarianism) as well as *"defence committees"* which were elected by democratic vote in the union organisations decades before the FoD existed. The Defence Committees (or councils) were a CNT insurgent agency in existence well before July 1936 and had, in fact, played a key role in many insurrections and strikes, including the events of July 1936. In other words, the *"break"* with anarchism Morrow presents was, in fact, an exact reproduction of the way the CNT had traditionally operated and acted -- it is the same program of a *"workers defence council"* and *"union management of the economy"* that the CNT had advocated prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. The only *"break"* that **did** occur post 19th of July was that of the CNT and FAI ignoring its politics and history in favour of "anti-fascist

unity" and a UGT "Workers' Alliance" with all anti-fascist unions and parties (see [section 20](#)).

Moreover, the CNT insurrection of December 1933 had been co-ordinated by a National Revolutionary Committee [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 235]. D.A. Santillan argued that the *"local Council of Economy will assume the mission of defence and raise voluntary corps for guard duty and if need be, for combat"* in the *"cases of emergency or danger of a counter-revolution."* [**After the Revolution**, p. 80] During the war itself a CNT national plenum of regions, in September 1936, called for a National Defence Council, with majority union representation and based on Regional Defence Councils. The Defence Council of Aragon, set up soon after, was based on these ideas. The need for co-ordinated revolutionary defence and attack is just common sense -- and had been reflected in CNT theory, policy and structure for decades.

An understanding of the basic ideas of anarchist theory on revolution combined with the awareness of the CNT's juntas (administrative councils or committees) had *"defence committees"* associated with them makes it extremely clear that rather than being a *"conscious break with the anti-statism of traditional anarchism"* the FoD's programme was, in fact, a conscious **return** to the anti-statism of traditional anarchism and the revolutionary program and vision of the pre-Civil War CNT.

This is confirmed if we look at the activities of the CNT in Aragon where they formed the *"Defence Council of Aragon"* in September 1936. In the words of historian Antony Beevor, *"[i]n late September delegates from the Aragonese collectives attended a conference at Bujaraloz, near where Durruti's column was based. They decided to establish a Defence Council of Aragon, and elected as president Joaquin Ascaso."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 96] In February 1937, the first congress of the regional federation of collectives was held at Caspe to co-ordinate the activities of the collectives -- an obvious example of a regional economic council desired by the FoD. Morrow does mention the Council of Aragon -- *"the anarchist-controlled Council for the Defence of Aragon"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 111] -- however, he strangely fails to relate this fact to anarchist politics. After all, in Aragon the CNT-FAI remained true to anarchism, created a defence council and a federation of collectives. If Morrow had discussed the events in Aragon he would have had to draw the conclusion that the FoD were not a *"conscious break with the traditional anti-statism of anarchism"* but rather were an expression of it.

This can be seen from the comments made after the end of the war by the Franco-Spanish Group of **The Friends of Durruti**. They clearly argued for a return to the principles of anarchism and the pre-war CNT. They argued not only for workers' self-organisation and self-management as the basis of the revolution but also to the pre-war CNT idea of a workers' alliance from the bottom up rather than a UGT-style one at the top (see [section 5](#)). In their words:

*"A revolution requires the absolute domination of the workers' organisations as was the case in July, 1936, when the CNT-FAI were masters . . . We incline to the view that it is necessary to form a Revolutionary Alliance; a Workers' Front; where no one would be allowed to enter and take their place except on a revolutionary basis . . . "* [**The Friends of Durruti Accuse**]

As can be seen, rather than a "revolutionary government" the FoD were consistently arguing for a federation of workers' associations as the basis of the revolution. In this they were loyally following Bakunin's basic arguments and the ideas of anarchism. Rather than the FoD breaking with anarchism, it is clear that it was the leading committees of the CNT and FAI which actually broke with the politics of anarchism and the tactics, ideas and ideals of the CNT.

Lastly there are the words of Jaime Balius, one of the FoD's main activists, who states in 1976 that:

*"We did not support the formation of Soviets; there were no grounds in Spain for calling for such. We stood for 'all power to the trade unions'. In no way were we politically orientated . . . Ours was solely an attempt to save the revolution; at the historical level it can be compared to Kronstadt because if there the sailors and workers called for 'all power to the Soviets', we were calling for all power to the unions."* [quoted by Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 381]

*"Political"* here meaning "state-political" -- a common anarchist use of the word. According to Fraser, the *"proposed revolutionary junta was to be composed of combatants from the barricades."* [**Ibid.**] This echoes Bakunin's comment that the *"Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades and by the creation of a Revolutionary Communal Council composed of one or two delegates from each barricade . . . vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 170-1]

As can be seen, rather than calling for power to a party or looking to form a government (i.e. being *"politically orientated"*) the FoD were calling for *"all power to the unions."* This meant, in the context of the CNT, all power to the union assemblies in the workplace. Decision making would flow from the bottom upwards rather than being delegated to a "revolutionary" government as in Trotskyism. To stress the point, the FoD did not represent a *"break"* with anarchism or the CNT tradition. To claim otherwise means to misunderstand anarchist politics and CNT history.

Our analysis, we must note, also makes a mockery of Guillamon's claim that because the FoD thought that libertarian communism had to be *"impose[d]"* and *"defended by force of arms"* their position represented an *"evolution within anarchist thought processes."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 95] As has been made clear above, from Bakunin onwards revolutionary anarchism has been aware of the need for an insurrection to create an anarchist society by destroying both the state and capitalism (i.e. to *"impose"* a free society upon those who wish hierarchy to continue and are in a position of power) and for that revolution to be defended against attempts to defeat it. Similarly, his claim that the FoD's *"revolutionary junta"* was the equivalent of what *"others call the vanguard or the revolutionary party"* cannot be defended given our discussion above -- it is clear that the junta was not seen as a form of delegated power by rather as a means of defending the revolution like the CNT's defence committees and under the direct control of the union assemblies.

It may be argued that the FoD did not actually mean this sort of structure. Indeed, their manifesto states



that they are *"introducing a slight variation in anarchism into our program. The establishment of a Revolutionary Junta."* Surely this implies that they saw themselves as having moved away from anarchism and CNT policy? As can be seen from Balius' comments during and after the revolution, the FoD were arguing for *"all power to the unions"* and stating that *"apolitical anarchism had failed."* However, *"apolitical"* anarchism came about post-July 19th when the CNT-FAI (ignoring anarchist theory and CNT policy and history) **ignored** the state machine rather than destroying it and supplanting it with libertarian organs of self-management. The social revolution that spontaneously occurred after July 19th was essentially economic and social (i.e. *"apolitical"*) and not *"anti-political"* (i.e. the destruction of the state machine). Such a revolution would soon come to grief on the shores of the (revitalised) state machine -- as the FoD correctly argued had happened.

To state that they had introduced a variation into their anarchism makes sense post-July 1936. The *"apolitical"* line of the CNT-FAI had obviously failed and a new departure was required. While it is clear that the FoD's "new" position was nothing of the kind, it was elemental anarchist principles, it was "new" in respect to the policy the CNT ("anarchism") had conducted during the Civil War -- a policy they justified by selective use of anarchist theory and principles. In the face of this, the FoD could claim they were presenting a new variation in spite of its obvious similarities to pre-war CNT policies and anarchist theory. Thus the claim that the FoD saw their ideas as some sort of departure from traditional anarchism cannot be maintained, given the obvious links this "new" idea had with the past policies and structure of the CNT. As Guillamon makes it clear, the FoD made *"their stand within the organisation and upon anarcho-syndicalist ideology"* and *"[a]t all times the Group articulated an anarcho-syndicalist ideology, although it also voiced radical criticism of the CNT and FAI leadership. But it is a huge leap from that to claiming that the Group espoused marxist positions."* [Op. Cit., p. 61 and p. 95]

One last comment. Morrow states that the *"CNT leadership . . . expelled the Friends of Durruti"* [Op. Cit., p. 189] This is not true. The CNT leadership did **try** to expel the FoD. However, as Balius points out, the *"higher committees order[ed] our expulsion, but this was rejected by the rank and file in the trade union assemblies and at a plenum of FAI groups held in the Casa CNT-FAI."* [quoted by Agustin Guillamon, Op. Cit., p. 73] Thus the CNT leadership could never get their desire ratified by any assembly of unions or FAI groups. Unfortunately, Morrow gets his facts wrong (and also presents a somewhat false impression of the relationship of the CNT leadership and the rank and file).

## 9. Were the Friends of Durruti influenced by Trotskyists?

Morrow implies that the Bolshevik-Leninists *"established close contacts with the anarchist workers, especially the 'Friends of Durruti'"* [Op. Cit., p. 139] The truth, as usual, is somewhat different.

To prove this we must again turn to Guillamon's work in which he dedicates a chapter to this issue. He brings this chapter by stating:

*"It requires only a cursory perusal of **El Amigo del Pueblo** or Balius's statements to establish that the Friends of Durruti were never marxists, nor influenced at all by the*

*Trotskyists or the Bolshevik-Leninist Section. But there is a school of historians determined to maintain the opposite and hence the necessity for this chapter.*" [Op. Cit., p. 94]

He stresses that the FoD *"were not in any way beholden to Spanish Trotskyism is transparent from several documents"* and notes that while the POUM and Trotskyists displayed *"an interest" in "bringing the Friends of Durruti under their influence"* this was *"something in which they never succeeded."* [Op. Cit., p. 96 and p. 110]

Pre-May, 1937, Balius himself states that the FoD *"had no contact with the POUM, nor with the Trotskyists."* [Op. Cit., p. 104] Post-May, this had not changed as witness E. Wolf letter to Trotsky in July 1937 which stated that it *"will be impossible to achieve any collaboration with them . . . Neither the POUMists nor the Friends would agree to the meeting [to discuss joint action]."* [Op. Cit., pp. 97-8]

In other words, the Friends of Durruti did not establish *"close contacts"* with the Bolshevik-Leninists after the May Days of 1937. While the Bolshevik-Leninists may have wished for such contacts, the FoD did not (they probably remembered their fellow anarchists and workers imprisoned and murdered when Trotsky was in power in Russia). They were, of course, contacts of a limited kind but no influence or significant co-operation. Little wonder Balius stated in 1946 that the *"alleged influence of the POUM or the Trotskyists upon us is untrue."* [quoted, Op. Cit., p. 104]

It is hardly surprising that the FoD were not influenced by Trotskyism. After all, they were well aware of the policies Trotsky introduced when he was in power. Moreover, the program of the Bolshevik-Leninists was similar in rhetoric to the anarchist vision -- they differed on the question of whether they actually **meant** *"all power to the working class"* or not (see section [12](#) and [13](#)). And, of course, the Trotskyists activities during the May Days amounted to little more than demanding that the workers' do what they were already doing (as can be seen from the leaflet they produced -- as George Orwell noted, *"it merely demanded what was happening already"* [**Homage to Catalonia**, p. 221]). As usual, the "vanguard of the proletariat" were trying to catch up with the proletariat.

In theory and practice the FoD were miles ahead of the Bolshevik-Leninists -- as to be expected, as the FoD were anarchists.

## 10. What does the Friends of Durruti's programme tell us about Trotskyism?

Morrow states that the FoD's *"slogans included the essential points of a revolutionary program: all power to the working class, and democratic organs of the workers, peasants and combatants, as the expression of the workers' power."* [Op. Cit., p. 133] It is useful to compare Leninism to these points to see if that provides a revolutionary program.

Firstly, as we argue in more detail in [section 11](#), Trotsky abolished the democratic organs of the Red Army. Lenin's rule also saw the elimination of the factory committee movement and its replacement with one-man management appointed from above (see [section 17](#) and Maurice Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control** for details). Both these events occurred before the start of the Russian Civil War in May 1918. Moreover, neither Lenin nor Trotsky considered workers' self-management of production as a key aspects of socialism. On this level, Leninism in power did not constitute a "*revolutionary program.*"

Secondly, Leninism does **not** call for "*all power to the working class*" or even "*workers' power*" to manage their own affairs. To quote Trotsky, in an article written in 1937, "*the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard.*" The working classes' role is one of supporting the party:

*"Without the confidence of the class in the vanguard, without support of the vanguard by the class, there can be no talk of the conquest of power.*

*"In this sense the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are the work of the whole class, but only under the leadership of the vanguard."*

Thus, rather than the working class as a whole seizing power, it is the "*vanguard*" which takes power -- "*a revolutionary party, even after seizing power . . . is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society.*" [**Stalinism and Bolshevism**] So much for "workers' power" -- unless you equate that with the "power" to give your power, your control over your own affairs, to a minority who claim to represent you. Indeed, Trotsky even attacks the idea that workers' can achieve power directly via organs of self-management like workers' councils (or soviets):

*"Those who propose the abstraction of the Soviets from the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."* [**Op. Cit.**]

In other words, the dictatorship of the proletariat is, in fact, expressed by "*the party dictatorship.*" In this Trotsky follows Lenin who asserted that:

*"The very presentation of the question -- 'dictatorship of the Party **or** dictatorship of the class, dictatorship (Party) of the leaders **or** dictatorship (Party) of the masses?' -- is evidence of the most incredible and hopeless confusion of mind . . . [because] classes are usually . . . led by political parties. . . "* [**Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder**, pp. 25-6]

As has been made clear above, the FoD being anarchists aimed for a society of generalised self-management, a system in which working people directly controlled their own affairs and so society. As these words by Lenin and Trotsky indicate they did not aim for such a society, a society based on "*all*

*power to the working class.*" Rather, they aimed for a society in which the workers would delegate their power into the hands of a few, the revolutionary party, who would exercise power **on their behalf**. The FoD meant exactly what they said when they argued for "*all power to the working class*" -- they did not mean this as a euphemism for party rule. In this they followed Bakunin:

*"[T]he federated Alliance of all labour associations . . . will constitute the Commune . . . there will be a federation of the standing barricades and a Revolutionary Communal Council will operate on the basis of one or two delegates from each barricade . . . these deputies being invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times. . . An appeal will be issued to all provinces, communes and associations inviting them to follow the example set . . . [and] to reorganise along revolutionary lines . . . and to then delegate deputies to an agreed place of assembly (all of those deputies invested with binding mandates and accountable and subject to recall), in order to found the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces . . . Thus it is through the very act of extrapolation and organisation of the Revolution with an eye to the mutual defences of insurgent areas that the . . . Revolution, founded upon . . . the ruins of States, will emerge triumphant. . .*

*"Since it is the people which must make the revolution everywhere, and since the ultimate direction of it must at all times be vested in the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial organisations . . . being organised from the bottom up through revolutionary delegation . . ."* [No God, No Masters, vol. 1, pp. 155-6]

And:

*"Not even as revolutionary transition will we countenance national Conventions, nor Constituent Assemblies, nor provisional governments, nor so-called revolutionary dictatorships: because we are persuaded that revolution s sincere, honest and real only among the masses and that, whenever it is concentrated in the hands of a few governing individuals, it inevitably and immediately turns into reaction."* [Op. Cit., p. 160]

As can be seen, Bakunin's vision is precisely, to use Morrow' words, "*all power to the working class, and democratic organs of the workers, peasants and combatants, as the expression of the workers' power.*" Thus the Friends of Durruti's program is not a "*break*" with anarchism (as we discussed in more detail in [section 8](#)) but rather in the tradition started by Bakunin -- in other words, an anarchist program. It is Leninism, as can be seen, which rejects this "*revolutionary program*" in favour of all power to the representatives of the working class (i.e. party) which it confuses with the working class as a whole.

Given that Morrow asserts that "*all power to the working class*" was an "*essential*" point of "*a revolutionary program*" we can only conclude that Trotskyism does not provide a revolutionary program -- rather it provides a program based, at best, on representative government in which the workers' delegate their power to a minority or, at worse, on party dictatorship **over** the working class (the

experience of Bolshevik Russia would suggest the former quickly becomes the latter, and is justified by Bolshevik ideology).

By his own arguments, here as in so many other cases, Morrow indicates that Trotskyism is not a revolutionary movement or theory.

## 11. Why is Morrow's comments against the militarisation of the Militias ironic?

Morrow denounces the Stalinist militarisation of the militias (their "*campaign for wiping out the internal democratic life of the militias*") as follows:

*"The Stalinists early sought to set an 'example' by handing their militias over to government control, helping to institute the salute, supremacy of officers behind the lines, etc. . .*

*"The example was wasted on the CNT masses . . . The POUM reprinted for distribution in the militias the original Red Army Manual of Trotsky, providing for a democratic internal regime and political life in the army." [Op. Cit., p. 126]*

Morrow states that he supported the "*democratic election of soldiers' committees in each unit, centralised in a national election of soldiers' delegates to a national council.*" Moreover, he attacks the POUM leadership because it "*forbade election of soldiers' committees*" and argued that the "*simple, concrete slogan of elected soldier's committees was the only road for securing proletariat control of the army.*" He attacks the POUM because its "*ten thousand militiamen were controlled bureaucratically by officials appointed by the Central Committee of the party, election of soldiers' committees being expressly forbidden.*" [Op. Cit., p. 127, p. 128 and pp. 136-7]

Again, Morrow is correct. A revolutionary working class militia **does** require self-management, the election of delegates, soldiers' councils and so on. Bakunin, for example, argued that the fighters on the barricades would take a role in determining the development of the revolution as the "*Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades . . . composed of one or two delegates from each barricade . . . vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates.*" This would complement "*the federative Alliance of all working men's [and women's] associations . . . which will constitute the Commune.*" [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, pp. 170-1] That is **exactly** why the CNT militia organised in this fashion (and, we must note, they were only applying the organisational principles of the CNT and FAI -- i.e. anarchism -- to the militias). The militia columns were organised in a libertarian fashion from the bottom up:

*"The establishment of war committees is acceptable to all confederal militias. We start from the individual and form groups of ten, which come to accommodations among*

*themselves for small-scale operations. Ten such groups together make up one centuria, which appoints a delegate to represent it. Thirty centurias make up one column, which is directed by a war committee, on which the delegates from the centurias have their say. . . although every column retains its freedom of action, we arrive at co-ordination of forces, which is not the same thing as unity of command."* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, pp. 256-7]

In other words, Morrow is arguing for an **anarchist** solution to the problem of defending the revolution and organising those who were fighting fascism. We say anarchist for good reason. What is ironic about Morrow's comments and description of "*workers' control of the army*" is that these features were **exactly** those eliminated by Trotsky when he created the Red Army in 1918! Indeed, Trotsky acted in **exactly** the same way as Morrow attacks the Stalinists for acting (and they used many of the same arguments as Trotsky did to justify it).

As Maurice Brinton correctly summarises:

*"Trotsky, appointed Commissar of Military Affairs after Brest-Litovsk, had rapidly been reorganising the Red Army. The death penalty for disobedience under fire had been restored. So, more gradually, had saluting, special forms of address, separate living quarters and other privileges for officers. Democratic forms of organisation, including the election of officers, had been quickly dispensed with."* [The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control, p. 37]

He notes that "*[f]or years, Trotskyist literature has denounced these reactionary facets of the Red Army as examples of what happened to it 'under Stalinism.'*" [Op. Cit., p. 37f] This claim was, amazingly enough, also made by Trotsky himself. In 1935 he re-wrote history by arguing that "*[i]n the fire of the cruel struggle [of the Civil War], there could not be even a question of a privileged position for officers: the very word was scrubbed out of the vocabulary.*" Only "*after the victories had been won and the passage made to a peaceful situation*" did "*the military apparatus*" try to "*become the most influential and privileged part of the whole bureaucratic apparatus*" with "*the Stalinist bureaucracy . . . gradually over the succeeding ten to twelve years*" ensuring for them "*a superior position*" and giving them "*ranks and decorations.*" [How Did Stalin Defeat the Opposition?]

In fact, "*ranks and decorations*" and "*superior*" positions were introduced by Trotsky **before** the outbreak of the Civil War in May 1918. Having been responsible for such developments you would think he would remember them!

On March 28th, 1918, Trotsky gave a report to the Moscow City Conference of the Communist Party. In this report he stated that "*the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree*" and that the Bolsheviks "*fac[ed] the task of creating a regular Army.*" Why the change? Simply because the Bolshevik Party held power ("*political power is in the hands of the same working class from whose ranks the Army is recruited*"). Of course, power was

actually held by the Bolshevik party, not the working class, but never fear:

*"Once we have established the Soviet regime, that is a system under which the government is headed by persons who have been directly elected by the Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies, there can be no antagonism between the government and the mass of the workers, just as there is no antagonism between the administration of the union and the general assembly of its members, and, therefore, there cannot be any grounds for fearing the **appointment** of members of the commanding staff by the organs of the Soviet Power."* [**Work, Discipline, Order**]

Of course, most workers' are well aware that the administration of a trade union usually works against them during periods of struggle. Indeed, so are most Trotskyists as they often denounce the betrayals by that administration. Thus Trotsky's own analogy indicates the fallacy of his argument. Elected officials do not necessary reflect the interests of those who elected them. That is why anarchists have always supported **delegation** rather than representation combined with decentralisation, strict accountability and the power of instant recall. In a highly centralised system (as created by the Bolsheviks and as exists in most social democratic trade unions) the ability to recall an administration is difficult as it requires the agreement of **all** the people. Thus there are quite a few grounds for fearing the appointment of commanders by the government -- no matter which party makes it up.

If, as Morrow argues, the *"simple, concrete slogan of elected soldier's committees was the only road for securing proletariat control of the army"* then Trotsky's regime in the Red Army ensured the defeat of proletarian control of that organisation. The question Morrow raises of who would control the army, the working class or the bourgeois failed to realise the real question -- who was to control the army, the working class, the bourgeois or the state bureaucracy. Trotsky ensured that it would be the latter.

Hence Morrow's own arguments indicate the anti-revolutionary nature of Trotskyism -- unless, of course, we decide to look only at what people say and not what they do.

Of course some Trotskyists know what Trotsky actually did when he held power and try and present apologetics for his obvious destruction of soldiers' democracy. One argues that the *"Red Army, more than any other institution of the civil war years, embodied the contradiction between the political consciousness and circumstantial coercion. On the one hand the creation of a Red Army was a retreat: it was a conscripted not a voluntary army; officers were appointed not elected . . . But the Red Army was also filled with a magnificent socialist consciousness."* [John Rees, *"In Defence of October"*, **International Socialism**, no. 52, pp. 3-82, p. 46]

This argument is somewhat weak for two reasons.

Firstly, the regressive features of the Red Army appeared **before** the start of the Civil War. It was a political decision to organise in this way, a decision **not justified at the time in terms of circumstantial necessity**. Indeed, far from it (like most of the other Bolshevik policies of the period).

Rather it was justified under the rather dubious rationale that workers did not need to fear the actions of a workers' state. Circumstances were not mentioned at all nor was the move considered as a retreat or as a defeat. It was not even considered as a matter of principle.

This perspective was reiterated by Trotsky after the end of the Civil War. Writing in 1922, he argued that:

*"There was and could be no question of controlling troops by means of elected committees and commanders who were subordinate to these committees and might be replaced at any moment . . . [The old army] had carried out a social revolution within itself, casting aside the commanders from the landlord and bourgeois classes and establishing organs of revolutionary self-government, in the shape of the Soviets of Soldiers' Deputies. These organisational and political measures were correct and necessary from the standpoint of breaking up the old army. But a new army capable of fighting could certainly not grow directly out of them . . . The attempt made to apply our old organisational methods to the building of a Red Army threatened to undermine it from the very outset . . . the system of election could in no way secure competent, suitable and authoritative commanders for the revolutionary army. The Red Army was built from above, in accordance with the principles of the dictatorship of the working class. Commanders were selected and tested by the organs of the Soviet power and the Communist Party. Election of commanders by the units themselves -- which were politically ill-educated, being composed of recently mobilised young peasants -- would inevitably have been transformed into a game of chance, and would often, in fact, have created favourable circumstances for the machinations of various intriguers and adventurers. Similarly, the revolutionary army, as an army for action and not as an arena of propaganda, was incompatible with a regime of elected committees, which in fact could not but destroy all centralised control."* [**The Path of the Red Army**]

If a "circumstantial" factor exists in this rationale, it is the claim that the soldiers were "politically ill-educated." However, **every** mass movement or revolution **starts** with those involved being "politically ill-educated." The very process of struggle educates them politically. A key part of this radicalisation is practising self-management and self-organisation -- in other words, in participating in the decision making process of the struggle, by discussing ideas and actions, by hearing other viewpoints, electing and mandating delegates. To remove this ensures that those involved **remain** "politically ill-educated" and, ultimately, incapable of self-government. It also contains the rationale for continuing party dictatorship:

*"If some people . . . have assumed the right to violate everybody's freedom on the pretext of preparing the triumph of freedom, they will always find that the people are not yet sufficiently mature, that the dangers of reaction are ever-present, that the education of the people has not yet been completed. And with these excuses they will seek to perpetuate their own power."* [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 52]



In addition, Trotsky's rationale refutes any claim that Bolshevism is somehow "fundamentally" democratic. The ramifications of it were felt everywhere in the soviet system as the Bolsheviks ignored the "wrong" democratic decisions made by the working masses and replaced their democratic organisations with appointees from above. Indeed, Trotsky admits that the *"Red Army was built from above, in accordance with the principles of the dictatorship of the working class."* Which means, to state the obvious, appointment from above, the dismantling of self-government, and so on are *"in accordance with the principles"* of Trotskyism. These comments were not made in the heat of the civil war, but afterward during peacetime. Notice Trotsky admits that a *"social revolution"* had swept through the Tsarist army. His actions, he also admits, reversed that revolution and replaced its organs of *"self-government"* with ones identical to the old regime. When that happens it is usually called by its true name, namely **counter**-revolution.

For a Trotskyist, therefore, to present themselves as a supporter of self-managed militias is the height of hypocrisy. The Stalinists repeated the same arguments used by Trotsky and acted in exactly the same way in their campaign against the CNT and POUM militias. Certain acts have certain ramifications, no matter who does them or under what government. In other words, abolishing democracy in the army will generate autocratic tendencies which will undermine socialistic ones **no matter who does it**. The same means cannot be used to serve different ends as there is an intrinsic relationship between the instruments used and the results obtained -- that is why the bourgeoisie do not encourage democracy in the army or the workplace! Just as the capitalist workplace is organised to produce proletarians and capital along with cloth and steel, the capitalist army is organised to protect and reinforce minority power. The army and the capitalist workplace are not simply means or neutral instruments. Rather they are social structures which generate, reinforce and **protect** specific social relations. This is what the Russian masses instinctively realised and conducted a social-revolution in both the army and workplace to **transform** these structures into ones which would enhance rather than crush freedom and working class autonomy. The Bolsheviks reversed these movements in favour of structures which reproduced capitalist social relationships **and justified it in terms of "socialism."** Unfortunately, capitalist means and organisations would only generate capitalist ends.

It was for these reasons that the CNT and its militias were organised from the bottom up in a self-managed way. It was the only way **socialists** and a socialist society could be created -- that is why anarchists are anarchists, we recognise that a socialist (i.e. libertarian) society cannot be created by authoritarian organisations. As the justly famous Sonvillier Circular argued *"[h]ow could one expect an egalitarian society to emerge out of an authoritarian organisation? It is impossible."* [quoted by Brian Morris, **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 61] Just as the capitalist state cannot be utilised by the working class for its own ends, capitalist/statist organisational principles such as appointment, autocratic management, centralisation and delegation of power and so on cannot be utilised for social liberation. They are not designed to be used for that purpose (and, indeed, they were developed in the first place to stop it and enforce minority rule!).

In addition, to abolish democracy on the pretext that people are not ready for it ensures that it will never exist. Anarchists, in contrast, argue that *"[o]nly freedom or the struggle for freedom can be the school for freedom."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 59]

Secondly, how can a "*socialist consciousness*" be encouraged, or continue to exist, without socialist institutions to express it? Such a position is idealistic nonsense, expressing the wishful notion that the social relationships people experiences does not impact on those involved. In effect, Rees is arguing that as long as the leaders have the "right ideas" it does not matter how an organisation is structured. However, how people develop, the ideas they have in their heads, are influenced by the relations they create with each other -- autocratic organisations do not encourage self-management or socialism, they produce bureaucrats and subjects.

An autocratic organisation **cannot** encourage a socialist consciousness by its institutional life, only in spite of it. For example, the capitalist workplace encourages a spirit of revolt and solidarity in those subject to its hierarchical management and this is expressed in direct action -- by **resisting** the authority of the boss. It only generates a socialist perspective via resistance to it. Similarly with the Red Army. Education programs to encourage reading and writing does not generate socialists, it generates soldiers who are literate. If these soldiers do not have the institutional means to manage their own affairs, a forum to discuss political and social issues, then they remain order takers and any socialist conscious will wither and die.

The Red Army was based on the fallacy that the structure of an organisation is unimportant and it is the politics of those in charge that matter (Marxists make a similar claim for the state, so we should not be too surprised). However, it is no co-incidence that bourgeois structures are always hierarchical -- self-management is a politically educational experience which erodes the power of those in charge and transforms those who do it. It is to stop this development, to protect the power of the ruling few, that the bourgeois always turn to centralised, hierarchical structures -- they reinforce elite rule. You cannot use the same form of organisation and expect different results -- they are designed that way for a reason! To twitter on about the Red Army being "*filled with a magnificent socialist consciousness*" while justifying the elimination of the only means by which that consciousness could survive, prosper and grow indicates a complete lack of socialist politics and any understanding of materialist philosophy.

Moreover, one of the basic principles of the anarchist militia was equality between all members. Delegates received the same pay, ate the same food, wore the same clothes as the rest of the unit. Not so in the Red Army. Trotsky thought, when he was in charge of it, that inequality was "*in some cases . . . quite explicable and unavoidable*" and that "[e]very Red Army warrior fully accepts that the commander of his unit should enjoy certain privileges as regards lodging, means of transport and even uniform." [**More Equality!**]

Of course, Trotsky would think that, being the head commander of the Army. Unfortunately, because soldier democracy had been abolished by decree, we have no idea whether the rank and file of the Red Army agreed with him. For Trotsky, privilege "*is, in itself, in certain cases, inevitable*" but "[o] **stentatious indulgence in privilege is not just evil, it is a crime.**" Hence his desire for "*more*" equality rather than equality -- to aim for "*eliminating the most abnormal [!] phenomena, softening [!] the inequality that exists*" rather than abolish it as they did in the CNT militias. [**Op. Cit.**]

But, of course, such inequalities that existed in the Red Army are to be expected in an autocratically run organisation. The inequality inherent in hierarchy, the inequality in power between the order giver and order taker, will, sooner or later, be reflected in material inequality. As happened in the Red Army (and all across the "workers' state"). All Trotsky wanted was for those in power to be respectable in their privilege rather than showing it off. The anarchist militias did not have this problem because being libertarian, delegates were subject to recall and power rested with the rank and file, **not** an elected government.

As another irony of history, Morrow quotes a Bolshevik-Leninist leaflet (which "*points the road*") as demanding "*[e]qual pay for officers and soldiers.*" [Op. Cit., p. 191] Obviously these good Trotskyists had no idea what their hero actually wrote on this subject or did when in power. We have to wonder how long their egalitarian demands would have survived once they had acquired power -- if the experience of Trotsky in power is anything to go by, not very long.

Trotsky did not consider how the abolition of democracy and its replacement with an autocratic system would effect the morale or consciousness of the soldiers subject to it. He argued that in the Red Army "*the best soldier does not mean at all the most submissive and uncomplaining.*" Rather, "*the best soldier will nearly always be sharper, more observant and critical than the others. . . by his critical comments, based on facts accessible to all, he will pretty often undermine the prestige of the commanders and commissars in the eyes of the mass of the soldiers.*" However, not having a democratic army the soldiers could hardly express their opinion other than rebellion or by indiscipline. Trotsky, however, adds a comment that makes his praise of critical soldiers seem less than sincere. He states that "*counter-revolutionary elements, agents of the enemy, make conscious and skilful use of the circumstances I have mentioned [presumably excessive privilege rather than critical soldiers, but who can tell] in order to stir up discontent and intensify antagonism between rank and file and the commanding personnel.*" [Op. Cit.] The question, of course, arises of who can tell the difference between a critical soldier and a "*counter-revolutionary element*"? Without a democratic organisation, soldier are dependent (as in any other hierarchy) on the power of the commanders, commissars and, in the Red Army, the Bolshevik Secret Police (the Cheka). In other words, members of the very class of autocrats their comments are directed against.

Without democratic organisation, the Red Army could never be a means for creating a socialist society, only a means of reproducing autocratic organisation. The influence of the autocratic organisation created by Trotsky had a massive impact on the development of the Soviet State. According to Trotsky himself:

*"The demobilisation of the Red Army of five million played no small role in the formation of the bureaucracy. The victorious commanders assumed leading posts in the local Soviets, in economy, in education, and they persistently introduced everywhere that regime which had ensured success in the civil war. Thus on all sides the masses were pushed away gradually from actual participation in the leadership of the country."* [**The Revolution Betrayed**]

Obviously Trotsky had forgotten who created the regime in the Red Army in the first place! He also seems to have forgotten that after militarising the Red Army, he turned his power to militarising workers (starting with the railway workers). He also forgets that Lenin had been arguing that workers' must "**unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of labour**" from April 1918 along with granting "*individual executives dictatorial power (or 'unlimited' powers)*" and that "*the appointment of individuals, dictators with unlimited powers*" was, in fact, "*in general compatible with the fundamental principles of Soviet government*" simply because "*the history of revolutionary movements*" had "*shown*" that "*the dictatorship of individuals was very often the expression, the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of revolutionary classes.*" He notes that "*[u]ndoubtedly, the dictatorship of individuals was compatible with bourgeois democracy.*" [**The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, p. 34 and p. 32]

In other words, Lenin urged the creation of, and implemented, **bourgeois** forms of workplace management based on the appointment of managers from above. To indicate that this was not in contradiction with Soviet principles, he points to the example of **bourgeois** revolutions! As if bourgeois methods do not reflect bourgeois interests and goals. In addition, these "dictators" were given the same autocratic powers Trotsky claimed the demobilisation of the Red Army four years later had "*persistently introduced everywhere.*" Yes, "*on all sides the masses were pushed away gradually from actual participation in the leadership of the country*" but the process had started immediately after the October Revolution and was urged and organised by Lenin and Trotsky before the Civil War had started.

Lenin's support for appointment of ("*dictatorial*") managers from above makes Trotsky's 1922 comment that the "*Red Army was built from above, in accordance with the principles of the dictatorship of the working class*" take on a new light. [**The Path of the Red Army**] After all, Lenin argued for an economy system built from above via the appointment of managers before the start of the Civil War. The Red Army was created from above via the appointment of officers before the start of the Civil War. Things had certainly changed since Lenin had argued in **The State and Revolution** that "*[a]ll officials, without exception, [would be] elected and subject to recall at any time.*" This would "*serve as the bridge between capitalism and socialism.*" [**The Essential Lenin**, p. 302] One major difference, given Trotsky's rationales, seems to be that the Bolsheviks were now in power and so election and recall without exception could be forgotten and replaced by appointment.

In summary, Trotsky's argument against functional democracy in the Red Army could, and was, used to justify the suppression of any democratic decision or organisation of the working class the Bolshevik government disapproved of. He used the same argument, for example, to justify the undermining of the Factory Committee movement and the struggle for workers' control in favour of one-man management -- the form of management in the workplace was irrelevant as the workers' were now citizens of a workers' state and under a workers' government (see [section 17](#)). Needless to say, a state which eliminates functional democracy in the grassroots will not stay democratic for long (and to remain the sovereign power in society, any state will have to eliminate it or, at the very least, bring it under central control -- as institutionalised in the USSR constitution of 1918).

Instead of seeing socialism as a product of free association, of working class self-organisation from the bottom up by self-managed organisations, Trotsky saw it as a centralised, top-down system. Of course, being a democrat of sorts he saw the Bolshevik Government as being elected by the mass of the population (or, more correctly, he saw it being elected by the national congress of soviets). However, his vision of centralisation of power provided the rationale for destroying functional democracy in the grass-roots -- and without healthy roots, any plant will wither and die. Little wonder, then, that the Bolshevik experiment proved such a disaster -- yes, the civil war did not help but the logic of Bolshevism has started to undermine working class self-management **before** it started.

Thus Trotsky's argument that the democratic nature of a workers' army or militia is irrelevant because a "workers' state" exists is flawed on many different levels. And the experience of Trotsky in power indicates well the poverty of Trotskyism and Morrow's criticism of the CNT -- his suggestion for a self-managed militia is pure anarchism with nothing to do with Leninism and the experience of Bolshevism in power.

## 12. What is ironic about Morrow's vision of revolution?

Equally ironic as Morrow's comments concerning democratic militias (see [last section](#)) is his argument that the revolution needed to *"give the factory committees, militia committees, peasant committees, a democratic character, by having them elected by all workers in each unit; to bring together these elected delegates in village, city, regional councils . . . [and] a national congress."* [Op. Cit., p. 100]

Such a position is correct, such developments were required to ensure the success of the revolution. However, it is somewhat ironic that a Trotskyist would present them as somehow being opposed to anarchism when, in fact, they are pure anarchism. Indeed, anarchists were arguing in favour of workers' councils more than five decades before Lenin discovered the importance of the Russian Soviets in 1917. Moreover, as we will indicate, what is even more ironic is the fact that Trotskyism does not actually see these organs as an expression of working class self-management and power but rather as a means of the party to take power. In addition, we must also note that it was Lenin and Trotsky who helped undermine the Russian workers' factory committees, militia committees and so on in favour of party rule. We will discuss each of these ironies in turn.

Firstly, as noted, such Morrow's stated position is exactly what Bakunin and the anarchist movement had been arguing since the 1860s. To quote Bakunin:

*"the federative alliance of all working men's associations . . . constitute the Commune . . . all provinces, communes and associations . . . by first **reorganising** on revolutionary lines . . . [will] constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces . . . [and] organise a revolutionary force capable defeating reaction . . . [and for] self-defence . . . [The] revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations . . . organised from the bottom upwards by means*

*of revolutionary delegation. . .* " [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 170-2]

*"The future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* [Op. Cit., p. 206]

Here is Kropotkin presenting the same vision:

*"independent Communes for the territorial organisation, and of federations of Trade Unions [i.e. workplace associations] for the organisation of men [and women] in accordance with their different functions. . . [and] free combines and societies . . . for the satisfaction of all possible and imaginable needs, economic, sanitary, and educational; for mutual protection, for the propaganda of ideas, for arts, for amusement, and so on."* [Peter Kropotkin, **Evolution and Environment**, p. 79]

*"the complete independence of the Communes, the Federation of free communes and the social revolution in the communes, that is to say the formation of associated productive groups in place of the state organisation."* [quoted by Camillo Berneri, **Peter Kropotkin: His Federalist Ideas**]

Bakunin also mentions that those defending the revolution would have a say in the revolutionary structure -- the *"Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades and by the creation of a Revolutionary Council composed of . . . delegates from each barricade . . . vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates."* [Op. Cit., p. 171] This obviously parallels the democratic nature of the CNT militias.

Interestingly enough, Marx commented that *"odd barricades, these barricades of the Alliance [Bakunin's anarchist organisation], where instead of fighting they spend their time writing mandates."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 111] Obviously the importance of militia self-management was as lost on him as it was on Lenin and Trotsky -- under Marx's state would its defenders just be cannon-fodder, obeying their government and officers without the ability to help determine the revolution they were fighting for? Apparently so. Moreover, Marx quotes Bakunin's support for *"responsible and recallable delegates, vested with their imperative mandates"* without commenting on the fact Bakunin **predicts** those features of the Paris Commune Marx praised in his **Civil War in France** by a number of years. Looks like Morrow is not the first Marxist to appropriate anarchist ideas without crediting their source.

As can be seen, Morrow's suggestion on how to push the Spanish Revolution forward just repeats the ideas of anarchism. Any one familiar with anarchist theory would not be surprised by this as they would know that we have seen a free federation of workplace and communal associations as the basis of a revolution and, therefore, a free society since the time of Proudhon. Thus Morrow's "Trotskyist" vision

of a federation of workers' council actually reproduces basic anarchist ideas, ideas which pre-date Lenin's support for soviets as the basis of his "workers' state" by over half a century (we will indicate the fundamental difference between the anarchist vision and the Trotskyist in due course).

As an aside, these quotes by Bakunin and Kropotkin make a mockery of Lenin's assertion that anarchists do not analysis "*what to put in the place of what has been destroyed [i.e. the old state machine] and how*" [Essential Works of Lenin, p. 362] Anarchists have always suggested a clear answer to what we should "*replace*" the state with -- namely free federations of working class organisations created in the struggle against capital and state. To state otherwise is to either be ignorant of anarchist theory or seek to deceive.

Some anarchists like Bakunin and the anarcho-syndicalists and collectivists saw these organisations being based primarily on libertarian labour unions complemented by whatever organisations were created in the process of revolution ("*The future society must be nothing else than the universalisation of the organisation that the International has formed for itself*" -- "*The Sonvillier Circular*" echoing Bakunin, quoted by Brian Morris, **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 61] Others like Kropotkin and anarcho-communists saw it as a free federation of organisations created by the process of revolution itself. While anarchists did not present a blueprint of what would occur after the revolution (and rightly so) they did provide a general outline in terms of a decentralised, free federation of self-managed workers' associations as well as linking these future forms of working class self-government with the forms generated in the current class struggle in the here and now.

Similarly, Lenin's other assertion that anarchists do not study "*the concrete lessons of previous proletarian revolutions*" [Ibid.] is equally baseless, as any one reading, say, Kropotkin's work would soon realise (for example, **The Great French Revolution, Modern Science and Anarchism** or his pamphlet "*Revolutionary Government*"). Starting with Bakunin, anarchists analysed the experiences of the Paris Commune and the class struggle itself to generalise political conclusions from them (for example, the vision of a free society as a federation of workers' associations is clearly a product of analysing the class struggle and looking at the failures of the Commune). Given that Lenin states in the same work that "*anarchists had tried to claim the Paris Commune as their 'own'*" [p. 350] suggests that anarchists **had** studied the Paris Commune and he was aware of that fact. Of course, Lenin states that we had "*failed to give . . . a true solution*" to its lessons -- given that the solution anarchists proposed was a federation of workers councils to smash the state and defend the revolution his comments seem strange as this, according to **The State and Revolution**, is the "Marxist" solution as well (in fact, as we will soon see, Lenin played lip service to this and instead saw the solution as government by his party rather than the masses as a whole).

Thus, Morrow's vision of what was required for a successful revolution parallels that of anarchism. We shall now discuss where and how they differ.

The essential difference between the anarchist and Trotskyist vision of workers' councils as the basis of a revolution is what role these councils should play. For anarchists, these federations of self-managed

assemblies is the actual framework of the revolution (and the free society it is trying to create). As Murray Bookchin puts it:

*"There can be no separation of the revolutionary process from the revolutionary goal. A society based on self-administration must be achieved by means of self-administration . . . Assembly and community must arise from within the revolutionary process itself; indeed, the revolutionary process must **be** the formation of assembly and community, and with it, the destruction of power. Assembly and community must become 'fighting words,' not distinct panaceas. They must be created as **modes of struggle** against the existing society, not as theoretical or programmatic abstractions. . . The factory committees . . . must be managed directly by workers' assemblies in the factories. . . neighbourhood committees, councils and boards must be rooted completely in the neighbourhood assemble. They must be answerable at every point to the assembly, they and their work must be under continual review by the assembly; and finally, their members must be subject to immediate recall by the assembly. The specific gravity of society, in short, must be shifted to its base -- the armed people in permanent assembly."* [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, pp. 167-9]

Thus the anarchist social revolution sees workers' councils as organs of working class self-management, the means by which they control their own lives and create a new society based on their needs, visions, dreams and hopes. They are not seen as means by which others, the revolutionary party, seized power **on behalf** of the people as Trotskyists do.

Harsh words? No, as can be seen from Morrow who is quite clear on the role of working class organisation -- it is seen purely as the means by which the party can take power. As he argues, there is *"no magic in the soviet form: it is merely the most accurate, most quickly reflecting and responsively changing form of political representation of the masses. . . It would provide the arena in which the revolutionary party can win the support of the working class."* [Op. Cit., p. 136]

He states that initially the *"reformist majority in the executive committee would decline the assumption of state power. But the workers could still find in the soviets their natural organs of struggle until the genuinely revolutionary elements in the various parties banded together to win a revolutionary majority in the congress and establish a workers' state."* In other words, the *"workers' state, the dictatorship of the proletariat . . . can only be brought into existence by the direct, **political** intervention of the masses, through the factory and village councils (soviets) at that point where a majority in the soviets is wielded by the workers' party or parties which are determined to overthrow the bourgeois state. Such was the basic theoretical contribution of Lenin."* [Op. Cit., p. 100 and p. 113]

From an anarchist perspective, this indicates well the fundamental difference between anarchism and Trotskyism. For anarchists, the existence of an *"executive committee"* indicates that the workers' council do not, in fact, have power in society -- rather it is the minority in the executive committee who have been delegated power. Rather than govern themselves and society directly, workers are turned into



voters implementing the decisions their leaders have made on their behalf. If revolutionary bodies like workers' councils **did** create a "workers' state" (as Morrow recommends) then their power would be transferred and centralised into the hands of a so-called "revolutionary" government. In this, Morrow follows his guru Trotsky:

*"the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard. In itself the necessity for state power arises from an insufficient cultural level of the masses and their heterogeneity. In the revolutionary vanguard, organised in a party, is crystallised the aspirations of the masses to obtain their freedom. Without the confidence of the class in the vanguard, without support of the vanguard by the class, there can be no talk of the conquest of power.*

*"In this sense the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are the work of the whole class, but only under the leadership of the vanguard."* [Trotsky, **Stalinism and Bolshevism**]

Thus, rather than the working class as a whole "seizing power", it is the "vanguard" which takes power -- "a revolutionary party, even after seizing power . . . is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society." [**Ibid.**] He mocks the anarchist idea that a socialist revolution should be based on the self-management of workers within their own autonomous class organisations:

*"Those who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."* [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 18]

In this he followed comments made when he was in power. In 1920 he argued that "[w]e have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorships of the Soviets the dictatorship of the party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the . . . party . . . [that] the Soviets . . . [became] transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class." [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 109] Any claims that Trotsky's infamously authoritarian (indeed dictatorial) politics were a temporary aberration caused by the necessities of the Russian Civil War are refuted by these quotes -- 17 years later he was still arguing the same point.

He had the same vision of party dictatorship being the basis of a revolution in 1924. Commenting on the Bolshevik Party conference of April 1917, he states that "whole of . . . Conference was devoted to the following fundamental question: Are we heading toward the conquest of power in the name of the socialist revolution or are we helping (anybody and everybody) to complete the democratic revolution? . . . Lenin's position was this: . . . the capture of the soviet majority; the overthrow of the Provisional Government; the seizure of power through the soviets." Note, **through** the soviets not **by** the soviets thus indicating the fact the Party would hold the real power, not the soviets of workers' delegates.

Moreover, he states that *"to prepare the insurrection and to carry it out under cover of preparing for the Second Soviet Congress and under the slogan of defending it, was of inestimable advantage to us."* He continued by noting that it was *"one thing to prepare an armed insurrection under the naked slogan of the seizure of power by the party, and quite another thing to prepare and then carry out an insurrection under the slogan of defending the rights of the Congress of Soviets."* The Soviet Congress just provided *"the legal cover"* for the Bolshevik plans rather than a desire to see the Soviets actually start managing society. [**The Lessons of October**]

We are not denying that Trotskyists do aim to gain a majority within working class conferences. That is clear. Anarchists also seek to gain the support of the mass of the population. It is what they do next that counts. Trotskyists seek to create a government above these organisations and dominate the executive committees that requires. Thus power in society shifts to the top, to the leaders of the centralised party in charge of the centralised state. The workers' become mere electors rather than actual controllers of the revolution. Anarchists, in contrast, seek to dissolve power back into the hands of society and empower the individual by giving them a direct say in the revolution through their workplace, community and militia assemblies and their councils and conferences.

Trotskyists, therefore, advocate workers councils because they see them as **the** means the vanguard party can take power. Rather than seeing socialism or "workers' power" as a society in which everyone would directly control their own affairs, Trotskyists see it in terms of working class people delegating their power into the hands of a government. Needless to say, the two things are not identical and, in practice, the government soon turns from being the people's servant into its master.

It is clear that Morrow always discusses workers councils in terms of the strategy and program of the party, not the value that workers councils have as organs of direct workers control of society. He clearly advocates workers councils because he sees them as the best way for the vanguard party to rally workers around its leadership and organise the seizure of state power. At no time does he see them as means by which working class people can govern themselves directly -- quite the reverse.

The danger of such an approach is obvious. The government will soon become isolated from the mass of the population and, due to the centralised nature of the state, difficult to hold accountable. Moreover, given the dominant role of the party in the new state and the perspective that it is the workers' vanguard, it becomes increasingly likely that it will place its power before that of those it claims to represent.

Certainly Trotsky's role in the Russian revolution tells us that the power of the party was more important to him than democratic control by workers through mass bodies. When the workers and sailors of the Kronstadt navy base rebelled in 1921, in solidarity with striking workers in Petrograd, they were demanding freedom of the press for socialist and anarchist groups and new elections to the soviets. But the reaction of the Bolshevik leadership was to crush the Kronstadt dissent in blood. Trotsky's attitude towards workers democracy was clearly expressed at the time:

*"They [the dissent Bolsheviks of the Workers' Opposition] have placed the workers' right*

*to elect representatives above the Party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the worker's democracy!"*

He spoke of the "*revolutionary historic birthright of the Party*" and that it "*is obliged to maintain its dictatorship . . . regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class . . . The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy.*" [quoted by M. Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 78]

This perspective naturally follows from Trotsky's vanguardist politics. For Leninists, the party is the bearer of "*socialist consciousness*" and, according to Lenin in **What is to be Done?**, workers, by their own efforts, can only achieve a "*trade union*" consciousness and, indeed, "*there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses of workers in the process of their struggle*" and so "*the only choice is: either bourgeois or socialist ideology*" (the later being developed not by workers but by the "*bourgeois intelligentsia*"). [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 82 and p. 74] To weaken or question the party means to weaken or question the socialist nature of the revolution and so weaken the "*dictatorship of the proletariat.*" Thus we have the paradoxical situation of the "proletarian dictatorship" repressing workers, eliminating democracy and maintaining itself against the "*passing moods*" of the workers (which means rejecting what democracy is all about). Hence Lenin's comment at a conference of the Cheka (his political police) in 1920:

*"Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the other hand, revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 24, p. 170]

Significantly, of the 17 000 camp detainees on whom statistical information was available on 1 November 1920, peasants and workers constituted the largest groups, at 39% and 34% respectively. Similarly, of the 40 913 prisoners held in December 1921 (of whom 44% had been committed by the Cheka) nearly 84% were illiterate or minimally educated, clearly, therefore, either peasants or workers. [George Leggett, **The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police**, p. 178] Needless to say, Lenin failed to mention this aspect of his system in **The State and Revolution** (a failure shared by Morrow and later Trotskyists).

It is hard to combine these facts and Lenin's and Trotsky's comments with the claim that the "workers' state" is an instrument of class rule -- after all, Lenin is acknowledging that coercion will be exercised against members of the working class as well. The question of course arises -- who decides what a "*wavering*" or "*unstable*" element is? Given their comments on the role of the party and the need for the party to assume power, it will mean in practice whoever rejects the government's decisions (for example, strikers, local soviets who reject central decrees and instructions, workers who vote for anarchists or parties other than the Bolshevik party in elections to soviets, unions and so on, socialists and anarchists, etc.). Given a hierarchical system, Lenin's comment is simply a justification for state repression of its

enemies (including elements within or even the whole working class).

It could be argued, however, that workers could use the soviets to recall the government. However, this fails for two reasons (we will ignore the question of the interests of the bureaucratic machine which will inevitably surround a centralised body -- see [section H.3.9](#) for further discussion).

Firstly, the Leninist state will be highly centralised, with power flowing from the top-down. This means that in order to revoke the government, all the soviets in all parts of the country must, at the same time, recall their delegates and organise a national congress of soviets (which, we stress, is not in permanent session). The local soviets are bound to carry out the commands of the central government (to quote the Soviet constitution of 1918 -- they are to "*carry out all orders of the respective higher organs of the soviet power*"). Any independence on their part would be considered "*wavering*" or an expression of "*unstable*" natures and so subject to "*revolutionary coercion*". In a highly centralised system, the means of accountability is reduced to the usual bourgeois level -- vote in the general election every few years (which, in any case, can be annulled by the government to ensure that the soviets do not go back into the "*mud*" via the "*passing moods*" caused by the "*insufficient cultural level of the masses*"). In other words, the soviet form may be the "*most accurate, most quickly reflecting and responsively changing form of political representation of the masses*" (to use Morrow's words) but only **before** they become transformed into state organs.

Secondly, "*revolutionary coercion*" against "*wavering*" elements does not happen in isolation. It will encourage critical workers to keep quiet in case they, too, are deemed "*unstable*" and become subject to "*revolutionary*" coercion. As a government policy it can have no other effect than deterring democracy.

Thus Trotskyist politics provides the rationale for eliminating even the limited role of soviets for electing representatives they hold in that ideology.

Morrow argues that "*[o]ne must never forget . . . that soviets **do not begin** as organs of state power*" rather they start as "*organs defending the workers' daily interests*" and include "*powerful strike committees.*" [Op. Cit., p. 136] That is true, initially workers' councils are expressions of working class power and are organs of working class self-management and self-activity. They are subject to direct control from below and unite from the bottom up. However, once they are turned into "*organs of state power*" their role (to re-quote the Soviet constitution of 1918) becomes that of "*carry[ing] out all orders of the respective higher organs of the soviet power.*" Soviet power is replaced by party power and they become a shell of their former selves -- essentially rubber-stamps for the decisions of the party central committee.

Ironically, Morrow quotes the main theoretician of the Spanish Socialist Party as stating "*the organ of the proletarian dictatorship will be the Socialist Party*" and states that they "*were saying precisely what the anarchist leaders had been accusing both communists and revolutionary socialists of meaning by the proletarian dictatorship.*" [Op. Cit., p. 99 and p. 100] This is hardly surprising, as this was what the likes of Lenin and Trotsky **had** been arguing. As well as the quotes we have provided above, we may

add Trotsky's comment that the *"fundamental instrument of proletarian revolution is the party."* [**Lessons of October**] And the resolution of the Second World Congress of the Communist International which stated that *"[e]very class struggle is a political struggle. The goal of this struggle . . . is the conquest of political power. Political power cannot be seized, organised and operated except through a political party."* [cited by Duncan Hallas, **The Comintern**, p. 35] In addition, we may quote Lenin's opinion that:

*"The very presentation of the question -- 'dictatorship of the Party **or** dictatorship of the class, dictatorship (Party) of the leaders **or** dictatorship (Party) of the masses?' -- is evidence of the most incredible and hopeless confusion of mind . . . [because] classes are usually . . . led by political parties. . . "*

And:

*"To go so far in this matter as to draw a contrast in general between the dictatorship of the masses and the dictatorship of the leaders, is ridiculously absurd and stupid."* [**Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder**, pp. 25-6 and p. 27]

As Lenin and Trotsky constantly argued, proletarian dictatorship was impossible without the political party of the workers (whatever its name). Indeed, to even discuss any difference between the dictatorship of the class and that of the party just indicated a confused mind. Hence Morrow's comments are incredulous, particularly as he himself stresses that the soviet form is useful purely as a means of gaining support for the revolutionary party which would take over the executive of the workers' councils. He clearly is aware that the party is the **essential** organ of proletarian rule from a Leninist perspective -- without the dictatorship of the party, Trotsky argues, the soviets fall back into the mud. Trotsky, indeed, stressed this need for the dictatorship of the party rather than of the proletariat in a letter written in 1937:

*"The revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is for me not a thing that one can freely accept or reject: It is an objective necessity imposed upon us by the social realities -- the class struggle, the heterogeneity of the revolutionary class, the necessity for a selected vanguard in order to assure the victory. The dictatorship of a party belongs to the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we can not jump over this chapter, which can open (not at one stroke) genuine human history. . . The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution . . . Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the 'dictatorship' of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions. The reason for the revolution comes from the circumstance that capitalism does not permit the material and the moral development of the masses."* [Trotsky, **Writings 1936-37**, pp. 513-4]

The net result of Bolshevik politics in Russia was that Lenin and Trotsky undermined the self-management of working class bodies during the Russian Revolution and **before** the Civil War started in May 1918. We have already chronicled Trotsky's elimination of democracy and equality in the Red Army (see [section 11](#)). A similar fate befell the factory committees (see [section 17](#)) and soviet democracy (as noted above). The logic of Bolshevism is such that at no point did Lenin describe the suppression of soviet democracy and workers' control as a defeat (indeed, as far as workers' control went Lenin quickly moved to a position favouring one-man management). We discuss the Russian Revolution in more detail in the appendix on "[What happened during the Russian Revolution?](#)" and so will not do so here.

All in all, while Morrow's rhetoric on the nature of the social revolution may sound anarchist, there are important differences between the two visions. While Trotskyists support workers' councils on purely instrumentalist grounds as the best means of gaining support for their party's assumption of governmental power, anarchists see workers' councils as the means by which people can revolutionise society and themselves by practising self-management in all aspects of their lives. The difference is important and its ramifications signify why the Russian Revolution became the "dictatorship **over** the proletariat" Bakunin predicted. His words still ring true:

*"[b]y popular government they [the Marxists] mean government of the people by a small under of representatives elected by the people. . . [That is,] government of the vast majority of the people by a privileged minority. But this minority, the Marxists say, will consist of workers. Yes, perhaps, of **former** workers, who, as soon as they become rulers or representatives of the people will cease to be workers and will begin to look upon the whole workers' world from the heights of the state. They will no longer represent the people but themselves and their own pretensions to govern the people."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 178]

It was for this reason that he argued the anarchists do *"not accept, even in the process of revolutionary transition, either constituent assemblies, provisional governments or so-called revolutionary dictatorships; because we are convinced that revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses, and that when it is concentrated in those of a few ruling individuals it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 237] The history of the Russian Revolution proved him right. Hence anarchist support for popular assemblies and federations of workers' councils as the framework of the social revolution rather than as a means to elect a "revolutionary" government.

One last point. We must point out that Morrow's follows Lenin in favouring executive committees associated with workers' councils. In this he actually ignores Marx's (and Lenin's, in **State and Revolution**) comments that the Paris Commune was *"to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time."* [**Selected Writings**, p. 287] The existence of executive committees was coded into the Soviet Union's 1918 Constitution. This suggests two things. Firstly, Leninism and Trotskyism differ on fundamental points with Marx and so the claim that Leninism equals

Marxism is difficult to support (the existence of libertarian Marxists like Anton Pannekoek and other council communists also disprove such claims). Secondly, it indicates that Lenin's claims in **State and Revolution** were ignored once the Bolsheviks took power so indicating that use of that work to prove the democratic nature of Bolshevism is flawed.

Moreover, Marx's support of the fusion of executive and legislative powers is not as revolutionary as some imagine. For anarchists, as Bookchin argues, "*[i]n point of fact, the consolidation of 'executive and legislative' functions in a single body was regressive. It simply identified the process of policy-making, a function that rightly should belong to the people in assembly, with the technical execution of these policies, a function that should be left to strictly administrative bodies subject to rotation, recall, limitations of tenure . . . Accordingly, the melding of policy formation with administration placed the institutional emphasis of classical [Marxist] socialism on centralised bodies, indeed, by an ironical twist of historical events, bestowing the privilege of formulating policy on the 'higher bodies' of socialist hierarchies and their execution precisely on the more popular 'revolutionary committees' below.*" [Toward an Ecological Society, pp. 215-6]

### 13. Why do anarchists reject the Marxist "workers' state"?

Morrow asserts two "*fundamental*" tenets of "*anarchism*" in his book [Op. Cit., pp. 101-2]. Unfortunately for him, his claims are somewhat at odds with reality. Anarchism, as we will prove in [section 14](#), does not hold one of the positions Morrow states it does. The first "*tenet*" of anarchism he fails to discuss at all and so the reader cannot understand **why** anarchists think as they do. We discuss this "*tenet*" here.

The first tenet is that anarchism "*has consistently refused to recognise the distinction between a bourgeois and a workers' state. Even in the days of Lenin and Trotsky, anarchism denounced the Soviet Union as an exploiters' regime.*" [Op. Cit., p. 101] It is due to this, he argues, the CNT co-operated with the bourgeois state:

*"The false anarchist teachings on the nature of the state . . . should logically have led them [the CNT] to refuse governmental participation in any event . . . the anarchists were in the intolerable position of objecting to the necessary administrative co-ordination and centralisation of the work they had already begun. Their anti-statism 'as such' had to be thrown off. What **did** remain, to wreck disaster in the end, was their failure to recognise the distinction between a workers' and a bourgeois state."* [Op. Cit., p. 101]

Needless to say, Morrow does not bother to explain **why** anarchists consider the bourgeois and workers' state to be similar. If he did then perhaps his readers would agree with the anarchists on this matter. However, before discussing that we have to address a misrepresentation of Morrow's. Rather than the expression of anarchist politics, the actions of the CNT were in direct opposition to them. As we showed in the [section 12](#), anarchists see a social revolution in terms of creating federations of workers associations (i.e. workers' councils). It was this vision that had created the structure of the CNT (as

Bakunin had argued, *"the organisation of the trade sections and their representation in the Chambers of Labour . . . bear in themselves the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old one. They are creating not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself"* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 255]).

Thus, the social revolution would see the workers' organisation (be they labour unions or spontaneously created organs) *"tak[ing] the revolution into its own hands . . . an earnest international organisation of workers' associations . . . [would] replac[e] this departing political world of States and bourgeoisie."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 110] This is **precisely** what the CNT did not do -- rather it decided against following anarchist theory and instead decided to co-operate with other parties and unions in the *"Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias"* (at least temporarily until the CNT stronghold in Saragossa was liberated by CNT militias). In effect, it created a UGT-like "Alliance" with other anti-fascist parties and unions and rejected its pre-war policy of "unity from below." The CNT and FAI leadership decided not to talk of libertarian communism but only of the fight against fascism. A greater mistake they could not have made.

An anarchist approach in the aftermath of the fascist uprising would have meant replacing the Generalitat with a federal assembly of delegates from workplace and local community assemblies (a Defence Council, to use a CNT expression). Only popular assemblies (not political parties) would be represented (parties would have an influence only in proportion to their influence in the basic assemblies). All the CNT would have had to do was to call a Regional Congress of unions and invite the UGT, independent unions and unorganised workplaces to send delegates to create the framework of this system. This, we must stress, was **not** done. We will discuss why in [section 20](#) and so will refrain from doing so here. However, **because** the CNT in effect "postponed" the political aspects of the social revolution (namely, to quote Kropotkin, to *"smash the State and replace it with the Federation [of Communes]"* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 259]) the natural result would be exactly as Morrow explains:

*"But isn't it a far cry from the failure to create the organs to overthrow the bourgeoisie, to the acceptance of the role of class collaboration with the bourgeoisie? Not at all . . . Without developing soviets -- workers' councils -- it was inevitable that even the anarchists and the POUM would drift into governmental collaboration with the bourgeoisie."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 88-9]

As Kropotkin predicted, *"there can be no half-way house: either the Commune is to be absolutely free to endow itself with whatever institutions it wishes and introduce all reforms and revolutions it may deem necessary, or else it will remain . . . a mere subsidiary of the State, chained in its every movement."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 259] Without an alternative means of co-ordinating the struggle, the CNT would, as Morrow argued, have little choice but to collaborate with the state. However, rather than being a product of anarchist theory, as Morrow states, this came about by **ignoring** that theory (see [section 20](#)).

This can be seen from the false alternative used to justify the CNT's and FAI's actions -- namely, *"either libertarian communism, which means anarchist dictatorship, or democracy, which means*



*collaboration.*" The creation of libertarian communism is done **from below** by those subject to capitalist and statist hierarchy overthrowing those with power over them by smashing the state machine and replacing it with self-managed organisations as well as expropriating capital and placing it under workers' self-management. As Murray Bookchin argues:

*"Underlying all [the] errors [of the CNT], at least in theoretical terms, was the CNT-FAI's absurd notion that if it assumed power in the areas it controlled, it was establishing a 'State.' As long as the institutions of power consisted of armed workers and peasants as distinguished from a professional bureaucracy, police force, army, and cabal of politicians and judges, they were no[t] a State . . . These institutions, in fact comprised a revolutionary people in arms . . . not a professional apparatus that could be regarded as a State in any meaningful sense of the term. . . That the 'taking of power' by an armed people in militias, libertarian unions and federations, peasant communes and industrial collectives could be viewed as an 'anarchist dictatorship' reveals the incredible confusion that filled the minds of the 'influential militants.'" ["Looking Back at Spain," pp. 53-96, **The Radical Papers**, pp. 86-7]*

This perspective explains why anarchists do not see any fundamental difference between a so-called "workers' state" and the existing state. For anarchists, the state is based fundamentally on hierarchical power -- the delegation of power into the hands of a few, of a government, of an "executive" committee. Unlike Lenin, who stressed the "bodies of armed men" aspect of the state, anarchists consider the real question as one of who will tell these "bodies of armed men" what to do. Will it be the people as a whole (as expressed through their self-managed organisations) or will be it a government (perhaps elected by representative organisations)?

If it **was** simply a question of consolidating a revolution and its self-defence then there would be no argument:

*"But perhaps the truth is simply this: . . . [some] take the expression 'dictatorship of the proletariat' to mean simply the revolutionary action of the workers in taking possession of the land and the instruments of labour, and trying to build a society and organise a way of life in which there will be no place for a class that exploits and oppresses the producers.*

*"Thus constructed, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' would be the effective power of all workers trying to bring down capitalist society and would thus turn into Anarchy as soon as resistance from reactionaries would have ceased and no one can any longer seek to compel the masses by violence to obey and work for him. In which case, the discrepancy between us would be nothing more than a question of semantics. Dictatorship of the proletariat would signify the dictatorship of everyone, which is to say, it would be a dictatorship no longer, just as government by everybody is no longer a government in the authoritarian, historical and practical sense of the word.*

*"But the real supporters of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' do not take that line, as they are making quite plain in Russia. Of course, the proletariat has a hand in this, just as the people has a part to play in democratic regimes, that is to say, to conceal the reality of things. In reality, what we have is the dictatorship of one party, or rather, of one' party's leaders: a genuine dictatorship, with its decrees, its penal sanctions, its henchmen and above all its armed forces, which are at present [1919] also deployed in the defence of the revolution against its external enemies, but which will tomorrow be used to impose the dictator's will upon the workers, to apply a break on revolution, to consolidate the new interests in the process of emerging and protect a new privileged class against the masses."* [Malatesta, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, pp. 38-9]

Maurice Brinton sums up the issue well when he argued that *"workers' power" "cannot be identified or equated with the power of the Party -- as it repeatedly was by the Bolsheviks . . . What 'taking power' really implies is that the vast majority of the working class at last realises its ability to manage both production and society -- and organises to this end."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. xiv]

The question is, therefore, one of **who** "seizes power" -- will it be the mass of the population or will it be a party claiming to represent the mass of the population. The difference is vital -- and anyone who confuses the issue (like Lenin) does so either out of stupidity or vested interests.

If it **is** the mass of people then they have to express themselves and their power (i.e. the power to manage their own affairs). That requires that individuals -- no matter where they are, be it in the workplace, community or on the front line -- are part of self-managed organisations. Only by self-management in functional groups can working class people be said to controlling their own lives and determining their own fate. Such a system of popular assemblies and their means of defence would not be a state in the anarchist sense of the word.

As we argued in [section 12](#), the Trotskyist vision of revolution, while seeming in some ways similar to that of anarchists, differ on this question. For Trotskyists, the **party** takes power, **not** the mass of the population directly. Only if you view "proletarian" seizure of power in terms of electing a political party to government could you see the elimination of functional democracy in the armed forces and the workplaces as no threat to working class power. Given Trotsky's actual elimination of democracy in the Red Army and Navy plus his comments on one-man management (and their justifications -- see sections [11](#) and [17](#)) it is clear that Trotskyists consider the workers' state in terms of party government, **not** self-management, **not** functional direct democracy.

Yes, the Trotskyists do claim that it is the workers, via their soviets, who will elect the government and hold it accountable but such a position fails to realise that a social revolution can only be created from below, by the direct action of the mass of the population. By delegating power into the hands of a few, the revolution is distorted. The initiative and power no longer rests in the hands of the mass of the population and so they can no longer take part in the constructive work of the revolution **and so it will not reflect their interests and needs**. As power flows from the top-down, bureaucratic distortions are

inevitable.

Moreover, the government will inevitably clash with its subjects and Trotskyist theory provides the justification for the government imposing its wishes and negating workers' democracy (see [section 12](#) for evidence for this claim). Moreover, in the centralised state desired by Trotskyists democratic accountability will inevitably suffer as power flows to the top:

*"The power of the local soviets passed into the hands of the [National] Executive Committee, the power of the Executive Committee passed into the hands of the Council of People's Commissars, and finally, the power of the Council of People's Commissars passed into the hands of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party."* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 152]

Little wonder, then, these CNT aphorisms:

*"power corrupts both those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised; those who think they can conquer the State in order to destroy it are unaware that the State overcomes all its conquerors. . . dictatorship of the proletariat is dictatorship without the proletariat and against them."* [Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 456]

That, in a nut shell, why anarchists consider the workers' state as no real change from the bourgeois state. Rather than creating a system in which working class people directly manage their own affairs, the workers' state, like any other state, involves the delegation of that power into the hands of a few. Given that state institutions generate specific social relations, specific relations of authority (namely those order giver and order taker) they cannot help becoming separated from society, becoming a new class based on the state's bureaucratic machine. Any state structure (particularly a highly centralised one, as desired by Leninists) has a certain independence from society and so serves the interests of those within the State institutions rather than the people as a whole.

Perhaps a Leninist will point to **The State and Revolution** as evidence that Lenin desired a state based round the soviets -- workers' council -- and so our comments are unjustified. However, as Marx said, judge people by what they do, not what they say. The first act of the October Revolution was to form an executive power **over** the soviets (although, of course, in theory accountable to their national congress). In **The State and Revolution** Lenin praised Marx's comment that the Paris Commune was both administrative **and** executive. The "workers' state" created by Lenin did not follow that model (as Russian anarcho-syndicalists argued in August 1918, *"the Soviet of People's Commissars [i]s an organ which does not stem from the soviet structure but only interferes with its work"* [**The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, p. 118]).

Thus the Bolshevik state was not based around soviet self-management **nor** the fusion of executive and administrative in their hands but rather the use of the soviets to elect a government (a separate executive) which had the real power. The issue is quite simple -- either *"All power to the Soviets"* means just that or

it means *"All power to the government elected by the Soviets"*. The two are not the same as the first, for the obvious reason that in the second the soviets become simply ratification machines for the government and not organs in which the working masses can run their own affairs. We must also point out that the other promises made in Lenin's book went the same way as his support for the combining administration and executive tasks in the Paris Commune -- and, we stress, all **before** the Civil War started in May 1918 (the usual Trotskyist defence of such betrayals is blame the Civil War which is hard to do as it had not started yet).

So it is unsurprising that Morrow does not explain why anarchists reject the "dictatorship of the proletariat" -- to do so would be to show that Trotskyism is not the revolutionary movement for workers' liberty it likes to claim it is. Moreover, it would involve giving an objective account of anarchist theory and admitting that the CNT did not follow its teachings.

## 14. What is wrong with Morrow's *"fundamental tenet"* of anarchism?

According to Morrow the *"second fundamental tenet in anarchist teaching"* is, apparently, the following:

*"Since Bakunin, the anarchists had accused Marxists of over-estimating the importance of state power, and had characterised this as merely the reflection of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals' pre-occupation with lucrative administrative posts. Anarchism calls upon workers to turn their backs on the state and seek control of the factories as the real source of power. The ultimate sources of power (property relations) being secured, the state power will collapse, never to be replaced."*

He then sums up by stating the Spanish anarchists *"thus failed to understand that it was only the collapse of state power . . . which had enabled them to seize the factories."* [Op. Cit., p. 102]

It would be interesting to discover in what work of Bakunin, or any anarchist, such a position could be found. Morrow gives us no references to help us in our quest -- hardly surprising as no anarchist (Spanish or otherwise) ever argued this point before July 1936. However, in September 1936, we discover the CNT arguing that the *"withering away of the State is socialism's ultimate objective. Facts have demonstrated that in practice it is achieved by liquidation of the bourgeois State, brought to a state of asphyxiation by economic expropriation."* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, p. 261] This, we must note, was the same month the CNT decided to join the Catalan Government! So much for the state having withered away.

However, will soon be made clear, such comments were a revision of anarchist theory brought about by the apparent victory of the CNT on July 19th, 1936 (just as other revisions occurred to justify CNT participation in the state). In other words, Morrow's *"second fundamental tenet"* does not exist in

anarchist theory. To prove this, we will quote Bakunin and a few other famous anarchists as well as giving an overview of some of the insurrections organised by the CNT before 1936. We start with Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta.

Given that Bakunin thought that it was the *"power of the State"* which *"sustains the privileged classes"* against the *"legitimate indignation of the masses of the people"* it is hard to know what Morrow is talking about. [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 196] Given this perspective, it naturally follows that to abolish capitalism, to allow the seizure of factories by the workers, the state had to be abolished (or *"destroyed"*). Equally clear is that the *"natural and necessary consequence of this destruction will be . . . [among others, the] dissolution of army, magistracy, bureaucracy, police and priesthood. . . confiscation of all productive capital and means of production on behalf of workers' associations, who are to put them to use . . . the federative Alliance of all working men's associations . . . will constitute the Commune."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings** p. 253 and p. 170]

Thus, the state has to be abolished in order to ensure that workers' can take over the means of production, so abolishing capitalism. This is the **direct opposite** of Morrow's claim that *"[s]ince Bakunin" anarchism had "call[ed] upon the workers to turn their backs to the state and seek control of the factories as the real source of power."* While control of the economy by workers is an important, indeed a key, aspect of a social revolution it is not a sufficient one for anarchists. It must be combined with the destruction of the state (as Bakunin argued, *"[n]o revolution could succeed . . . today unless it was simultaneously a political and a social revolution"* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 141]). As the power of the state *"sustains"* the capitalists it clearly follows that the capitalist only has his property because the state protects his property claims -- without the state, workers' would seize the means of production. Which means, contra Morrow, Bakunin was aware that in order for workers' to take over their workplaces the state had to be destroyed as it was by means of the state that capitalist property rights are enforced.

And, just to stress the obvious, you cannot *"turn your backs on the state"* while dissolving the state bureaucracy, the army, police and so on. This is clear for Bakunin. He argued that *"[l]iberty can only be created by liberty, by an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upward."* And the nature of this workers' organisation? Workers' councils -- the *"proletariat . . . must enter the International [Workers' Association] en masse, form[ing] factory, artisan, and agrarian sections, and unite them into local federations."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 179 and p. 49]

Similarly, we discover Kropotkin arguing that *"expropriation"* would occur at the same time as *"the capitalists' power to resist [had] been smashed"* and that *"the authorities"* will be *"overthrown."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 232 and p. 233] He also recognised the need for self-defence, arguing that the revolution must *"withstand both the attempts to form a government that would seek to strangle it and any onslaughts which may emanate from without."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 232] He argued the Commune *"must smash the State and replace it with the Federation and it will act accordingly."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 259] You cannot do all this by *"turning your backs"* on the state. To smash the state you need to face it and fight it -- there is no other way.

Elsewhere he argued that the commune of the future would base itself on *"the principles of anarchist communism"* and *"entirely abolish . . . property, government, and the state."* They will *"proclaim and establish their independence by direct socialist revolutionary action, abolishing private property"* when *"governments are swept away by the people . . . the insurgent people will not wait until some new government decrees, in its marvellous wisdom, a few economic reforms."* Rather, they *"will take possession on the spot and establish their rights by utilising it without delay. They will organise themselves in the workshops to continue the work, but what they will produce will be what is wanted by the masses, not what gives the highest profit to employers. . . they will organise themselves to turn to immediate use the wealth stored up in the towns; they will take possession of it as if it had never been stolen from them by the middle class."* [**The Commune of Paris**] Note that Kropotkin explicitly states that only **after** *"governments are swept away"* would the *"insurgent people . . . organise themselves in the workshops."*

As Malatesta noted, the anarchist principles formulated in 1872 at the Congress of St Imier (under the influence of Bakunin, obviously) stated that *"[d]estruction of all political power is the first duty of the proletariat"* who must *"establish solidarity in revolutionary action outside the framework of bourgeois politics."* He adds, *"[n]eedless to say, for the delegates of St. Imier as for us and for all anarchists, the abolition of political power is not possible without the simultaneous destruction of economic privilege."* [**Life and Ideas**, pp. 157-8]

Malatesta himself always stressed that revolution required *"the insurrectionary act which sweeps away the material obstacles, the armed forces of the government."* He argued that *"[o]nce the government has been overthrown . . . it will be the task of the people . . . to provide for the satisfaction of immediate needs and to prepare for the future by destroying privileges and harmful institutions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 163 and p. 161] In other words, the revolution needs to smash the state and at the same time abolish capitalism by expropriation by the workers.

Thus anarchism is clear on that you need to destroy the state in order to expropriate capital. Morrow's assertions on this are clearly false. Rather than urging *"workers to turn their backs on the state and seek control of the factories as the real source of power"* anarchism calls upon workers to *"overthrow," "smash," "sweep away," "destroy," "dissolve"* the state and its bureaucratic machinery via an *"insurrectionary act"* and expropriate capital **at the same time** -- in other words, a popular uprising probably combined with a general strike (*"an excellent means for starting the social revolution,"* in Malatesta's words, but not in itself enough to make *"armed insurrection unnecessary"* [Errico Malatesta, **The Anarchist Reader**, pp. 224-5]).

That, in itself, indicates that Morrow's *"fundamental tenet"* of anarchism does not, in fact, actually exist. In addition, if we look at the history of the CNT during the 1930s we discover that the union organised numerous insurrections which did not, in fact, involve workers *"turning their backs on the state"* but rather attacking the state. For example, in the spontaneous revolt of CNT miners in January 1932, the workers *"seized town halls, raised the black-and-red flags of the CNT, and declared **comunismo**"*

*liberatarrio.*" In Tarassa, the same year, the workers again "*seiz[ed] town halls*" and the town "*swept by street fighting.*" The revolt in January 1933 began with "*assaults by Anarchist action groups . . . on Barcelona's military barracks . . . Serious fighting occurred in working-class **barrios** and the outlying areas of Barcelona . . . Uprising occurred in Tarassa, Sardanola-Ripollet, Lerida, in several **pueblos** in Valencia province, and in Andalusia.*" In Casas Viejas, as we discussed in [section 1](#), the CNT members surrounded and attacked the barracks of the Civil Guard. In December 1933, the workers "*reared barricades, attacked public buildings, and engaged in heavy street fighting . . . many villages declared libertarian communism.*" [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 225, p. 226, p. 227 and p. 238]

Moreover, "*[w]herever possible . . . insurrections had carried out industrial and agrarian take-overs and established committees for workers' and peasant's control, libertarian systems of logistics and distribution -- in short, a miniature society 'organised on the lines set down by Kropotkin.'*" [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 239]

Now, does all that really sound like workers turning their backs on the state and only seizing control of their factories?

Perhaps it will be argued that Morrow is referring to **after** the insurrection (although he clearly is not). What about the defence of the revolution? Anarchists have always been clear on this too -- the revolution would be defended by the people in arms. We have discussed this issue above (in sections [1](#) and [8](#) in particular) so we do not need to discuss it in much detail here. We will just provide another quote by Bakunin (although written in 1865, Bakunin made the same points over and over again until his death in 1876):

*"While it [the revolution] will be carried out locally everywhere, the revolution will of necessity take a federalist format. Immediately after established government has been overthrown, communes will have to reorganise themselves along revolutionary lines . . . In order to defend the revolution, their volunteers will at the same time form a communal militia. But no commune can defend itself in isolation. So it will be necessary for each of them to radiate outwards, to raise all its neighbouring communes in revolt . . . and to federate with them for common defence."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 142]

This was essentially the position agreed by the CNT in May 1936:

*"The armed people will be the best guarantee against all attempts to restore the destroyed regime by interior or exterior forces . . . Each Commune should have its arms and elements of defence."* [quoted by Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 1, p. 64]

Like the CNT with its "*Defence Committees*" the defence of the revolution would rest with the commune and its federation. Thus Morrow's "*fundamental tenet*" of anarchism does not exist. We have **never**

urged the ignoring of the state nor the idea that seizing economic power will eliminate political power by itself. Nor is anarchism against the defence of a revolution. The position of the CNT in May 1936 was identical to that of Bakunin in 1865. The question is, of course, how do you organise a revolution and its defence -- is it by the whole people or is it by a party representing that people. Anarchists argue for the former, Trotskyists the latter. Needless to say, a state structure (i.e. a centralised, hierarchical structure based on the delegation of power) is required only when a revolution is seen as rule by a party -- little wonder anarchists reject the concept of a "workers' state" as a contradiction in terms.

The question of July 1936 however rears its head. If anarchism **does** stand for insurrection, workers councils and so on, then why did the CNT ignore the state? Surely that suggests anarchism is, as Morrow claims, flawed? No, it does not -- as we argue in some detail in [section 20](#) this confuses mistakes by **anarchists** with errors in anarchist theory. The CNT-FAI did not pursue anarchist theory and so July 1936 does not invalidate anarchism. As Bakunin argued, "*[n]o revolution could succeed . . . unless it was simultaneously a political and a social revolution.*" [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 141] The revolution of July 1936 was a social revolution (it expropriated capital and revolutionised social relationships across society) but it was not a political revolution -- in other words, it did not destroy the state. The CNT refused to do this because of the danger of fascism and fear of isolation (see [section 20](#)). Little wonder the social revolution was defeated -- the CNT did not apply basic anarchist theory. To dismiss anarchist ideas because they were not applied seems somewhat strange.

To finish this section we must indicate that Morrow's statement concerning anarchists "turning our backs" to the state and concentrating on property actually contradicts both Engels and Lenin.

As Lenin notes in **The State and Revolution**, "*Marx agreed with Proudhon on the necessity of 'smashing' the present state machine. . . [there is] similarity between Marxism and anarchism (Proudhon and Bakunin) . . . on this point*" and that anarchists advocate "*the destruction of the state machine.*" [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 310 and p. 358] You can hardly smash the state or destroy the state machine by "turning your back" to it. Similarly, Engels argued (although distorting his thought somewhat) that Bakunin saw "*the state as the main evil to be abolished . . . [and] maintains that it is the state which has created capital, that the capitalist has his capital only by the grace of the state . . . [Hence] it is above all the state which must be done away with . . . organise, and when ALL workers are won over . . . abolish the state and replace it with the organisation of the International.*" [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, pp. 728-9] You cannot "*abolish*" and "*replace*" the state by ignoring it ("turning your back to it"). We must also stress that Engels comments disprove Lenin's assertion that anarchists "*have absolutely no clear idea of what the proletariat will put in its [the states] place.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 358] We have always been clear, namely a federation of workers' associations (this was the organisation of the First International). In other, more modern, words, a system of workers' councils -- a position Marxists only embraced six decades later when Lenin advocated them as the basis of his "workers' state."

Thus Morrow's comments against anarchism are in contradiction to usual Marxist claims against anarchism (namely, that we seek to smash the state but do not understand that the workers' state is necessary to abolish capitalism). Indeed, Engels attributed the opposite idea to Bakunin that Morrow



implies anarchists think with regards to property -- namely the idea that the capitalist has his property because of the state. Morrow's "*fundamental tenet*" of anarchism not only does not exist in anarchist theory, it does not even exist in the Marxist critique of that theory! It is impressive enough to assign a false doctrine to your enemies, it takes real ability to make a claim which contradicts your own theory's assertions!

## 15. Did Spanish Anarchism aim for the creation of "*collectives*" before the revolution?

The formation of the worker-managed enterprises called "*collectives*" in the Spanish revolution of 1936 has sometimes led people (particularly Marxists) to misconceptions about anarcho-syndicalist and communist-anarchist theory. These comments by a Marxist-Leninist are typical:

*"Spanish anarchists believed that a system of autonomous collectives, with the weakest possible connections between them, was the alternative to capitalism and also to the Marxist view of society running the entire economy as one whole."*

And:

*"The anarchist theory led to the ordinary anarchist considering each factory as owned simply by the workers that laboured there, and not by the working class as a whole."* [Joseph Green, "*The Black Autonomy Collective and the Spanish Civil War*", **Communist Voice** no. 10, Vol. 2, no. 5, Oct. 1, 1996]

This assertion is sometimes voiced by Libertarian Marxists of the council communist tendency (who should know better):

*"At the time of the Civil War, a popular idea amongst the Spanish working class and peasants was that each factory, area of land, etc., should be owned collectively by its workers, and that these 'collectives' should be linked with each other on a 'federal' basis - that is, without any superior central authority.*

*"This basic idea had been propagated by anarchists in Spain for more than 50 years. When the Civil War began, peasants and working class people in those parts of the country which had not immediately fallen under fascist control seized the opportunity to turn anarchist ideal into reality."* ["*Anarchism and the Spanish 'Revolution'*", **Subversion** no. 18]

Trotskyist Felix Morrow also presents a similar analysis when he states that the POUM "*recorded the tendency of CNT unions to treat collectivised property as their own. It never attacked the anarcho-syndicalist theories which created the tendency.*" [Op. Cit., p. 104]

However, the truth of the matter is somewhat different.

Firstly, as will soon become clear, CNT policy and anarchist theory was **not** in favour of workers' owning their individual workplaces. Instead both argued for **socialisation** of the means of life by a system of federations of workers' assemblies. Individual workplaces would be managed by their workers but they would not exist in isolation or independently of the others -- they would be members of various federations (minimally an industrial one and one which united all workplaces regardless of industry in a geographical area). These would facilitate co-ordination and co-operation between self-managed workplaces. The workplace would, indeed, be autonomous but such autonomy did not negate the need for federal organs of co-ordination nor did federation negate that autonomy (as we will discuss later in [section 18](#), autonomy means the ability to make agreements with others and so joining a federation is an expression of autonomy and not necessarily its abandonment, it depends on the nature of the federation).

Secondly, rather than being the product of "*more than 50 years*" of anarchist propaganda or of "*anarcho-syndicalist theories*", the "*collectives*" instituted during the Civil War were seen by the CNT as merely a temporary stop-gap. They had not been advocated in the CNT's pre-Civil War program, but came into existence precisely because the CNT was unable to carry out its libertarian communist program, which would have required setting up workers congresses and federal councils to establish co-ordination and aid the planning of common activities between the self-managed workplaces. In other words, the idea of self-managed workplaces was seen as one step in a process of socialisation, the basic building block of a federal structure of workers' councils. They were **not** seen as an end in themselves no matter how important they were as the base of a socialised economy.

Thus the CNT had never proposed that factories or other facilities would be owned by the people who happened to work there. The CNT's program called for the construction of "*libertarian communism.*" This was the CNT's agreed goal, recognising it must be freely created from below. In addition, the Spanish Anarchists argued for "*free experimentation, free show of initiative and suggestions, as well as the freedom of organisation,*" recognising that "*[i]n each locality the degree of [libertarian] communism, collectivism or mutualism will depend on conditions prevailing. Why dictate rules? We who make freedom our banner, cannot deny it in economy.*" [D. A. de Santillan, **After the Revolution**, p. 97] In other words, the CNT recognised that libertarian communism would not be created overnight and different areas will develop at different speeds and in different directions depending on the material circumstances they faced and what their population desired.

However, libertarian communism was the CNTs declared goal. This meant that the CNT aimed for a situation where the economy as a whole would be socialised and **not** an mutualist economy consisting independent co-operatives owned and controlled by their workers (with the producers operating totally independently of each other on the basis of market exchange). Instead, workers would manage their workplace directly, but would not own it -- rather ownership would rest with society as a whole but the day-to-day management of the means of production would be delegated to those who did the actual work. Councils of workers' delegates, mandated by and accountable to workplace assemblies, would be created to co-ordinate activity at all levels of the economy.

A few quotes will be needed to show that this was, in fact, the position of the Spanish Anarchists. According to Issac Puente, the *"national federations will hold as common property all the roads, railways, buildings, equipment, machinery and workshops."* The village commune *"will federate with its counterparts in other localities and with the national industrial federations."* [**Libertarian Communism**, p. 29 and p. 26] In D. A. de Santillan's vision, libertarian communism would see workers' councils overseeing 18 industrial sectors. There would also be *"councils of the economy"* for local, regional and national levels (ultimately, international as well). [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 50-1 and pp. 80-7] These councils would be *"constitute[d] by delegations or through assemblies"* and *"receives [their] orientation from below and operates in accordance with the resolutions"* of their appropriate *"assemblies."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 83 and p. 86]

The CNT's national conference in Saragossa during May 1936 stressed this vision. Its resolution declared that the revolution would abolish *"private property, the State, the principle of authority, and . . . classes."* It argued that *"the economic plan of organisation, throughout national production, will adjust to the strictest principles of social economy, directly administered by the producers through their various organs of production, designated in general assemblies of the various organisations, and always controlled by them."* In urban areas, *"the workshop or factory council"* would make *"pacts with other labour centres"* via *"Councils of Statistics and Production"* which are the *"organ of relations of Union to Union (association of producers)"*, in other words, workers' councils. These would *"federate among themselves, forming a network of constant and close relations among all the producers of the Iberian Confederation."* In rural areas, *"the producers of the Commune"* would create a *"Council of Cultivation"* which would *"establish the same network of relations as the Workshop, Factory Councils and those of Production and Statistics, complementing the free federation represented by the Commune."*

The resolution argues that *"[b]oth the Associations of industrial producers and Associations of agricultural producers will federate nationally"* and *"Communes will federate on a county and regional basis . . . Together these Communes will constitute an Iberian Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes."* Being anarchists, the CNT stressed that *"[n]one of these organs will have executive or bureaucratic character"* and their members *"will carry out their mission as producers, meeting after the work day to discuss questions of details which don't require the decision of the communal assemblies."* The assemblies themselves *"will meet as often as needed by the interests of the Commune. . . When problems are dealt with which affect a country or province, it must be the Federations which deliberate, and in the meetings and assemblies all Communities will be represented and the delegates will bring points of view previously agreed upon"* by the Commune assembly. [quoted by Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 59, p. 60 and p. 62]

Joan Ferrer, a bookkeeper who was the secretary of the CNT commercial workers union in Barcelona, explained this vision:

*"It was our idea in the CNT that everything should start from the worker, not -- as with the Communists -- that everything should be run by the state. To this end we wanted to set up industrial federations -- textiles, metal-working, department stores, etc. -- which would*

*be represented on an overall Economics Council which would direct the economy. Everything, including economic planning, would thus remain in the hands of the workers."* [quoted by Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 180]

However, social revolution is a dynamic process and things rarely develop exactly as predicted or hoped in pre-revolutionary times. The "collectives" in Spain are an example of this. Although the regional union conferences in Catalonia had put off overthrowing the government in July of 1936, workers began taking over the management of industries as soon as the street-fighting had died down. The initiative for this did not come from the higher bodies -- the regional and national committees -- but from the rank-and-file activists in the local unions. In some cases this happened because the top management of the enterprise had fled and it was necessary for the workers to take over if production was to continue. But in many cases the local union militants decided to take advantage of the situation to end wage labour by creating self-managed workplaces.

As to be expected of a real movement, mistakes were made by those involved and the development of the movement reflected the real problems the workers faced and their general level of consciousness and what they wanted. This is natural and to denounce such developments in favour of ideal solutions means to misunderstand the dynamic of a revolutionary situation. In the words of Malatesta:

*"To organise a [libertarian] communist society on a large scale it would be necessary to transform all economic life radically, such as methods of production, of exchange and consumption; and all this could not be achieved other than gradually, as the objective circumstances permitted and to the extent that the masses understood what advantages could be gained and were able to act for themselves."* [**Life and Ideas**, p. 36]

This was the situation in revolutionary Spain. Moreover, the situation was complicated by the continued existence of the bourgeois state. As Gaston Leval, in his justly famous study of the collectives, states *"it was not . . . true socialisation, but . . . a self-management straddling capitalism and socialism, which we maintain would not have occurred had the Revolution been able to extend itself fully under the direction of our syndicates."* [Gaston Leval, **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 227-8] Leval in fact terms it *"a form of workers neo-capitalism"* but such a description is inaccurate (and unfortunate) simply because wage labour had been abolished and so it was not a form of capitalism -- rather it was a form of mutualism, of workers' co-operatives exchanging the product of their labour on the market.

However, Leval basic argument was correct -- due to the fact the political aspect of the revolution (the abolition of the state) had been "postponed" until after the defeat of fascism, the economic aspects of the revolution would also remain incomplete. The unions that had seized workplaces were confronted with a dilemma. They had control of their individual workplaces, but the original libertarian plan for economic co-ordination was precluded by the continued existence of the State. It was in this context of a partial revolution, under attack by the counter-revolution, that the idea of "collectives" was first put forward to solve some of the problems facing the workers and their self-managed workplaces. Unfortunately, this very "solution" caused problems of its own. For example, Gaston Leval indicates that the collectivisation

decree of October 1936 "*legalising collectivisation*", "*distorted everything right from the start*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 227] and did not allow the collectives to develop beyond a mutualist condition into full libertarian communism. It basically legalised the existing situation while hindering its development towards libertarian communism by undermining union control.

This dilemma of self-managed individual workplaces and lack of federations to co-ordinate them was debated at a CNT union plenary in September of 1936. The idea of converting the worker-managed workplaces into co-operatives, operating in a market economy, had never been advocated by the Spanish anarchists before the Civil War, but was now seen by some as a temporary stop-gap that would solve the immediate question of what to do with the workplaces that had been seized by the workers. It was at this meeting that the term "collective" was first adopted to describe this solution. This concept of "collectivisation" was suggested by Joan Fabregas, a Catalan nationalist of middle class origin who had joined the CNT after July of 1936. As one CNT militant recalled:

*"Up to that moment, I had never heard of collectivisation as a solution for industry -- the department stores were being run by the union. What the new system meant was that each collectivised firm would retain its individual character, but with the ultimate objective of federating all enterprises within the same industry."* [quoted by Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 212]

However, a number of unions went beyond "collectivisation" and took over all the facilities in their industries, eliminating competition between separate firms. The many small barber and beauty shops in Barcelona were shut down and replaced with large neighbourhood haircutting centres, run through the assemblies of the CNT barbers' union. The CNT bakers union did something similar. The CNT Wood Industry Union shut down the many small cabinet-making shops, where conditions were often dangerous and unhealthy. They were replaced with two large factories, which included new facilities for the benefit of the workforce, such as a large swimming pool.

The union ran the entire industry, from the felling of timber in the Val d'Aran to the furniture showrooms in Barcelona. The railway, maritime shipping and water, gas and electric industry unions also pursued this strategy of industrial unification, as did the textile union in the industrial town of Badalona, outside Barcelona. This was considered to be a step in the direction of eventual socialisation.

At the Catalan union plenary of September, 1936, "*the bigger, more powerful unions, like the woodworkers, the transport workers, the public entertainment union, all of which had already socialised [i.e. unified their industries under union management], wanted to extend their solution to the rest of industry. The smaller, weaker unions wanted to form co-operatives. . .*" [Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 212]

The collectives came out of this conflict and discussion as a sort of "middle ground" -- however, it should be stressed that it did not stop many unions from ignoring the Catalan's governments' attempt to legalise (and so control) the collectives (the so-called "*collectivisation*" decree) as far as they could. As Albert Perez-Baro, a Catalan Civil Servant noted, "*the CNT . . . pursued its own, unilateral objectives*

*which were different. Syndical collectivisation or syndicalised collectives, I would call those objectives; that's to say, collectives run by their respective unions . . . The CNT's policy was thus not the same as that pursued by the decree."* [quoted by Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 212-3] Indeed, Abad de Santillan stated later that he *"was an enemy of the decree because I considered it premature . . . When I became [economics] councillor [of the Generalitat for the CNT], I had no intention of taking into account of carrying out the decree; I intended to allow our great people to carry on the task as they saw fit, according to their own aspiration."* [quoted, **Op. Cit.**, p. 212f]

Therefore, when Leninist Joseph Green argues the initial collectivisation of workplaces *"was the masses starting to take things into their own hands, and they showed that they could continue production in their workplaces . . . The taking over of the individual workplaces and communities is one step in a revolutionary process. But there is yet more that must be done -- the workplaces and communities must be integrated into an overall economy"* he is just showing his ignorance. The CNT, despite Green's assertions to the contrary, were well aware that the initial collectivisations were just one step in the revolution and were acting appropriately. It takes some gall (or extreme ignorance) to claim that CNT theory, policy and actions were, in fact, the exact opposite of what they were. Similarly, when he argues *"[h]ow did the anarchists relate the various workplace collectives to each other in Barcelona? . . . they made use of a patchwork system including a Central Labour Bank, an Economic Council, credit . . ."* he strangely fails to mention the socialisation attempts made by many CNT industrial unions during the revolution, attempts which reflected pre-war CNT policy. But such facts would get in the way of a political diatribe and so are ignored. [Green, **Op. Cit.**]

Green continues his inaccurate diatribe by arguing that:

*"The problem is that, saddled with their false theory, they could not understand the real nature of the economic steps taken in the collectives, and thus they could not deal with the economic relations that arose among the collectives."* [**Op. Cit.**]

However, the only thing false about this is the false assertions concerning anarchist theory. As is crystal clear from our comments above, the Spanish anarchists (like all anarchists) were well aware of the need for economic relations between collectives (self-managed workplaces) before the revolution and acted to create them during it. These were the industrial federations and federations of rural communities/collectives predicted in anarchist and CNT theory and actually created, in part at least, during the revolution itself.

Thus Green's "critique" of anarchism is, in fact, **exactly** what anarchist theory actually argues and what the Spanish anarchists themselves argued and tried to implement in all industries. Of course, there are fundamental differences between the anarchist vision of socialisation and the Leninist vision of Nationalisation but this does not mean that anarchism is blind to the necessity of integrating workplaces and communities into a coherent system of federations of workers' councils (as proven above). However, such federation has two sources -- it is either imposed from above or agreed to from below. Anarchists choose the former as the latter negates any claim that a revolution is a popular, mass movement from

below (and, incidentally, the Leninist claim that the "workers' state" is simply a tool of the workers to defeat capitalist oppression).

The actual process in Spain towards industrial federations and so socialisation was dependent on the wishes of the workers involved -- as would be expected in a true social revolution. For example, the department stores were collectivised and an attempt to federate the stores failed. The works councils opposed it, considering the enterprises as their own and were unwilling to join a federation -- the general assemblies of the collectives agreed. Joan Ferrer, the secretary of the CNT commercial union, considered it natural as "*[o]nly a few months before, the traditional relationship between employer and worker had been overthrown. Now the workers were being asked to make a new leap -- to the concept of collective ownership. It was asking a lot to expect the latter to happen overnight.*" [quoted by Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 220]

However, before Leninists like Green rush in and assert that this proves that "*anarchist theory led to the ordinary anarchist considering each factory as owned simply by the workers that laboured there*" we should point out two things. Firstly, it was the "ordinary anarchists" who were trying to organise socialisation (i.e. CNT members and militants). Secondly, the Russian Revolution also saw workers taking over their workplaces and treating them as their own property. Leninists like Green would have a fit if we took these examples to "prove" that Leninism "*led to the ordinary Bolshevik worker considering each factory as owned simply by the workers that laboured there*" (which was what the Mensheviks **did** argue in 1917 when Martov "*blamed the Bolsheviks for creating the local, particularistic attitudes prevailing among the masses.*" [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 72]). In other words, such events are a natural part of the process of a revolution and are to be expected regardless of the dominant theory in that revolution.

To summarise.

The Spanish revolution does confirm anarchist theory and in no way contradicts it. While many of the aspects of the collectives were in accord with pre-war CNT policy and anarchist theory, other aspects of them were in contradiction to them. This was seen by the militants of the CNT and FAI who worked to transform these spontaneously created organs of economic self-management into parts of a socialised economy as required for libertarian communism. Such a transformation flowed from below and was not imposed from above, as would be expected in a libertarian social revolution.

As can be seen, the standard Marxist account of the collectives and its relationship to anarchist theory and CNT policy is simply wrong.

## **16. How does the development of the collectives indicate the differences between Bolshevism and anarchism?**

As argued in the [last section](#), the collectives formed during the Spanish Revolution reflected certain

aspects of anarchist theory but not others. They were a compromise solution brought upon by the development of the revolution and did not, as such, reflect CNT or anarchist theory or vision but being self-managed by their workers. The militants of the CNT and FAI tried to convince their members to federate together and truly socialise the economy, with various degrees of success. A similar process occurred during the Russian Revolution of 1917. There workers created factory committees which tried to introduce workers' self-management of production. The differences in outcome in these two experiences and the actions of the Bolsheviks and anarchists indicate well the fundamental differences between the two philosophies. In this section we discuss the contrasting solutions pursued by the CNT and the Bolsheviks in their respective revolutions.

The simple fact is that revolutions are complex and dynamic processes which involve many contradictory developments. The question is how do you push them forward -- either from below or from above. Both the Spanish and the Russian revolution were marked by "localism" -- when the workers in a factory consider it their own property and ignore wider issues and organisation.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks "solved" the problem of localism by eliminating workers' self-management in favour of one-man management appointed from above. Attempts by the workers and factory committees themselves to combat localism were stopped by the Bolshevik dominated trade unions which "*prevented the convocation of a planned All-Russian Congress of Factory Committees*" in November 1917 when "*called upon*" by the Bolsheviks "*to render a special serve to the nascent Soviet State and to discipline the Factory Committees.*" [I. Deutscher, quoted by Maurice Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 19] Instead, the Bolsheviks built from the top-down their system of "*unified administration*" based on converting the Tsarist system of central bodies which governed and regulated certain industries during the war. [Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 36] The CNT, in comparison, tried to solve the problem of localism by a process of discussion and debate from below. Both were aware of the fact the revolution was progressing in ways different from their desired goal but their solution reflected their different politics -- libertarian in the case of the CNT, authoritarian in the case of Bolshevism.

Therefore, the actual economic aspects of the Spanish revolution reflected the various degrees of political development in each workplace and industry. Some industries socialised according to the CNT's pre-war vision of libertarian communism, others remained at the level of self-managed workplaces in spite of the theories of the union and anarchists. This was the case with other aspects of the collectives. As Vernon Richards points out, "*[i]n some factories . . . the profits or income were shared out among the workers . . . As a result, wages fluctuated in different factories and even within the same industry . . . But fortunately . . . the injustice of this form of collectivisation was recognised and combated by the CNT syndicates from the beginning.*" [**Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, pp. 106-7]

Thus the collectives, rather than expressing the economic vision of communist-anarchism or anarcho-syndicalism, came into existence precisely because the CNT was unable to carry out its libertarian communist program, which would have required setting up workers congresses and co-ordinating councils to establish common ownership and society wide self-management. To assert that the collectives were an exact reflection of anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist theory is, therefore, incorrect. Rather, they reflected certain aspects of that theory (such as workers' self-management in the workplace)



while others (industrial federations to co-ordinate economic activity, for example) were only partially met. This, we must stress, is to be expected as a revolution is a **process** and not an event. As Kropotkin argued:

*"It is a whole insurrectionary period of three, four, perhaps five years that we must traverse to accomplish our revolution in the property system and in social organisation."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 72]

Thus the divergence of the actual revolution from the program of the CNT was to be expected and so did not represent a failure or a feature of anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist theory as Morrow and other Marxists assert. Rather, it expresses the nature of a social revolution, a movement from below which, by its very nature, reflects real needs and problems and subject to change via discussion and debate. Bakunin's comments stress this aspect of the revolution:

*"I do not say that the peasants [and workers], freely organised from the bottom up, will miraculously create an ideal organisation, confirming in all respects to our dreams. But I am convinced that what they construct will be living and vibrant, a thousands times better and more just than any existing organisation. Moreover, this . . . organisation, being on the one hand open to revolutionary propaganda . . . , and on the other, not petrified by the intervention of the State . . . will develop and perfect itself through free experimentation as fully as one can reasonably expect in our times.*

*"With the abolition of the State, the spontaneous self-organisation of popular life . . . will revert to the communes. The development of each commune will take its point of departure the actual condition of its civilisation . . ."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 207]

To **impose** an "ideal" solution would destroy a revolution -- the actions and decisions (**including what others may consider mistakes**) of a free people are infinitely more productive and useful than the decisions and decrees of the best central committee. Moreover, a centralised system by necessity is an imposed system (as it excludes by its very nature the participation of the mass of the people in determining their own fate). As Bakunin argued, *"Collectivism could be imposed only on slaves, and this kind of collectivism would then be the negation of humanity. In a free community, collectivism can come about only through the pressure of circumstances, not by imposition from above but by a free spontaneous movement from below."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 200] Thus socialisation must proceed from below, reflecting the real development and desires of those involved. To "speed-up" the process via centralisation can only result in replacing socialisation with nationalisation and the elimination of workers' self-management with hierarchical management. Workers' again would be reduced to the level of order-takers, with control over their workplaces resting not in their hands but in those of the state.

Lenin argued that *"Communism requires and presupposes the greatest possible centralisation of large-scale production throughout the country. The all-Russian centre, therefore, should definitely be given the right of direct control over all the enterprises of the given branch of industry. The regional centres*

*define their functions depending on local conditions of life, etc., in accordance with the general production directions and decisions of the centre."* He continued by explicitly arguing that "[t]o deprive the all-Russia centre of the right to direct control over all the enterprises of the given industry . . . would be regional anarcho-syndicalism, and not communism." [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 292]

We expect that Morrow would subscribe to this "solution" to the problems of a social revolution generates. However, such a system has its own problems.

First is the basic fallacy that the centre will not start to view the whole economy as its property (and being centralised, such a body would be difficult to effectively control). Indeed, Stalin's power was derived from the state bureaucracy which ran the economy in its own interests. Not that it suddenly arose with Stalin. It was a feature of the Soviet system from the start. Samuel Farber, for example, notes that, *"in practice, [the] hypercentralisation [pursued by the Bolsheviks from early 1918 onwards] turned into infighting and scrambles for control among competing bureaucracies"* and he points to the *"not untypical example of a small condensed milk plant with few than 15 workers that became the object of a drawn-out competition among six organisations including the Supreme Council of National Economy, the Council of People's Commissars of the Northern Region, the Vologda Council of People's Commissars, and the Petrograd Food Commissariat."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 73] In other words, centralised bodies are not immune to viewing resources as their own property (and compared to an individual workplace, the state's power to enforce its viewpoint against the rest of society is considerably stronger).

Secondly, to eliminate the dangers of workers' self-management generating "propertarian" notions, the workers' have to have their control over their workplace reduced, if not eliminated. This, by necessity, generates **bourgeois** social relationships and, equally, appointment of managers from above (which the Bolsheviks did embrace). Indeed, by 1920 Lenin was boasting that in 1918 he had *"pointed out the necessity of recognising the dictatorial authority of single individuals for the pursue of carrying out the Soviet idea"* and even claimed that at that stage *"there were no disputes in connection with the question"* of one-man management. [quoted by Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 65] While the first claim is true (Lenin argued for one-man management appointed from above **before** the start of the Civil War in May 1918) the latter one is **not** true (excluding anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists, there were also the dissent Left-Communists in the Bolshevik party itself).

Thirdly, a centralised body effectively excludes the mass participation of the mass of workers -- power rests in the hands of a few people which, by its nature, generates bureaucratic rule. This can be seen from the example of Lenin's Russia. The central bodies the Bolsheviks created had little knowledge of the local situation and often gave orders that contradicted each other or had little bearing to reality, so encouraging factories to ignore the centre. In other words the government's attempts to centralise actually led to localism (as well as economic mismanagement)! Perhaps this was what Green means when he argues for a *"new centralism"* which would be *"compatible with and requiring the initiative of the workers at the base"* [Green **Op. Cit.**]-- that is, the initiative of the workers to ignore the central bodies and keep the economy going **in spite** of the *"new centralism"*?

The simple fact is, a socialist society **must** be created from below, by the working class itself. If the workers do not know how to create the necessary conditions for a socialist organisation of labour, no one else can do it for them or compel them to do it. If the state is used to combat "localism" and such things then it obviously cannot be in the hands of the workers' themselves. Socialism can only be created by workers' own actions and organisations otherwise it will not be set up at all -- something else will be, namely state capitalism.

Thus, a close look at Lenin's "solution" indicates that Trotskyist claim that their state is the *"tool of the majority in their fight against exploitation by the few"* (to use Joseph Green's words) is refuted by their assertion that this state will also bring the economy under centralised control and by the actions of the Bolsheviks themselves.

Why is this? Simply because **if** the mass of collectives are not interested in equality and mutual aid in society as a whole then how can the government actually be the "tool" of the majority when it imposes such "mutual aid" and "equality" upon the collectives? In other words, the interests of the government replace those of the majority. After all, if workers **did** favour mutual aid and equality then they would federate themselves to achieve it. (which the collectives were actually doing all across Spain, we must note). If they do not do this then how can the "workers' state" be said to be simply their tool when it has to **impose** the appropriate economic structure upon them? The government is elected by the whole people, so it will be claimed, and so must be their tool. This is obviously flawed -- "if," argued Malatesta, *"you consider these worthy electors as unable to look after their own interests themselves, how is it that they will know how to choose for themselves the shepherds who must guide them? And how will they be able to solve this problem of social alchemy, of producing a genius from the votes of a mass of fools? And what will happen to the minorities which are still the most intelligent, most active and radical part of a society?"* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 53]

What does all this mean? Simply that Trotskyists recognise, implicitly at least, that the workers' state is not, in fact, the simple tool of the workers. Rather, it is the means by which "socialism" will be imposed upon the workers by the party. If workers do not practice mutual aid and federation in their day-to-day running of their lives, then how can the state impose it if it is simply their tool? It suggests what is desired *"by all of the working people as a whole"* (nearly always a euphemism for the party in Trotskyist ideology) is different that what they actually want (as expressed by their actions). In other words, a conflict exists between the workers' and the so-called "workers' state" -- in Russia, the party imposed **its** concept of the interests of the working class, even against the working class itself.

Rather than indicate some kind of failure of anarchist theory, the experience of workers' self-management in both Spain and Russia indicate the authoritarian core of Trotskyist ideology. If workers do not practice mutual aid or federation then a state claiming to represent them, to be simply their tool, cannot force them to do so without exposing itself as being an alien body with power **over** the workers.

For these reasons Bakunin was correct to argue that anarchists have *"no faith except in freedom. Both [Marxists and anarchists], equally supporters of science which is to destroy superstition and replace*

*belief, differ in the former wishing to impose it, and the latter striving to propagate it; so human groups, convinced of its truth, may organise and federate spontaneously, freely, from the bottom up, by their own momentum according to their real interests, but never according to any plan laid down in advance and imposed upon the **ignorant masses** by some superior intellects."* Anarchists, he continues, "*think that there is much more practical and intellectual common sense in the instinctive aspirations and in the real needs of the mass of the people than in the profound intelligence of all these doctors and teachers of mankind who, after so many fruitless attempts to make humanity happy, still aspire to add their own efforts.*" [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 198]

In summary, the problem of "localism" and any other problems faced by a social revolution will be solved in the interests of the working class only if working class people solve them themselves. For this to happen it requires working class people to manage their own affairs directly and that implies self-managed organising from the bottom up (i.e. anarchism) rather than delegating power to a minority at the top, to a "revolutionary" party or government. This applies economically, socially and politically. As Bakunin argued, the "*revolution should not only be made for the people's sake; it should also be made by the people.*" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 141]

Thus the actual experience of the collectives and their development, rather than refuting anarchism, indicates well that it is the only real form of socialism. Attempts to nationalise the means of production inevitably disempower workers and eliminate meaningful workers' self-management or control. It does not eliminate wage labour but rather changes the name of the boss. Socialism can only be built from below. If it is not, as the Russian experience indicated, then state capitalism will be the inevitable outcome.

## 17. Why is Morrow's support for "*proletarian methods of production*" ironic?

Morrow states "*[i]n the midst of civil war the factory committees are demonstrating the superiority of proletarian methods of production.*" [Op. Cit., p. 53] This is ironic as the Bolsheviks in power fought against the factory committees and their attempts to introduce the kind of workers' self-management Morrow praises in Spain (see Maurice Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control** for details). Moreover, rather than seeing workers' self-management as "*proletarian methods of production*" Lenin and Trotsky thought that how a workplace was managed was irrelevant under socialism. Trotsky argued that "*[i]t would be a most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the head of factories. The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy of the collective will of the workers [a euphemism for the Party -- M.B.] and not at all in the form in which individual economic organisations are administered.*" Indeed, "*I consider if the civil war had not plundered our economic organs of all that was strongest, most independent, most endowed with initiative, we should undoubtedly have entered the path of one-man management in the sphere of economic administration much sooner and much less painfully.*" [quoted by Maurice Brinton, Op. Cit., p. 66 and pp. 66-7]

In other words, Trotsky both in theory and in practice opposed "*proletarian methods of production*" -- and if the regime introduced by Trotsky and Lenin in Russia was **not** based on "*proletarian methods of production*" then what methods was it based on? One-man management with "*the appointment of individuals, dictators with unlimited powers*" by the government and "*the people unquestioningly obey [ing] the single will of the leaders of labour.*" [**The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, p. 32 and p. 34] In other words, the usual **bourgeois** methods of production with the workers' doing what the boss tells them. At no time did the Bolsheviks support the kind of workers' self-management introduced by the anarchist influenced workers of Spain -- indeed they hindered it and replaced it with one-man management at the first opportunity (see Maurice Brinton's classic **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control** for details).

To point out the obvious, bourgeois methods of production means bourgeois social relations and relations of production. In other words, Morrow comments allows us to see that Lenin and Trotsky's regime was not proletarian at the point of production. How ironic. And if it was not proletarian at the point of production (i.e. at the source of **economic** power) how could it remain proletarian at the political level? Unsurprisingly, it did not -- party power soon replaced workers' power and the state bureaucracy replaced the party.

Yet again Morrow's book exposes the anti-revolutionary politics of Trotskyism by allowing anarchists to show the divergence between the rhetoric of that movement and what it did when it was in power. Morrow, faced with a workers' movement influenced by anarchism, inadvertently indicates the poverty of Trotskyism when he praises the accomplishments of that movement. The reality of Leninism in power was that it eliminated the very things Morrow praises -- such as "*proletarian methods of production,*" democratic militias, workers' councils and so on. Needless to say, the irony of Morrow's work is lost on most of the Trotskyists who read it.

## 18. Were the federations of collectives an "*abandonment*" of anarchist ideas?

From our discussion in [section 15](#), it is clear that anarchism does not deny the need for co-ordination and joint activity, for federations of self-managed workplaces, industries and rural collectives at all levels of society. Far from it. As proven in sections [12](#) and [15](#), such federations are a basic idea of anarchism. In anarchy co-ordination flows **from below** and not imposed by a few from above. Unfortunately Marxists cannot tell the difference between solidarity from below and unity imposed from above. Morrow, for example, argues that "*the anarchist majority in the Council of Aragon led in practice to the abandonment of the anarchist theory of the autonomy of economic administration. The Council acted as a centralising agency.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 205-6]

Of course it does nothing of the kind. Yes, anarchists are in favour of autonomy -- including the autonomy of economic administration. We are also in favour of federalism to co-ordinate joint activity

and promote co-operation on a wide-scale (what Morrow would, inaccurately, call "centralism" or "centralisation"). Rather than seeing such agreements of joint activity as the "abandonment" of autonomy, we see it as an **expression** of that autonomy. It would be a strange form of "freedom" that suggested making arrangements and agreements with others meant a restriction of your liberty. For example, no one would argue that to arrange to meet your friend at a certain place and time meant the elimination of your autonomy even though it obviously reduces your "liberty" to be somewhere else at the same time.

Similarly, when an individual joins a group and takes part in its collective decisions and abides by their decisions, this does not represent the abandonment of their autonomy. Rather, it is an expression of their freedom. If we took Morrow's comment seriously then anarchists would be against all forms of organisation and association as they would mean the *"abandonment of autonomy"* (of course some Marxists **do** make that claim, but such a position indicates an essentially **negative** viewpoint of liberty, a position they normally reject). In reality, of course, anarchists are aware that freedom is impossible outside of association. Within an association absolute "autonomy" cannot exist, but such "autonomy" would restrict freedom to such a degree that it would be so self-defeating as to make a mockery of the concept of autonomy and no sane person would seek it.

Of course anarchists are aware that even the best association could turn into a bureaucracy that **does** restrict freedom. Any organisation could transform from being an expression of liberty into a bureaucratic structure which restricts liberty because power concentrates at the top, into the hands of an elite. That is why we propose specific forms of organisation, ones based on self-management, decentralisation and federalism which promote decision-making from the bottom-up and ensure that the organisation remains in the hands of its members and its policies are agreements between them rather than ones imposed upon them. For this reason the basic building block of the federation is the autonomous group assembly. It is this body which decides on its own issues and mandates delegates to reach agreements within the federal structure, leaving to itself the power to countermand the agreements its delegates make. In this way autonomy is combined with co-ordination in an organisation that is structured to accurately reflect the needs and interests of its members by leaving power in their hands. In the words of Murray Bookchin, anarchists *"do not deny the need for co-ordination between groups, for discipline, for meticulous planning, and for unity in action. But [we] believe that co-ordination, discipline, planning, and unity in action must be achieved **voluntarily**, by means of self-discipline nourished by conviction and understanding, not by coercion and a mindless, unquestioning obedience to orders from above."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 215]

Therefore, anarchist support for *"the autonomy of economic administration"* does not imply the lack of co-operation and co-ordination, of joint agreements and federal structures which may, to the uninformed like Morrow, seem to imply the *"abandonment"* of autonomy. As Kropotkin argued, the commune *"cannot any longer acknowledge any superior: that, above it, there cannot be anything, save the interests of the Federation, freely embraced by itself in concert with other Communes."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 259] This vision was stressed in the CNT's Saragossa resolution on Libertarian Communism made in May, 1936, which stated that the *"the foundation of this administration will be the commune. These communes are to be autonomous and will be federated at regional and national levels"*

to achieve their general goals. The right to autonomy does not preclude the duty to implement agreements regarding collective benefits." [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 106] Hence anarchists do not see making collective decisions and working in a federation as an abandonment of autonomy or a violation of anarchist theory.

The reason for this is simple. To exercise your autonomy by joining self-managing organisations and, therefore, agreeing to abide by the decisions you help make is not a denial of that autonomy (unlike joining a hierarchical structure, we must stress). That is why anarchists have always stressed the importance of the **nature** of the associations people join **as well as** their voluntary nature -- as Kropotkin argued, the "*communes of the next revolution will not only break down the state and substitute free federation for parliamentary rule; they will part with parliamentary rule within the commune itself. . . . They will be anarchist within the commune as they will be anarchist outside it.*" [**The Commune of Paris**] Moreover, within the federal structures anarchists envision, the actual day-to-day running of the association would be autonomous. There would be little or no need for the federation to interfere with the mundane decisions a group has to make day in, day out. As the Saragossa resolution makes clear:

*"[The] commune . . . will undertake to adhere to whatever general norms may be agreed by majority vote after free debate . . . . The inhabitants of a commune are to debate among themselves their internal problems . . . . Federations are to deliberate over major problems affecting a country or province and all communes are to be represented at their reunions and assemblies, thereby enabling their delegates to convey the democratic viewpoint of their respective communes . . . . every commune which is implicated will have its right to have its say . . . . On matters of a regional nature, it is the duty of the regional federation to implement agreements . . . . So the starting point is the individual, moving on through the commune, to the federation and right on up finally to the confederation."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 106-7]

Since the Council of Aragon and the Federation of Collectives were based on a federal structure, regular meetings of mandated delegates and decision-making from the bottom up, it would be wrong to call them a "*centralising agency*" or an "*abandonment*" of the principle of "*autonomy*." Rather, they were expressions of that autonomy based around a **federal** and not centralised organisation. The autonomy of the collective, of its mass assembly, was not restricted by the federation nor did the federation interfere with the day to day running of the collectives which made it up. The structure was a federation of autonomous collectives. The role of the Council was to co-ordinate the decisions of the federation delegate meetings -- in other words, purely administrative implementation of collective agreements. To confuse this with centralisation is a mistake common to Marxists, but it is still a confusion.

To summarise, what Morrow claims is an "*abandonment*" of anarchism is, in fact, an expression of anarchist ideas. The Council of Aragon and the Aragon Federation of Collectives were following the CNT's vision of libertarian communism and not abandoning it, as Morrow claims. As anyone with even a basic understanding of anarchism would know.

## 19. Did the experience of the rural collectives refute anarchism?

Some Leninists attack the rural collectives on similar lines as they attack the urban ones (as being independent identities and without co-ordination -- see [section 15](#) for details). They argue that "*anarchist theory*" resulted in them considering themselves as being independent bodies and so they ignored wider social issues and organisation. This meant that anarchist goals could not be achieved:

*"Let's evaluate the Spanish collectives according to one of the basic goals set by the anarchists themselves. This was to ensure equality among the toilers. They believed that the autonomous collectives would rapidly equalise conditions among themselves through 'mutual aid' and solidarity. This did not happen . . . conditions varied greatly among the Spanish collectives, with peasants at some agricultural collectives making three times that of peasants at other collectives."* [Joseph Green, **Op. Cit.**]

Of course, Green fails to mention that in the presumably "centralised" system created by the Bolsheviks, the official rationing system had a differentiation of **eight to one** under the class ration of May 1918. By 1921, this, apparently, had fallen to around four to one (which is still higher than the rural collectives) but, in fact, remained at eight to one due to workers in selected defence-industry factories getting the naval ration which was approximately double that of the top civilian workers' ration. [Mary McAuley, **Bread and Justice: State and Society in Petrograd 1917-1922**, pp. 292-3] This, we note, ignores the various privileges associated with state office and Communist Party membership which would increase differentials even more (and such inequality extended into other fields, Lenin for example warned in 1921 against "*giving non-Party workers a false sense of having some increase in their rights*" [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 325]). The various resolutions made by workers for equality in rations were ignored by the government (all this long before, to use Green's words "*their party degenerated into Stalinist revisionism*").

So, if equality is important, then the decentralised rural collectives were far more successful in achieving it than the "centralised" system under Lenin (as to be expected, as the rank-and-file were in control, not a few at the top).

Needless to the collectives could not unify history instantly. Some towns and workplaces started off on a more favourable position than others. Green quotes an academic (David Miller) on this:

*"Such variations no doubt reflected historical inequalities of wealth, but at the same time the redistributive impact of the [anarchist] federation had clearly been slight."*

Note that Green implicitly acknowledges that the collectives **did** form a federation. This makes a mockery of his claims that earlier claims that the anarchists "*believed that the village communities would enter the realm of a future liberated society if only they became autonomous collectives. They didn't see the collectives as only one step, and they didn't see the need for the collectives to be integrated into a broader social control of all production.*" [**Op. Cit.**] As proven above, such assertions are either the



product of ignorance or a conscious lie. We quoted numerous Spanish anarchist documents that stated the exact opposite to Green's assertions. The Spanish anarchists were well aware of the need for self-managed communities to federate. Indeed, the federation of collectives fits **exactly** pre-war CNT policy and anarchist theory (see sections [15](#) and [18](#) for details). To re-quote a Spanish Anarchist pamphlet, the village commune *"will federate with its counterparts in other localities and with the national industrial federations."* [Issac Puente, **Libertarian Communism**, p. 26] Thus what Green asserts the CNT and FAI did not see the need of, they in fact **did** see the need for and argued for their creation before the Civil War and actually created during it! Green's comments indicate a certain amount of "doublethink" -- he maintains that the anarchists rejected federations while acknowledging they did federate.

However, historical differences are the product of **centuries** and so it will take some time to overcome them, particularly when such changes are not imposed by a central government. In addition, the collectives were not allowed to operate freely and were soon being hindered (if not physically attacked) by the state within a year. Green dismisses this recognition of reality by arguing *"one could argue that the collectives didn't have much time to develop, being in existence for only two and a half years at most, with the anarchists only having one year of reasonably unhindered work, but one could certainly not argue that this experience confirmed anarchist theory."* However, his argument is deeply flawed for many reasons.

Firstly, we have to point out that Green quotes Miller who is using data from collectives in Castille. Green, however, was apparently discussing the collectives of Aragon and the Levante and their respective federations (as was Miller). To state the obvious, it is hard to evaluate the activities of the Aragon or Levante federation using data from collectives in the Castille federation. Moreover, in order to evaluate the redistributive activities of the federations you need to look at the differentials before and after the federation was created. The data Miller uses does not do that and so the lack of success of the federation cannot be evaluated using Green's source. Thus Green uses data which is, frankly, a joke to dismiss anarchism. This says a lot about the quality of his critique.

As far as the Castille federation goes, Robert Alexander notes *"[a]nother feature of the work of regional federation was that of aiding the less fortunate collectives. Thus, within a year, it spent 2 000 000 pesetas on providing chemical fertilisers and machines to poorer collectives, the money from this being provided by the sale of products of the wealthier ones."* [**The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 1, p. 438] He also quotes an article from an anarchist paper which states *"there does not yet exist sufficient solidarity"* between rich and poor collectives and that notes *"the difficulties which the State has put in the way of the development of the collectives."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 439] Thus the CNT was open about the difficulties it was experiencing in the collectives and the problems facing it.

Secondly, the collectives may have been in existence for about one year before the Stalinists attacked but their federations had not. The Castille federation was born in April, 1937 (the general secretary stated in July of that year *"[w]e have fought terrible battles with the Communists"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 446]). The Aragon federation was created in February 1937 (the Council of Aragon was created in October 1936) and the Communists under Lister attacked in August 1937. The Levante federation was formed a

few weeks after the start of the war and the attacks against them started in March 1937. The longest period of free development, therefore, was only **seven** months and not a year. Thus the federations of collectives -- the means seen by anarchist theory to co-ordinate economic and social activities and promote equality -- existed for only a few months before they were physically attacked by the state. Green expects miracles if he thinks history can be nullified in half a year.

Thirdly, anarchists do not think communist-anarchism, in all its many aspects, is possible overnight. Anarchists are well aware, to quote Kropotkin, the "*revolution may assume a variety of characters and differing degrees of intensity among different peoples.*" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 231] Also, as noted above, we are well aware that a revolution is a **process** ("*By revolution we do not mean just the insurrectionary act*" [Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 156]) which will take some time to fully develop once the state has been destroyed and capital expropriated. Green's assertion that the Spanish Revolution refutes anarchist theory is clearly a false one.

Green argues that a "*vast organisational task faces the oppressed masses who are rising up to eliminate the old exploiting system, but anarchist theory just brushes aside this problem -- co-ordination between collective would supposedly be easily accomplished by 'mutual aid' or 'voluntary co-operation' or, if absolutely need be, by the weakest possible federation.*" [Op. Cit.] As can be seen from our discussion, such a claim is a false one. Anarchists are well aware of difficulties involved in a revolution. That is why we stress that revolution must come from below, by the actions of the oppressed themselves -- it is far too complex to left to a few party leaders to decree the abolition of capitalism. Moreover, as proven above anarchist theory and practice is well aware of the need for organisation, co-operation and co-ordination. We obviously do not "*brush it aside.*" This can be seen from Green's reference to "*the weakest possible federation.*" This obviously is a cover just in case the reader is familiar with anarchist theory and history and knows that anarchists support the federation of workers' associations and communes as the organisational framework of a revolution and of the free society.

This distorted vision of anarchism even extends to other aspects of the revolution. Green decides to attack the relative lack of international links the Spanish anarchist movement had in 1936. He blames this on anarchist theory and states "*again the localist anarchist outlook would go against such preparations. True, the anarchists had had their own International association in the 1870s, separate from the original First International and the Marxists. It had flopped so badly that the anarchists never tried to resuscitate it and seem to prefer to forget about it. Given anarchist localism, it is not surprising that this International doesn't even seem to be been missed by current-day anarchists.*" [Op. Cit.]

Actually, the anarchist International came out of the First International and was made up of the libertarian wing of that association. Moreover, in 1936 the CNT was a member of the International Workers' Association founded in 1922 in Berlin. The IWA was small, but this was due to state and Fascist repression. For example, the German FAUD, the Italian USI and the FORA in Argentina had all been destroyed by fascist governments. However, those sections which did exist (such as the Swedish SAC and French CGTSR) **did** send aid to Spain and spread CNT and FAI news and appeals (as did anarchist groups across the world). The IWA still exists today, with sections in over a dozen countries (including the CNT in Spain). In addition, the International Anarchist Federation also exists, having

done so for a number of decades, and also has sections in numerous countries. In other words, Green either knows nothing about anarchist history and theory or he does and is lying.

He attacks the lack of CNT support for Moroccan independence during the war and states "*[t]hey just didn't seem that concerned with the issue during the Civil War.*" Actually, many anarchists **did** raise this important issue. Just one example, Camillo Berneri argued that "*we must intensify our propaganda in favour of Morocco autonomy.*" ["What can we do?", **Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review**, no. 4, p. 51] Thus to state "*the anarchists . . . didn't seem that concerned*" is simply false. Many anarchists were and publicly argued for it. Trapped as a minority force in the government, the CNT could not push through this position.

Green also points out that inequality existed between men and woman. He even quotes the anarchist women's organisation Mujeres Libres to prove his point. He then notes what the Bolsheviks did to combat sexism, "*[a]mong the methods of influence was mobilising the local population around social measures promulgated throughout the country. The banner of the struggle was not autonomy, but class-wide effort.*" Two points, Mujeres Libres was a nation wide organisation which aimed to end sexism by collective action inside and outside the anarchist movement by organising women to achieve their own liberation (see Martha Ackelsberg's , **Free Women of Spain** for more details). Thus its aims and mode of struggle **was** "*class-wide*" -- as anyone familiar with that organisation and its activities would know. Secondly, why is equality between men and women important? Because inequality reduces the freedom of women to control their own lives, in a word, it hinders they **autonomy**. Any campaign against sexism is based on the banner of autonomy -- that Green decides to forget this suggests a lot about his politics.

Thus Green gets it wrong again and again. Such is the quality of most Leninist accounts of the Spanish revolution.

## 20. Does the experience of the Spanish Revolution indicate the failure of anarchism or the failure of anarchists?

Marxists usually point to the events in Catalonia after July 19th, 1936, as evidence that anarchism is a flawed theory. They bemoan the fact that, when given the chance, the anarchists did not "*seize power*" and create a "*dictatorship of the proletariat.*" To re-quote Trotsky:

*"A revolutionary party, even having seized power (of which the anarchist leaders were incapable in spite of the heroism of the anarchist workers), is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* [**Stalinism and Bolshevism**]

However, as we argued in [section 12](#), the Trotskyist "definition" of "workers' power" and "proletarian dictatorship" is, in fact, party power, party dictatorship and party sovereignty -- **not** working class self-management. Indeed, in a letter written in 1937, Trotsky clarified what he meant: "*Because the leaders of the CNT renounced dictatorship for themselves they left the place open for the Stalinist*

*dictatorship.*" [our emphasis, **Writings 1936-7**, p. 514]

Hence the usual Trotskyist lament concerning the CNT is that the anarchist leaders did not seize power themselves and create the so-called "*dictatorship of the proletariat*" (i.e. the dictatorship of those claiming to represent the proletariat). A strange definition of "*workers' power*," we must admit. The "leaders" of the CNT and FAI quite rightly rejected such a position -- unfortunately they also rejected the anarchist position at the same time, as we will see.

Trotsky states that the "*leaders of the CNT . . . explained their open betrayal of the theory of anarchism by the pressure of 'exceptional circumstances' . . . Naturally, civil war is not a peaceful and ordinary but an 'exceptional circumstance.' Every serious revolutionary organisation, however, prepares precisely for 'exceptional circumstances.'*" ["*Stalinism and Bolshevism*", **Op. Cit.**, p. 16]

Trotsky is, for once, correct. We will ignore the obvious fact that his own (and every other Leninist) account of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution into Stalinism is a variation of the "*exceptional circumstances*" excuse and turn to his essential point. In order to evaluate anarchism and the actions of the CNT we have to evaluate **all** the revolutionary situations it found itself in, **not** just July, 1936 in Catalonia. This is something Trotsky and his followers seldom do -- for reasons that will become clear.

Obviously space considerations does not allow us to discuss every revolutionary situation anarchism faced. We will, therefore, concentrate on the Russian Revolution and the activities of the CNT in Spain in the 1930s. These examples will indicate that rather than signifying the failure of anarchism, the actions of the CNT during the Civil War indicate the failure of anarchists to apply anarchist theory and so signifies a betrayal of anarchism. In other words, that anarchism is a valid form of revolutionary politics.

If we look at the Russian Revolution, we see anarchist theory gain its most wide scale influence in those parts of the Ukraine protected by the Makhnovist army. The Makhnovists fought against White (pro-Tsarist), Red and Ukrainian Nationalists in favour of a system of "*free soviets*" in which the "*working people themselves must freely choose their own soviets, which are to carry out the will and desires of the working people themselves. that is to say, **administrative**, not ruling councils.*" As for the economy, the "*land, the factories, the workshops, the mines, the railroads and the other wealth of the people must belong to the working people themselves, to those who work in them, that is to say, they must be socialised.*" ["*Some Makhnovist Proclamations*", contained in Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 273]

To ensure this end, the Makhnovists refused to set up governments in the towns and cities they liberated, instead urging the creation of free soviets so that the working people could govern themselves. Taking the example of Aleksandrovsk, once they had liberated the city the Makhnovists "*immediately invited the working population to participate in a general conference . . . it was proposed that the workers organise the life of the city and the functioning of the factories with their own forces and their own organisations . . . The first conference was followed by a second. The problems of organising life*

*according to principles of self-management by workers were examined and discussed with animation by the masses of workers, who all welcomed this ideas with the greatest enthusiasm . . . Railroad workers took the first step . . . They formed a committee charged with organising the railway network of the region . . . From this point, the proletariat of Aleksandrovsk began systematically to the problem of creating organs of self-management."* [Op. Cit., p. 149]

They also organised free agricultural communes which "*[a]dmittedly . . . were not numerous, and included only a minority of the population . . . But what was most precious was that these communes were formed by the poor peasants themselves. The Makhnovists never exerted any pressure on the peasants, confining themselves to propagating the idea of free communes."* [Op. Cit., p. 87] Makhno played an important role in abolishing the holdings of the landed gentry. The local soviet and their district and regional congresses equalised the use of the land between all sections of the peasant community. [Op. Cit., pp. 53-4]

Moreover, the Makhnovists took the time and energy to involve the whole population in discussing the development of the revolution, the activities of the army and social policy. They organised numerous conferences of workers', soldiers' and peasants' delegates to discuss political and social issues. They organised a regional congress of peasants and workers when they had liberated Aleksandrovsk. When the Makhnovists tried to convene the third regional congress of peasants, workers and insurgents in April 1919 and an extraordinary congress of several regions in June 1919 (including Red Army soldiers) the Bolsheviks viewed them as counter-revolutionary, tried to ban them and declared their organisers and delegates outside the law. For example, Trotsky issued order 1824 which stated the June 1919 congress was forbidden, that to inform the population of it was an act of high treason and all delegates should be arrested immediately as were all the spreading the call. [Op. Cit., p. 98-105 and p. 122-31]

The Makhnovists replied by holding the conferences anyway and asking "*[c]an there exist laws made by a few people who call themselves revolutionaries, which permit them to outlaw a whole people who are more revolutionary than they are themselves?"* and "*[w]hose interests should the revolution defend: those of the Party or those of the people who set the revolution in motion with their blood?"* Makhno himself stated that he "*consider[ed] it an inviolable right of the workers and peasants, a right won by the revolution, to call conferences on their own account, to discuss their affairs."* [Op. Cit., p. 103 and p. 129] These actions by the Bolsheviks should make the reader ponder if the elimination of workers' democracy during the civil war can fully be explained by the objective conditions facing Lenin's government or whether Leninist ideology played an important role in it. As Arshinov argues, "*[w]hoever studies the Russian Revolution should learn it [Trotsky's order no. 1824] by heart."* [Op. Cit., p. 123] Obviously the Bolsheviks considered that soviet system was threatened if soviet conferences were called and the "dictatorship of the proletariat" was undermined if the proletariat took part in such events.

In addition, the Makhnovists "*full applied the revolutionary principles of freedom of speech, of thought, of the press, and of political association. In all cities and towns occupied by the Makhnovists, they began by lifting all the prohibitions and repealing all the restrictions imposed on the press and on political organisations by one or another power."* Indeed, the "*only restriction that the Makhnovists considered necessary to impose on the Bolsheviks, the left Socialist-Revolutionaries and other statist*

*was a prohibition on the formation of those 'revolutionary committees' which sought to impose a dictatorship over the people."* [Op. Cit., p. 153 and p. 154]

The army itself, in stark contrast to the Red Army, was fundamentally democratic (although, of course, the horrific nature of the civil war did result in a few deviations from the ideal -- however, compared to the regime imposed on the Red Army by Trotsky, the Makhnovists were much more democratic movement). Arshinov proves a good summary:

*"The Makhnovist insurrectionary army was organised according to three fundamental principles: voluntary enlistment, the electoral principle, and self-discipline.*

*"Voluntary enlistment meant that the army was composed only of revolutionary fighters who entered it of their own free will.*

*"The electoral principle meant that the commanders of all units of the army, including the staff, as well as all the men who held other positions in the army, were either elected or accepted by the insurgents of the unit in question or by the whole army.*

*"Self-discipline meant that all the rules of discipline were drawn up by commissions of insurgents, then approved by general assemblies of the various units; once approved, they were rigorously observed on the individual responsibility of each insurgent and each commander."* [Op. Cit., p. 96]

Thus the Makhnovists indicate the validity of anarchist theory. They organised the self-defence of their region, refused to form of a "revolutionary" government and so the life of the region, its social and revolutionary development followed the path of self-activity of the working people who did not allow any authorities to tell them what to do. They respected freedom of association, speech, press and so on while actively encouraging workers' and peasants' self-management and self-organisation.

Moving to the Spanish movement, the various revolts and uprisings organised by the CNT and FAI that occurred before 1936 were marked by a similar revolutionary developments as the Makhnovists. We discuss the actual events of the revolts in 1932 and 1933 in more detail in [section 14](#) and so will not repeat ourselves here. However, all were marked by the anarchist movement attacking town halls, army barracks and other sources of state authority and urging the troops to revolt and side with the masses (the anarchists paid a lot of attention to this issue -- like the French syndicalists they produced anti-militarist propaganda arguing that soldiers should side with their class and refuse orders to fire on strikers and to join popular revolts). The revolts also saw workers taking over their workplaces and the land, trying to abolish capitalism while trying to abolish the state. In summary, they were **insurrections** which combined political goals (the abolition of the state) and social ones (expropriation of capital and the creation of self-managed workplaces and communes).

The events in Asturias in October 1934 gives a more detailed account of nature of these insurrections.

The anarchist role in this revolt has not been as widely known as it should be and this is an ideal opportunity to discuss it. Combined with the other insurrections of the 1930s it clearly indicates that anarchism is a valid form of revolutionary theory.

While the CNT was the minority union in Asturias, it had a considerable influence of its own (the CNT had over 22 000 affiliates in the area and the UGT had 40 000). The CNT had some miners in their union (the majority were in the UGT) but most of their membership was above ground, particularly in the towns of Aviles and Gijon. The regional federation of the CNT had joined the Socialist Party dominated "Alianza Obrera," unlike the other regional federations of the CNT.

When the revolt started, the workers organised attacks on barracks, town halls and other sources of state authority (just as the CNT revolts of 1932 and 1933 had). Bookchin indicates that "*[s]tructurally, the insurrection was managed by hundreds of small revolutionary committees whose delegates were drawn from unions, parties, the FAI and even anti-Stalinist Communist groups. Rarely, if at all, were there large councils (or 'soviets') composed of delegates from factories.*" [**The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 249] This, incidentally, indicates that Morrow's claims that in Asturias "*the Workers' Alliances were most nearly like soviets, and had been functioning for a year under socialist and Communist Left leadership*" are false. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 31] The claims that the Asturias uprising had established soviets was simply Communist and government propaganda.

In fact, the Socialists "*generally functioned through tightly knit committees, commonly highly centralised and with strong bureaucratic proclivities. In Asturias, the UGT tried to perpetuate this form wherever possible . . . But the mountainous terrain of Asturias made such committees difficult to co-ordinate, so that each one became an isolated miniature central committee of its own, often retaining its traditional authoritarian character.*" The anarchists, on the other hand, "*favoured looser structures, often quasi-councils composed of factory workers and assemblies composed of peasants. The ambience of these fairly decentralised structures, their improvisatory character and libertarian spirit, fostered an almost festive atmosphere in Anarchist-held areas.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 249] Bookchin quotes an account which compares anarchist La Felguera with Marxist Sama, towns of equal size and separated only by the Nalon river:

*"[The October Insurrection] triumphed immediately in the metallurgical and in the mining town. . . . Sama was organised along military lines. Dictatorship of the proletariat, red army, Central Committee, discipline. authority . . . La Felguera opted for **comunismo libertario**: the people in arms, liberty to come and go, respect for the technicians of the Duro-Felguera metallurgical plant, public deliberations of all issues, abolition of money, the rational distribution of food and clothing. Enthusiasm and gaiety in La Felguera; the sullenness of the barracks in Sama. The bridges [of Sama] were held by a corp of guards complete with officers and all. No one could enter or leave Sama without a safe-conduct pass, or walk through the streets without passwords. All of this was ridiculously useless, because the government troops were far away and the Sama bourgeoisie disarmed and neutralised . . . The workers of Sama who did not adhere to the Marxist religion preferred to go to La Felguera, where at least they could breathe. Side by*

*side there were two concepts of socialism: the authoritarian and the libertarian; on each bank of the Nalon, two populations of brothers began a new life: with dictatorship in Sama; with liberty in La Felguera."* [Op. Cit., pp. 249-50]

Bookchin notes that "*[i]n contrast to the severely delimited Marxist committee in Sama, La Felguera workers met in popular assembly, where they socialised the industrial city's economy. The population was divided into wards, each of which elected delegates to supply and distribution committees. . . The La Felguera commune . . . proved to be so successful, indeed so admirable, that surrounding communities invited the La Felguera Anarchists to advice them on reorganising their own social order. Rarely were comparable institutions created by the Socialists and, where they did emerge, it was on the insistence of the rank-and-file workers."* [Op. Cit., p. 250]

In other words, the Asturias uprising saw anarchists yet again applying their ideas with great success in a revolutionary situation. As Bookchin argues:

*"Almost alone, the Anarchists were to create viable revolutionary institutions structured around workers' control of industry and peasants' control of land. That these institutions were to be duplicated by Socialist workers and peasants was due in small measure to Anarchist example rather than Socialist precept. To the degree that the Asturian miners and industrial workers in various communities established direct control over the local economy and structured their committees along libertarian lines, these achievements were due to Anarchist precedents and long years of propaganda and education."* [Op. Cit., p. 250-1]

Unlike their Socialist and Communist allies, the anarchists in Asturias took the Alianza's slogan "*Unity, Proletarian Brothers*" seriously. A key factor in the defeat of the uprising (beyond its isolation due to socialist incompetence elsewhere -- see [section 6](#)) was the fact that "*[s]o far as the Aviles and Gijon Anarchists were concerned . . . their Socialist and Communist 'brothers' were to honour the slogan only in the breach. When Anarchist delegates from the seaports arrived in Oviedo on October 7, pleading for arms to resist the imminent landings of government troops, their requests were totally ignored by Socialists and Communists who, as [historian Gabriel] Jackson notes, 'clearly mistrusted them.' The Oviedo Committee was to pay a bitter price for its refusal. The next day, when Anarchist resistance, hampered by the pitiful supply of weapons, failed to prevent the government from landing its troops, the way into Asturias lay open. The two seaports became the principal military bases for launching the savage repression of the Asturian insurrection that occupied so much of October and claimed thousands of lives."* [Murray Bookchin, Op. Cit., p. 248]

Therefore, to state as Morrow does that before July 1936, "*anarchism had never been tested on a grand scale*" and now "*leading great masses, it was to have a definite test*" is simply wrong. [Op. Cit., p. 101] Anarchism had had numerous definite tests before involving "*great masses,*" both in Spain and elsewhere. The revolts of the 1930s, the Makhnovists in the Ukraine, the factory occupations in Italy in 1920 (see [section A.5.5](#)) and in numerous other revolutionary and near revolutionary situations



anarchism had been tested **and had passed** those tests. Defeat came about by the actions of the Marxists (in the case of Asturias and Italy) or by superior force (as in the 1932 and 1933 Spanish insurrections and the Ukraine) **not** because of anarchist theory or activities. At no time did they collaborate with the bourgeois state or compromise their politics. By concentrating on July 1936, Marxists effectively distort the history of anarchism -- a bit like arguing the actions of the Social Democratic Party in crushing the German discredits Marxism while ignoring the actions and politics of the council communists during it or the Russian Revolution.

But the question remains, why did the CNT and FAI make such a mess (politically at least) of the Spanish Revolution of 1936? However, even this question is unfair as the example of the Aragon Defence Council and Federation of Collectives indicate that anarchists **did** apply their ideas successfully in certain areas during that revolution.

Morrow is aware of that example, as he argues that the "*Catalonian [i.e. CNT] militia marched into Aragon as an army of social liberation . . . Arriving in a village, the militia committees sponsor the election of a village anti-fascist committee . . . [which] organises production on a new basis*" and "*[e] very village wrested from the fascists was transformed into a forest of revolution.*" Its "*municipal councils were elected directly by the communities. The Council of Aragon was at first largely anarchist.*" He notes that "*[l]ibertarian principles were attempted in the field of money and wages*" yet he fails to mention the obvious application of libertarian principles in the field of **politics** with the state abolished and replaced by a federation of workers' associations. To do so would be to invalidate his basic thesis against anarchism and so it goes unmentioned, hoping the reader will not notice this confirmation of anarchist **politics** in practice. [Op. Cit., p. 53, p. 204 and p. 205]

So, from the experience of the Ukraine, the previous revolts in 1932, 1933 and 1934 and the example of the Council of Aragon it appears clear that rather than exposing anarchist theory (as Marxists claim), the example of July 1936 in Catalonia is an aberration. Anarchist politics had been confirmed as a valid revolutionary theory many times before and, indeed, shown themselves as the only one to ensure a free society. However, why did this aberration occur?

Most opponents of anarchism provide a rather (in)famous quote from FAI militant Juan Garcia Oliver, describing the crucial decision made in Catalonia in July of '36 to co-operate with Companys' government to explain the failure of the CNT to "seize power":

*"The CNT and FAI decided on collaboration and democracy, eschewing revolutionary totalitarianism . . . by the anarchist and Confederal dictatorship."* [quoted by Stuart Christie, **We, the Anarchists!**, p. 105]

In this statement Garcia Oliver describes the capitalist state as "democracy" and refers to the alternative of the directly democratic CNT unions taking power as "totalitarianism" and "dictatorship." Marxists tend to think this statement tells us something about the CNT's original program in the period leading up to the crisis of July 1936. As proven above, any such assertion would be false (see also [section 8](#)). In fact

this statement was made in December of 1937, many months after Garcia Oliver and other influential CNT activists had embarked upon collaboration in the government ministries and Republican army command. The quote is taken from a report by the CNT leadership, presented by Garcia Oliver and Mariano Vazquez (CNT National Secretary in 1937) at the congress of the International Workers Association (IWA). The CNT was aware that government participation was in violation of the principles of the IWA and the report was intended to provide a rationalisation. That report is an indication of just how far Garcia Oliver and other influential CNT radicals had been corrupted by the experience of government collaboration.

Garcia Oliver's position in July of 1936 had been entirely different. He had been one of the militants to argue in favour of overthrowing the Companys government in Catalonia in the crucial union assemblies of July 20-21. As Juan Gomez Casas argues:

*"The position supported by Juan Garcia Oliver [in July of '36] has been described as 'anarchist dictatorship' Actually, though, Oliver was advocating application of the goals of the Saragossa Congress in Barcelona and Catalonia at a time in history when, in his opinion, libertarian communism was a real possibility. It would always signify dissolution of the old parties dedicated to the idea of [state] power, or at least make it impossible for them to pursue their politics aimed at seizure of power. There will always be pockets of opposition to new experiences and therefore resistance to joining 'the spontaneity of the popular masses.' In addition, the masses would have complete freedom of expression in the unions and in the economic organisations of the revolution as well as in their political organisations."* [Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI, p. 188f]

Those libertarians who defended government participation in Spain argued that a non-hierarchical re-organisation of society in Catalonia in July of '36 could only have been imposed by force, against the opposition of the parties and sectors of society that have a vested interest in existing inequalities. They argued that this would have been a "dictatorship," no better than the alternative of government collaboration.

If this argument were valid, then it logically means that anarchism itself would be impossible, for there will always be sectors of society -- bosses, judges, politicians, etc. -- who will oppose social re-organisation on a libertarian basis. As Malatesta once argued, some people *"seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of a respect for the freedom of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas!"* [Anarchy, p. 41] It is doubtful he would have predicted that certain anarchists would be included in such believers!

Neither anarchism nor the CNT program called for suppressing other viewpoints. The various viewpoints that existed among the workforce and population would be reflected in the deliberations and debates of the workplace and community assemblies as well as in the various local and regional congresses and conference and on their co-ordinating Councils. The various political groups would be

free to organise, publish their periodicals and seek influence in the various self-managed assemblies and structures that existed. The CNT would be dominant because it had overwhelming support among the workers of Catalonia (and would have remained dominant as long as that continued).

What is essential to a state is that its authority and armed power be top-down, separate and distinct from the population. Otherwise it could not function to protect the power of a boss class. When a population in society directly and democratically controls the armed force (in fact, effectively **is** the armed force as in the case of the CNT militias), directly manages its own affairs in decentralised, federal organisations based on self-management from the bottom upwards and manages the economy, this is not a "state" in the historical sense. Thus the CNT would not in any real sense have "seized power" in Catalonia, rather it would have allowed the mass of people, previously disempowered by the state, to take control of their own lives -- both individually and collectively -- by smashing the state and replacing it by a free federation of workers' associations.

What this means is that a non-hierarchical society must be imposed by the working class against the opposition of those who would lose power. In building the new world we must destroy the old one. Revolutions are authoritarian by their very nature, but only in respect to structures and social relations which promote injustice, hierarchy and inequality. It is not "authoritarian" to destroy authority, in other words! Revolutions, above all else, must be libertarian in respect to the oppressed (indeed, they are acts of liberation in which the oppressed end their oppression by their own direct action). That is, they must develop structures that involve the great majority of the population, who have previously been excluded from decision making about social and economic issues.

So the dilemma of "anarchist dictatorship" or "collaboration" was a false one and fundamentally wrong. It was never a case of banning parties, etc. under an anarchist system, far from it. Full rights of free speech, organisation and so on should have existed for all but the parties would only have as much influence as they exerted in union, workplace, community, militia (and so on) assemblies, as should be the case! "Collaboration" yes, but within the rank and file and within organisations organised in a libertarian manner. Anarchism does not respect the "freedom" to be a capitalist, boss or politician.

Instead of this "collaboration" from the bottom up, the CNT and FAI committees favoured "collaboration" from the top down. In this they followed the example of the UGT and its "Workers' Alliances" rather than their own activities previous to the military revolt. Why? Why did the CNT and FAI in Catalonia reject their previous political perspective and reject the basic ideas of anarchism? As shown above, the CNT and FAI has successfully applied their ideas in many insurrections before hand. Why the change of direction? There were two main reasons.

Firstly, while a majority in Catalonia and certain other parts of Spain, the CNT and FAI were a minority in such areas as Castille and Asturias. To combat fascism required the combined forces of all parties and unions and by collaborating with a UGT-like "Anti-Fascist Alliance" in Catalonia, it was believed that such alliances could be formed elsewhere, with equality for the CNT ensured by the Catalan CNT's decision of equal representation for minority organisations in the Catalan Anti-Fascist Committee. This

would, hopefully, also ensure aid to CNT militias via the government's vast gold reserves and stop foreign intervention by Britain and other countries to protect their interests if libertarian communism was declared.

However, as Vernon Richards argues:

*"This argument contains . . . two fundamental mistakes, which many of the leaders of the CNT-FAI have since recognised, but for which there can be no excuse, since they were not mistakes of judgement but the deliberate abandonment of the principles of the CNT. Firstly, that an armed struggle against fascism or any other form of reaction could be waged more successfully within the framework of the State and subordinating all else, including the transformation of the economic and social structure of the country, to winning the war. Secondly, that it was essential, and possible, to collaborate with political parties -- that is politicians -- honestly and sincerely, and at a time when power was in the hands of the two workers organisations. . .*

*"All the initiative . . . was in the hands of the workers. The politicians were like generals without armies floundering in a desert of futility. Collaboration with them could not, by any stretch of the imagination, strengthen resistance to Franco. On the contrary, it was clear that collaboration with political parties meant the recreation of governmental institutions and the transferring of initiative from the armed workers to a central body with executive powers. By removing the initiative from the workers, the responsibility for the conduct of the struggle and its objectives were also transferred to a governing hierarchy, and this could not have other than an adverse effect on the morale of the revolutionary fighters." [Lessons of the Spanish Revolution, p. 42]*

In addition, in failing to take the initiative to unite the working class independently of the Republican state at the crucial moment, in July of '36, the CNT of Catalonia was in effect abandoning the only feasible alternative to the Popular Front strategy. Without a libertarian system of popular self-management, the CNT and FAI had no alternative but to join the bourgeois state. For a revolution to be successful, as Bakunin and Kropotkin argued, it needs to create libertarian organisations (such as workers' associations, free communes and their federations) which can effectively replace the state and the market, that is to create a widespread libertarian organisation for social and economic decision making through which working class people can start to set their own agendas. Only by going this can the state and capitalism be effectively smashed. If this is not done and the state is ignored rather than smashed, it continues and gets stronger as it will be the only medium that exists for wide scale decision making. This will result in revolutionaries having to work within it, trying to influence it since no other means exist to reach collective decisions.

The failure to smash the state, this first betrayal of anarchist principles, led to all the rest, and so the defeat of the revolution. Not destroying the state meant that the revolution could never be fully successful economically as politics and economics are bound together so closely. Only under the

political conditions of anarchism can its economic conditions flourish and vice versa.

The CNT had never considered a "strategy" of collaboration with the Popular Front prior to July of '36. In the months leading up to the July explosion, the CNT had consistently criticised the Popular Front strategy as a fake unity of leaders over the workers, a strategy that would subordinate the working class to capitalist legality. However, in July of '36, the CNT conferences in Catalonia had not seen clearly that their "temporary" participation in the Anti-Fascist Militia Committee would drag them inexorably into a practice of collaboration with the Popular Front. As Christie argues, *"the Militias Committee was a compromise, an artificial political solution . . . It . . . drew the CNT-FAI leadership inexorably into the State apparatus, until them its principle enemy, and led to the steady erosion of anarchist influence and credibility."* [Op. Cit., p. 105]

Secondly, the fear of fascism played a key role. After all, this was 1936. The CNT and FAI had seen their comrades in Italy and Germany being crushed by fascist dictatorships, sent to concentration camps and so on. In Spain, Franco's forces were slaughtering union and political militants and members by the tens of thousands (soon to reach hundreds of thousands by the end of the war and beyond). The insurrection had not been initiated by the people themselves (as had the previous revolts in the 1930s) and this also had a psychological impact on the decision making process. The anarchists were, therefore, in a position of being caught between two evils -- fascism and the bourgeois state, elements of which had fought with them on the streets. To pursue anarchist politics at such a time, it was argued, could have resulted in the CNT fighting on two fronts -- against the fascists and also against the Republican government. Such a situation would have been unbearable and so it was better to accept collaboration than aid Fascism by dividing the forces of the anti-fascist camp.

However, such a perspective failed to appreciate the depth of hatred the politicians and bourgeois had for the CNT. Indeed, by their actions it would appear they preferred fascism to the social revolution. So, in the name of "anti-fascist" unity, the CNT worked with parties and classes which hated both them and the revolution. In the words of Sam Dolgoff *"both before and after July 19th, an unwavering determination to crush the revolutionary movement was the leitmotif behind the policies of the Republican government; irrespective of the party in power."* [The Anarchist Collectives, p. 40]

Rather than eliminate a civil war developing within the civil war, the policy of the CNT just postponed it -- until such time as the state was stronger than the working class. The Republican government was quite happy to attack the gains of the revolution, physically attacking rural and urban collectives, union halls, assassinating CNT and FAI members of so on. The difference was the CNT's act only postponed such conflict until the balance of power had shifted back towards the status quo.

Moreover, the fact that the bourgeois republic was fighting fascism could have meant that it would have tolerated the CNT social revolution rather than fight it (and so weakening its own fight against Franco). However, such an argument remains moot.

It is clear that anti-fascism destroyed the revolution, not fascism. As a Scottish anarchist in Barcelona

during the revolution argued, "*Fascism is not something new, some new force of evil opposed to society, but is only the old enemy, Capitalism, under a new and fearful sounding name . . . Anti-Fascism is the new slogan by which the working class is being betrayed.*" [Ethal McDonald, **Workers Free Press**, Oct. 1937] This was also argued by the **Friends of Durruti** who stated that "*[d]emocracy defeated the Spanish people, not Fascism.*" [**The Friends of Durruti Accuse**]

The majority at the July 20-21 conferences went along with proposal of postponing the social revolution, of starting the work of creating libertarian communism, and smashing the state and replacing it with a federation of workers' assemblies. Most of the CNT militants there saw it as a temporary expedient, until the rest of Spain was freed from Franco's forces (in particular, Aragon and Saragossa). Companys' (the head of the Catalan government) had proposed the creation of a body containing representatives of all anti-fascist parties and unions called the "*Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias*," sponsored by his government. The CNT meeting agreed to this proposal, though only on condition that the CNT be given the majority on it. A sizeable minority of delegates were apparently disgusted by this decision. The delegation from Bajo Llobregat County (an industrial area south of Barcelona) walked out saying they would never go along with government collaboration.

Therefore, the decision to postpone the revolution and so to ignore the state rather than smashing was a product of isolation and the fear of a fascist victory. However, while "isolation" may explain the Catalan militants' fears and so decisions, it does not justify their decision. If the CNT of Catalonia had given Companys the boot and set up a federation of workplace and community assemblies in Catalonia, uniting the rank-and-file of the other unions with the CNT, this would have strengthened the resolve of workers in other parts of Spain, and it might have also inspired workers in nearby countries to move in a similar direction.

Isolation, the uneven support for a libertarian revolution across Spain and the dangers of fascism were real problems, but they do not excuse the libertarian movement for its mistakes. On the contrary, in following the course of action advised by leaders like Horacio Prieto and Abad Diego de Santillan, the CNT only weakened the revolution and helped to discredit libertarian socialism. After all, as Bakunin and Kropotkin continually stressed, revolutions break out in specific areas and then spread outward -- isolation is a feature of revolution which can only be overcome by action, by showing a practical example which others can follow.

Most of the CNT militants at the July 20th meeting saw the compromise as a temporary expedient, until the rest of Spain was freed from Franco's forces (in particular, Aragon and Saragossa). As the official account states, "*[t]he situation was considered and it was unanimously decided not to mention Libertarian Communism until such time as we had captured that part of Spain that was in the hands of the rebels.*" [quoted by Christie, **Op. Cit.**, p. 102] However, the membership of the CNT decided **themselves** to start the social revolution ("*very rapidly collectives . . . began to spring up. It did not happen on instructions from the CNT leadership . . . the initiative came from CNT militants*" [Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 349]). The social revolution began anyway, from below, but without the key political aspect (abolition of the state) and so was fatally compromised from the beginning.

As Stuart Christie argues:

*"The higher committees of the CNT-FAI-FIJJL in Catalonia saw themselves caught on the horns of a dilemma: social revolution, fascism or bourgeois democracy. Either they committed themselves to the solutions offered by social revolution, regardless of the difficulties involved in fighting both fascism and international capitalism, or, through fear of fascism . . . they sacrificed their anarchist principles and revolutionary objectives to bolster, to become part of the bourgeois state . . . Faced with an imperfect state of affairs and preferring defeat to a possibly Pyrrhic victory, Catalan anarchist leadership renounced anarchism in the name of expediency and removed the social transformation of Spain from their agenda.*

*"But what the CNT-FAI leaders failed to grasp was that the decision whether or not to implement Libertarian Communism was not theirs to make. Anarchism was not something which could be transformed from theory to practice by organisational decree. . .*

*"What the CNT-FAI leadership had failed to take on board was the fact that the spontaneous defensive movement of 19 July had developed a political direction of its own. On their own initiative, without any intervention by the leadership of the unions or political parties, the rank and file militants of the CNT, representing the dominant force within the Barcelona working class, together with other union militants had, with the collapse of State power, . . . been welded . . . into genuinely popular non-partisan revolutionary committees . . . in their respective neighbourhoods. They were the natural organisms of the revolution itself and direct expression of popular power." [Op. Cit., p. 99]*

In other words, the bulk of the CNT-FAI membership acted in an anarchist way while the higher committees compromised their politics and achievements in the name of anti-fascist unity. In this the membership followed years of anarchist practice and theory. It was fear of fascism which made many of the leading militants of the CNT abandon anarchist politics and instead embrace "anti-fascist unity" and compromise with the bourgeois republic. To claim that July 1936 indicated the failure of anarchism means to ignore the constructive work of millions of CNT members in their workplaces, communities and militias and instead concentrate on a few militants who made the terrible mistake of ignoring their political ideas in an extremely difficult situation. As we said above, this may explain the decision but it does not justify it.

Therefore, it is clear that the experiences of the CNT and FAI in 1936 indicate a failure of anarchists to apply their politics rather than the failure of those politics. The examples of the Makhnovists, the revolts in Spain between 1932 and 1934 as well as the Council of Aragon show beyond doubt that this is the case. Rather than act as anarchists in July 1936, the militants of the Catalan CNT and FAI ignored their basic ideas (not lightly, we stress, but in response to real dangers). They later justified their decisions by putting their options in a Marxist light -- "either we impose libertarian communism, and so become an

anarchist dictatorship, or we collaborate with the democratic government." As Vernon Richards makes clear:

*"Such alternatives are contrary to the most elementary principles of anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism. In the first place, an 'anarchist dictatorship' is a contradiction in terms (in the same way as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is), for the moment anarchists impose their social ideas on the people by force, they cease being anarchists . . . the arms of the CNT-FAI held could be no use for imposing libertarian communism . . . The power of the people in arms can only be used in the defence of the revolution and the freedoms won by their militancy and their sacrificed. We do not for one moment assume that all social revolutions are necessarily anarchist. But whatever form the revolution against authority takes, the role of anarchists is clear: that of inciting the people to abolish capitalistic property and the institutions through which it exercises its power for the exploitation of the majority by a minority. . . the role of anarchists [is] to support, to incite and encourage the development of the social revolution and to frustrate any attempts by the bourgeois capitalist state to reorganise itself, which it would seek to do." [Op. Cit., pp. 43-6]*

Their compromise in the name of anti-fascist unity contained the rest of their mistakes. Joining the "Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias" was the second mistake as at no time could it be considered as the embryo of a new workers' power. It was, rather, an organisation like the pre-war UGT "Workers' Alliances" -- an attempt to create links between the top-level of other unions and parties. Such an organisation, as the CNT recognised before the war (see [section 5](#)), could not be a means of creating a revolutionary federation of workers' associations and communes and, in fact, a hindrance to such a development, if not its chief impediment.

Given that the CNT had rejected the call for revolution in favour of anti-fascist unit on July 20th, such a development does not reflect the CNT's pre-war program. Rather it was a reversion to Felix Morrow's Trotskyist position of joining the UGT's "Workers' Alliance" in spite of its non-revolutionary nature (see [section 5](#)).

The CNT did not carry out its program (and so apply anarchist politics) and so did not replace the Generalitat (Catalan State) with a Defence Council in which only union/workplace assemblies (not political parties) were represented. To start the process of creating libertarian communism all the CNT would have had to do was to call a Regional Congress of unions and invite the UGT, independent unions and unorganised workplaces to send delegates. It could also have invited the various neighbourhood and village defence committees that had either sprung up spontaneously or were already organised before the war as part of the CNT. Unlike the other revolts it took part in the 1930s, the CNT did not apply anarchist politics. However, to judge anarchism by this single failure means to ignore the whole history of anarchism and its successful applications elsewhere, including by the CNT and FAI during numerous revolts in Spain during the 1930s and in Aragon in 1936.



Ironically enough, Kropotkin had attacked the official CNT line of not mentioning Libertarian Communism *"until such time as we had captured that part of Spain that was in the hands of the rebels."* In analysing the Paris Commune Kropotkin had lambasted those who had argued *"Let us first make sure of victory, and then see what can be done."* His comments are worth quoting at length:

*"Make sure of victory! As if there were any way of forming a free commune without laying hands upon property! As if there were any way of conquering the foe while the great mass of the people is not directly interested in the triumph of the revolution, by seeing that it will bring material, moral and intellectual well-being to everybody.*

*"The same thing happened with regard to the principle of government. By proclaiming the free Commune, the people of Paris proclaimed an essential anarchist principle, which was the breakdown of the state.*

*"And yet, if we admit that a central government to regulate the relations of communes between themselves is quite needless, why should we admit its necessity to regulate the mutual relations of the groups which make up each commune? . . . There is no more reason for a government inside the commune than for a government outside." [The Commune of Paris]*

Kropotkin's argument was sound, as the CNT discovered. By waiting until victory in the war they were defeated. Kropotkin also indicated the inevitable effects of the CNT's actions in co-operating with the state and joining representative bodies. In his words:

*"Paris sent her devoted sons to the town hall. There, shelved in the midst of files of old papers, obliged to rule when their instincts prompted them to be and to act among the people, obliged to discuss when it was needful to act, to compromise when no compromise was the best policy, and, finally, losing the inspiration which only comes from continual contact with the masses, they saw themselves reduced to impotence. Being paralysed by their separation from the people -- the revolutionary centre of light and heat -- they themselves paralysed the popular initiative." [Op. Cit.]*

Which, in a nutshell, was what happened to the leading militants of the CNT who collaborated with the state. As anarchist turned Minister admitted after the war, *"[w]e were in the government, but the streets were slipping away from us. We had lost the workers' trust and the movement's unity had been whittled away."* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, p. 274] The actions of the CNT-FAI higher committees and Ministers helped paralyse and defeat the May Days revolt of 1937. The CNT committees and leaders become increasingly isolated from the people, they compromised again and again and, ultimately, became an impotent force. Kropotkin was proved correct. Which means that far from refuting anarchist politics or analysis, the experience of the CNT-FAI in the Spanish Revolution *confirms* it.

In summary, therefore, the Spanish Revolution of 1936 indicates the failure of anarchists rather than the

failure of anarchism.

One last point, it could be argued that anarchist theory allowed the leadership of the CNT and FAI to paint their collaboration with the state as a libertarian policy. That is, of course, correct. Anarchism is against the so-called "dictatorship of the proletariat" just as much as it is against the actual dictatorship of the bourgeoisie (i.e. the existing system and its off-shoots such as fascism). This allowed the CNT and FAI leaders to argue that they were following anarchist theory by not destroying the state completely in July 1936. Of course, such a position cannot be used to discredit anarchism simply because such a revision meant that it can never be libertarian to abolish government and the state. In other words, the use made of anarchist theory by the leaders of the CNT and FAI in this case presents nothing else than a betrayal of that theory rather than its legitimate use.

Also, and more importantly, while anarchist theory was corrupted to justify working with other parties and unions in a democratic state, **Marxist** theory was used to justify the brutal one-party dictatorship of the Bolsheviks, first under Lenin and the Stalin. That, we feel, sums up the difference between anarchism and Leninism quite well.

## I.5 What could the social structure of anarchy look like?

The social and political structure of anarchy is similar to that of the economic structure, i.e., it is based on a voluntary federation of decentralised, directly democratic policy-making bodies. These are the neighbourhood and community assemblies and their confederations. In these grassroots political units, the concept of "*self-management*" becomes that of "*self-government*", a form of municipal organisation in which people take back control of their living places from the bureaucratic state and the capitalist class whose interests it serves.

*"A new economic phase demands a new political phase,"* argued Kropotkin, *"A revolution as profound as that dreamed of by the [libertarian] socialists cannot accept the mould of an out-dated political life. A new society based on equality of condition, on the collective possession of the instruments of work, cannot tolerate for a week . . . the representative system . . . if we want the social revolution, we must seek a form of political organisation that will correspond to the new method of economic organisation. . . . The future belongs to the free groupings of interests and not to governmental centralisation; it belongs to freedom and not to authority."* [**Words of a Rebel**, pp. 143-4]

Thus the social structure of an anarchist society will be the opposite of the current system. Instead of being centralised and top-down as in the state, it will be decentralised and organised from the bottom up. As Kropotkin argued, *"socialism must become **more popular**, more communalistic, and less dependent upon indirect government through elected representatives. It must become more **self-governing**."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 185] While anarchists have various different conceptions of how this communal system would be constituted (as we will see), they is total agreement on these basic visions and principles.

This empowerment of ordinary citizens through decentralisation and direct democracy will eliminate the alienation and apathy that are now rampant in the modern city and town, and (as always happens when people are free) unleash a flood of innovation in dealing with the social breakdown now afflicting our urban wastelands. The gigantic metropolis with its hierarchical and impersonal administration, its atomised and isolated "*residents*," will be transformed into a network of humanly scaled participatory communities (usually called "*communes*"), each with its own unique character and forms of self-government, which will be co-operatively linked through federation with other communities at several levels, from the municipal through the bioregional to the global.

Of course, it can (and has) been argued that people are just not interested in "*politics*." Further, some claim that this disinterest is why governments exist -- people delegate their responsibilities and power to others because they have better things to do. Such an argument, however, is flawed on empirical grounds. As we indicated in [section B.2.6](#), centralisation of power in both the French and American revolutions occurred **because** working people were taking **too much** interest in politics and social

issues, not the reverse (*"To attack the central power, to strip it of its prerogatives, to decentralise, to dissolve authority, would have been to abandon to the people the control of its affairs, to run the risk of a truly popular revolution. That is why the bourgeoisie sought to reinforce the central government even more. . ."* [Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 143]).

Simply put, the state is centralised to facilitate **minority rule** by excluding the mass of people from taking part in the decision making processes within society. This is to be expected as social structures do not evolve by chance -- rather they develop to meet specific needs and requirements. The specific need of the ruling class is to rule and that means marginalising the bulk of the population. Its requirement is for minority power and this is transformed into the structure of the state (and the capitalist company).

Even if we ignore the historical evidence on this issue, anarchists do not draw this conclusion from the current apathy that surrounds us. In fact, we argue that this apathy is not the cause of government but its result. Government is an inherently hierarchical system in which ordinary people are deliberately marginalised. The powerlessness people feel due to the workings of the system ensure that they are apathetic about it, thus guaranteeing that wealthy and powerful elites govern society without hindrance from the oppressed and exploited majority.

Moreover, government usually sticks its nose into areas that most people have no real interest in. Some things, as in the regulation of industry or workers' safety and rights, a free society could leave to those affected to make their own decisions (we doubt that workers would subject themselves to unsafe working conditions, for example). In others, such as the question of personal morality and acts, a free people would have no interest in (unless it harmed others, of course). This, again, would reduce the number of issues that would be discussed in a free commune.

Also, via decentralisation, a free people would be mainly discussing local issues, so reducing the complexity of many questions and solutions. Wider issues would, of course, be discussed but these would be on specific issues and so more focused in their nature than those raised in the legislative bodies of the state. So, a combination of centralisation and an irrational desire to discuss every and all questions also helps make *"politics"* seem boring and irrelevant.

As noted above, this result is not an accident and the marginalisation of *"ordinary"* people is actually celebrated in bourgeois *"democratic"* theory. As Noam Chomsky notes:

*"Twentieth century democratic theorists advise that 'The public must be put in its place,' so that the 'responsible men' may 'live free of the trampling and roar of a bewildered herd,' 'ignorant and meddling outsiders' whose 'function' is to be 'interested spectators of action,' not participants, lending their weight periodically to one or another of the leadership class (elections), then returning to their private concerns. (Walter Lippman). The great mass of the population, 'ignorant and mentally deficient,' must be kept in their place for the common good, fed with 'necessary illusion' and 'emotionally potent oversimplifications' (Wilson's Secretary of State Robert Lansing, Reinhold Niebuhr). Their*

*'conservative' counterparts are only more extreme in their adulation of the Wise Men who are the rightful rulers -- in the service of the rich and powerful, a minor footnote regularly forgotten.*" [Year 501, p. 18]

As discussed in Section B.2.6 ("[Who benefits from centralisation?](#)") this marginalisation of the public from political life ensures that the wealthy can be "left alone" to use their power as they see fit. In other words, such marginalisation is a necessary part of a fully functioning capitalist society. Hence, under capitalism, libertarian social structures have to be discouraged. Or as Chomsky puts it, the *"rabble must be instructed in the values of subordination and a narrow quest for personal gain within the parameters set by the institutions of the masters; meaningful democracy, with popular association and action, is a threat to be overcome."* [Op. Cit., p. 18] This philosophy can be seen in the statement of a US Banker in Venezuela under the murderous Jimenez dictatorship:

*"You have the freedom here to do whatever you want to do with your money, and to me, that is worth all the political freedom in the world."* [quoted by Chomsky, Op. Cit., p. 99]

Deterring libertarian alternatives to statism is a common feature of our current system. By marginalising and disempowering people, the ability of individuals to manage their own social activities is undermined and weakened. They develop a "fear of freedom" and embrace authoritarian institutions and "strong leaders," which in turn reinforces their marginalisation.

This consequence is hardly surprising. Anarchists maintain that the desire to participate and the ability to participate are in a symbiotic relationship: participation feeds on itself. By creating the social structures that allow participation, participation will increase. As people increasingly take control of their lives, so their ability to do so also increases. The challenge of having to take responsibility for decisions that make a difference is at the same time an opportunity for personal development. To begin to feel power, having previously felt powerless, to win access to the resources required for effective participation and learn how to use them, is a liberating experience. Once people become active subjects, making things happen in one aspect of their lives, they are less likely to remain passive objects, allowing things to happen to them, in other aspects. All in all, "politics" is far too important a subject to leave to politicians, the wealthy and bureaucrats. After all, it is what affects, your friends, community, and, ultimately, the planet you live on. Such issues cannot be left to anyone but you.

Hence a meaningful communal life based on self-empowered individuals is a distinct possibility (indeed, it has repeatedly appeared throughout history). It is the hierarchical structures in statism and capitalism, marginalising and disempowering the majority, which is at the root of the current wide scale apathy in the face of increasing social and ecological disruption. Libertarian socialists therefore call for a radically new form of political system to replace the centralised nation-state, a form that would be based around confederations of self-governing communities. In other words, in anarchism *"[s]ociety is a society of societies; a league of leagues of leagues; a commonwealth of commonwealths of commonwealths; a republic of republics of republics. Only there is freedom and order, only there is spirit, a spirit which is self-sufficiency and community, unity and independence."* [Gustav Landauer, **For Socialism**, pp. 125-

To create such a system would require dismantling the nation-state and reconstituting relations between communities on the basis of self-determination and free and equal confederation from below. In the following subsections we will examine in more detail why this new system is needed and what it might look like. As we stressed in the introduction, these are just suggestions of possible anarchist solutions to social organisation. Most anarchists recognise that anarchist communities will co-exist with non-anarchist ones after the destruction of the existing state. As we are anarchists we are discussing anarchist visions. We will leave it up to non-anarchists to paint their own pictures of a possible future.

## I.5.1 What are participatory communities?

As Murray Bookchin argues in **The Rise of Urbanisation and the Decline of Citizenship** (reprinted as **From Urbanisation to Cities**), the modern city is a virtual appendage of the capitalist workplace, being an outgrowth and essential counterpart of the factory (where "*factory*" means any enterprise in which surplus value is extracted from employees). As such, cities are structured and administered primarily to serve the needs of the capitalist elite -- employers -- rather than the needs of the many -- their employees and their families. From this standpoint, the city must be seen as (1) a transportation hub for importing raw materials and exporting finished products; and (2) a huge dormitory for wage slaves, conveniently locating them near the enterprises where their labour is to be exploited, providing them with entertainment, clothing, medical facilities, etc. as well as coercive mechanisms for controlling their behaviour.

The attitude behind the management of these "*civic*" functions by the bureaucratic servants of the capitalist ruling class is purely instrumental: worker-citizens are to be treated merely as means to corporate ends, not as ends in themselves. This attitude is reflected in the overwhelmingly alienating features of the modern city: its inhuman scale; the chilling impersonality of its institutions and functionaries; its sacrifice of health, comfort, pleasure, and aesthetic considerations to bottom-line requirements of efficiency and "*cost effectiveness*"; the lack of any real communal interaction among residents other than collective consumption of commodities and amusements; their consequent social isolation and tendency to escape into television, alcohol, drugs, gangs, etc. Such features make the modern metropolis the very antithesis of the genuine community for which most of its residents hunger. This contradiction at the heart of the system contains the possibility of radical social and political change.

The key to that change, from the anarchist standpoint, is the creation of a network of participatory communities based on self-government through direct, face-to-face democracy in grassroots neighbourhood and community assemblies. As we argued in [section I.2.3](#) such assemblies will be born in social struggle and so reflect the needs of the struggle and those within it so our comments here must be considered as generalisations of the salient features of such communities and **not** blue-prints.

Traditionally, these participatory communities were called **communes** in anarchist theory ("*The basic social and economic cell of the anarchist society is the free, independent commune*" [A. Grachev, quoted

by Paul Avrich, **The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, p. 64]). Within anarchist thought, there are two main conceptions of the free commune. One vision is based on workplace delegates, the other on neighbourhood assemblies. We will sketch each in turn.

Bakunin argued that the *"future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* In other words, *"the federative Alliance of all working men's associations . . . will constitute the commune."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 206 and p. 170]

This vision of the commune was created during many later revolutions (such as in Russia in 1905 and 1917 and Hungary in 1956). Being based on workplaces, this form of commune has the advantage of being based on groups of people who are naturally associated during most of the day (Bakunin considered workplace bodies as *"the natural organisation of the masses"* as they were *"based on the various types of work"* which *"define their actual day-to-day life"* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 139]). This would facilitate the organisation of assemblies, discussion on social, economic and political issues and the mandating and recalling of delegates. Moreover, it combines political and economic power in one organisation, so ensuring that the working class actually manages society.

This vision was stressed by later anarchist thinkers. For example, Spanish anarchist Issac Puente thought that in towns and cities *"the part of the free municipality is played by local federation. . . Ultimate sovereignty in the local federation of industrial unions lies with the general assembly of all local producers."* [**Libertarian Communism**, p. 27] The Russian anarchist G. P. Maximoff saw the *"communal confederation"* as being *"constituted by thousands of freely acting labour organisations."* [**The Program of Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 43]

Other anarchists counterpoise neighbourhood assemblies to workers' councils. These assemblies will be general meetings open to all citizens in every neighbourhood, town, and village, and will be the source of and final *"authority"* over public policy for all levels of confederal co-ordination. Such *"town meetings"* will bring ordinary people directly into the political process and give them an equal voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Such anarchists point to the experience of the French Revolution of 1789 and the *"sections"* of the Paris Commune as the key example of *"a people governing itself directly -- when possible -- without intermediaries, without masters."* It is argued, based on this experience, that *"the principles of anarchism . . . dated from 1789, and that they had their origin, not in theoretical speculations, but in the deeds of the Great French Revolution."* [Peter Kropotkin, **The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 210 and p. 204]

Critics of workers' councils point out that not all working class people work in factories or workplaces. Many are parents who look after children, for example. By basing the commune around the workplace, such people are automatically excluded. Moreover, in most modern cities many people do not live near where they work. It would mean that local affairs could not be effectively discussed in a system of workers' councils as many who take part in the debate are unaffected by the decisions reached (this is

something which the supporters of workers' councils **have** noticed and argue for councils which are delegates from both the inhabitants **and** the enterprises of an area).

In addition, anarchists like Murray Bookchin argue that workplace based systems automatically generate "*special interests*" and so exclude community issues. Only community assemblies can "*transcend the traditional special interests of work, workplace, status, and property relations, and create a **general** interest based on shared community problems.*" [Murray Bookchin, **From Urbanisation to Cities**, p. 254]

However, such communities assemblies can only be valid if they can be organised rapidly in order to make decisions and to mandate and recall delegates. In the capitalist city, many people work far from where they live and so such meetings have to be called for after work or at weekends. Thus the key need is to reduce the working day/week and to communalise industry. For this reason, many anarchists continue to support the workers' council vision of the commune, complemented by community assemblies for those who live in an area but do not work in a traditional workplace (e.g. parents bring up small children, the old, the sick and so on).

These positions are not hard and fast divisions, far from it. Puente, for example, thought that in the countryside the dominant commune would be "*all the residents of a village or hamlet meeting in an assembly (council) with full powers to administer local affairs.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 25] Kropotkin supported the soviets of the Russian Revolution, arguing that the "*idea of soviets . . . of councils of workers and peasants . . . controlling the economic and political life of the country is a great idea. All the more so, since it necessarily follows that these councils should be composed of all who take part in the production of natural wealth by their own efforts.*" [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 254]

Which method, workers' councils or community assemblies, will be used in a given community will depend on local conditions, needs and aspirations and it is useless to draw hard and fast rules. It is likely that some sort of combination of the two approaches will be used, with workers' councils being complemented by community assemblies until such time as a reduced working week and decentralisation of urban centres will make purely community assemblies the more realistic option. It is likely that in a fully libertarian society, community assemblies will be the dominant communal organisation but in the period immediately after a revolution this may not be immediately possible. Objective conditions, rather than predictions, will be the deciding factor. Under capitalism, anarchists pursue both forms of organisation, arguing for community **and** industrial unionism in the class struggle (see sections [J.5.1](#) and [J.5.2](#)).

Regardless of the exact make up of the commune, they would share identical features. They would be free associations, based upon the self-assumed obligation of those who join them. In free association, participation is essential simply because it is the **only** means by which individuals can collectively govern themselves (and unless they govern themselves, someone else will). "*As a unique individual,*" Stirner argues, "*you can assert yourself alone in association, because the association does not own you, because you are one who owns it or who turns it to your own advantage.*" The rules governing the



association are determined by the associated and can be changed by them (and so a vast improvement over *"love it or leave"*) as are the policies the association follows. Thus, the association *"does not impose itself as a spiritual power superior to my spirit. I have no wish to become a slave to my maxims, but would rather subject them to my ongoing criticism."* [Max Stirner, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 17]

Thus participatory communities are freely joined and self-managed by their members. No more division between order givers and order takers as exist within the state or capitalist workplaces. Rather the associated govern themselves and while the assembled people collectively decide the rules governing their association, and are bound by them as individuals, they are also superior to them in the sense that these rules can always be modified or repealed (see section A.2.11 -- ["Why are most anarchists in favour of direct democracy?"](#) -- for more details). As can be seen, a participatory commune is new form of social life, radically different from the state as it is decentralised, self-governing and based upon individual autonomy and free agreement. Thus Kropotkin:

*"The representative system was organised by the bourgeoisie to ensure their domination, and it will disappear with them. For the new economic phase that is about to begin we must seek a new form of political organisation, based on a principle quite different from that of representation. The logic of events imposes it."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 125]

This *"new form of political organisation has to be worked out the moment that socialistic principles shall enter our life. And it is self-evident that this new form will have to be **more popular, more decentralised, and nearer to the folk-mote self-government** than representative government can ever be."* [Kropotkin, **Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 184] He, like all anarchists, considered the idea that socialism could be created by taking over the current state or creating a new one as doomed to failure. Instead, he recognised that socialism would only be built using new organisations that reflect the spirit of socialism (such as freedom, self-government and so on). Kropotkin, like Proudhon and Bakunin before him, therefore argued that *"[t]his was the form that the social revolution must take -- the independent commune. . . [whose] inhabitants have decided that they will communalise the consumption of commodities, their exchange and their production."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 163]

In a nutshell, a participatory community is a free association, based upon the mass assembly of people who live in a common area, the means by which they make the decisions that affect them, their communities, bio-regions and the planet. Their essential task is to provide a forum for raising public issues and deciding them. Moreover, these assemblies will be a key way of generating a community (and community spirit) and building and enriching social relationships between individuals and, equally important, of developing and enriching individuals by the very process of participation in communal affairs. By discussing, thinking and listening to others, individuals develop their own abilities and powers while at the same time managing their own affairs, so ensuring that no one else does (i.e. they govern themselves and are no longer governed from above by others). As Kropotkin argued, self-management has an educational effect on those who practice it:

*"The 'permanence' of the general assemblies of the sections -- that is, the possibility of*

*calling the general assembly whenever it was wanted by the members of the section and of discussing everything in the general assembly. . . will educate every citizen politically. . . The section in permanence -- the forum always open -- is the only wayy . . . to assure an honest and intelligent administration."* [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 210-1]

As well as integrating the social life of a community and encouraging the political and social development of its members, these free communes will also be integrated into the local ecology. Humanity would life in harmony with nature as well as with itself:

*"We can envision that their squares will be interlaced by streams, their places of assembly surrounded by groves, their physical contours respected and tastefully landscaped, their soils nurtured carefully to foster plant variety for ourselves, our domestic animals, and wherever possible the wildlife they may support on their fringes."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 344]

The commune itself would aim for a balanced mix of agriculture and industry, as described by Peter Kropotkin in his classic work **Fields, Factories and Workshops**. Thus a free commune would aim to integrate the individual into social and communal life, rural and urban life into a balanced whole and human life into the wider ecology. In this way the free commune would make human habitation fully ecological, ending the sharp and needless (and dehumanising and de-individualising) division of human life from the rest of the planet. The commune will be a key means of the expressing diversity within humanity and the planet as well as improving the quality of life in society:

*"The Commune . . . will be entirely devoted to improving the communal life of the locality. Making their requests to the appropriate Syndicates, Builders', Public Health, Transport or Power, the inhabitants of each Commune will be able to gain all reasonable living amenities, town planning, parks, play-grounds, trees in the street, clinics, museums and art galleries. Giving, like the medieval city assembly, an opportunity for any interested person to take part in, and influence, his town's affairs and appearance, the Commune will be a very different body from the borough council. . .*

*"In ancient and medieval times cities and villages expressed the different characters of different localities and their inhabitants. In redstone, Portland or granite, in plaster or brick, in pitch of roof, arrangements of related buildings or patterns of slate and thatch each locality added to the interests of travellers . . . each expressed itself in castle, home or cathedral.*

*"How different is the dull, drab, or flashy ostentatious monotony of modern England. Each town is the same. The same Woolworth's, Odeon Cinemas, and multiple shops, the same 'council houses' or 'semi-detached villas' . . . North, South, East or West, what's the difference, where is the change?"*

*"With the Commune the ugliness and monotony of present town and country life will be swept away, and each locality and region, each person will be able to express the joy of living, by living together."* [Tom Brown, **Syndicalism**, p. 59]

The size of the neighbourhood assemblies will vary, but it will probably fluctuate around some ideal size, discoverable in practice, that will provide a viable scale of face-to-face interaction and allow for both a variety of personal contacts and the opportunity to know and form a personal estimation of everyone in the neighbourhood. Some anarchists have suggested that the ideal size for a neighbourhood assembly might be under one thousand adults. This, of course, suggests that any town or city would itself be a confederation of assemblies -- as was, of course, practised very effectively in Paris during the Great French Revolution.

Such assemblies would meet regularly, at the very least monthly (probably more often, particularly during periods which require fast and often decision making, like a revolution), and deal with a variety of issues. In the words of the CNT's resolution on libertarian communism:

*"the foundation of this administration will be the commune. These communes are to be autonomous and will be federated at regional and national levels to achieve their general goals. The right to autonomy does not preclude the duty to implement agreements regarding collective benefits.*

*"[The] commune . . . without any voluntary restrictions will undertake to adhere to whatever general norms may be agreed by majority vote after free debate. In return, those communities which industrialisation . . . may agree upon a different model of co-existence and will be entitled to an autonomous administration released from the general commitments . . .*

*". . . the commune is to be autonomous and confederated with the other communes . . . the commune will have the duty to concern itself with whatever may be of interest to the individual.*

*"It will have to oversee organising, running and beautification of the settlement. It will see that its inhabitants; are housed and that items and products be made available to them by the producers' unions or associations.*

*"Similarly, it is concern itself with hygiene, the keeping of communal statistics and with collective requirements such as education, health services and with the maintenance and improvement of local means of communication.*

*"It will orchestrate relations with other communes and will take care to stimulate all artistic and cultural pursuits.*

*"So that this mission may be properly fulfilled, a communal council is to be appointed . . . None of these posts will carry any executive or bureaucratic powers . . . [its members] will perform their role as producers coming together in session at the close of the day's work to discuss the detailed items which may not require the endorsement of communal assemblies.*

*"Assemblies are to be summoned as often as required by communal interests, upon the request of the communal council or according to the wishes of the inhabitants of each commune . . .*

*"The inhabitants of a commune are to debate among themselves their internal problems . . . Federations are to deliberate over major problems affecting a country or province and all communes are to be represented at their reunions and assemblies, thereby enabling their delegates to convey the democratic viewpoint of their respective communes . . . every commune which is implicated will have its right to have its say . . . On matters of a regional nature, it is the duty of the regional federation to implement agreements . . . So the starting point is the individual, moving on through the commune, to the federation and right on up finally to the confederation." [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 106-7]*

Thus the communal assembly discusses that which affects the community and those within it. As these local community associations, will be members of larger communal bodies, the communal assembly will also discuss issues which affect wider areas, as indicated, and mandate their delegates to discuss them at confederation assemblies (see [next section](#)). This system, we must note, was applied with great success during the Spanish revolution (see [section I.8](#)) and so cannot be dismissed as wishful thinking.

However, of course, the actual framework of a free society will be worked out in practice. As Bakunin correctly argued, society "*can, and must, organise itself in a different fashion [than what came before], but not from top to bottom and according to an ideal plan*" [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 205] What does seem likely is that confederations of communes will be required. We turn to this in the [next section](#).

## **I.5.2 Why are confederations of participatory communities needed?**

Since not all issues are local, the neighbourhood and community assemblies will also elect mandated and recallable delegates to the larger-scale units of self-government in order to address issues affecting larger areas, such as urban districts, the city or town as a whole, the county, the bio-region, and ultimately the entire planet. Thus the assemblies will confederate at several levels in order to develop and co-ordinate common policies to deal with common problems.

In the words of the CNT's resolution on libertarian communism:

*"The inhabitants of a commune are to debate among themselves their internal problems . . . Federations are to deliberate over major problems affecting a country or province and all communes are to be represented at their reunions and assemblies, thereby enabling their delegates to convey the democratic viewpoint of their respective communes.*

*"If, say, roads have to be built to link villages of a county or any matter arises to do with transportation and exchange of produce between agricultural and industrial counties, then naturally every commune which is implicated will have its right to have its say.*

*"On matters of a regional nature, it is the duty of the regional federation to implement agreements which will represent the sovereign will of all the region's inhabitants. So the starting point is the individual, moving on through the commune, to the federation and right on up finally to the confederation.*

*"Similarly, discussion of all problems of a national nature shall flow a like pattern . . .*  
" [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 107]

In other words, the commune *"cannot any longer acknowledge any superior: that, above it, there cannot be anything, save the interests of the Federation, freely embraced by itself in concert with other Communes."* [Kropotkin, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 259]

Federalism is applicable at all levels of society. As Kropotkin pointed out, anarchists *"understand that if no central government was needed to rule the independent communes, if national government is thrown overboard and national unity is obtained by free federation, then a central **municipal** government becomes equally useless and noxious. The same federative principle would do within the commune."* [Kropotkin's **Revolutionary Pamphlets**, pp. 163-164] Thus the whole of society would be a free federation, from the local community right up to the global level. And this free federation would be based squarely on the autonomy and self-government of local groups. With federalism, co-operation replaces coercion.

This need for co-operation does not imply a centralised body. To exercise your autonomy by joining self-managing organisations and, therefore, agreeing to abide by the decisions you help make is not a denial of that autonomy (unlike joining a hierarchical structure, where you forsake autonomy **within** the organisation). In a **centralised** system, we must stress, **power** rests at the top and the role of those below is simply to obey (it matters not if those with the power are elected or not, the principle is the same). In a **federal** system, power is **not** delegated into the hands of a few (obviously a *"federal"* government or state is a centralised system). Decisions in a federal system are made at the base of the organisation and flow upwards so ensuring that power remains decentralised in the hands of all. Working together to solve common problems and organise common efforts to reach common goals is not centralisation and

those who confuse the two make a serious error -- they fail to understand the different relations of authority each generates and confuse obedience with co-operation.

As in the economic federation of collectives, the lower levels will control the higher, thus eliminating the current pre-emptive powers of centralised government hierarchies. Delegates to higher-level co-ordinating councils or conferences will be instructed, at every level of confederation, by the assemblies they represent, on how to deal with any issue. These instructions will be binding, committing delegates to a framework of policies within which they must act and providing for their recall and the nullification of their decisions if they fail to carry out their mandates. Delegates may be selected by election and/or sortition (i.e. random selection by lot, as for jury duty currently).

Most anarchists recognise that there will be a need for "*public officials*" with specific tasks within the social confederation. We stress the word "*tasks*" as "*powers*" would not be the best word to describe their activities simply because their work is essentially administrative in nature. For example, an individual or a group of individuals may be elected to look into alternative power supplies for a community and report back on what they discover. They cannot impose their decision **onto** the community as they do not have the power to do so. They simply present their findings to the body which had mandated them. These findings are **not** a law which the electors are required to follow, but a series of suggestions and information from which the electors chose what they think is best. Or, to use another example, someone may be elected to overlook the installation of a selected power supply but the decision on what power supply to use and which specific project to implement has been decided upon by the whole community. Similarly with any delegate elected to a confederal council. Such a delegate will have their decisions mandated by their electors and are subject to recall by those electors. If such a delegate starts to abuse their position or even vote in ways opposed to by the communal assembly then they would quickly be recalled and replaced.

As such a person is an elected delegate of the community, they are a "*public official*" in the broadest sense of the word but that does not mean that they have power or authority. Essentially they are an agent of the local community who is controlled by, and accountable to, that community. Clearly, such "*officials*" are unlike politicians. They do not, and cannot, make policy decisions on behalf of those who elected them, and so they do not have governmental power over those who elected them. By this method the "*officials*" remain the servants of the public and are not given power to make decisions for people. In addition, these "*officials*" will be rotated frequently to prevent a professionalisation of politics and the problem of politicians being largely on their own once elected. And, of course, they will continue to work and live with those who elected them and receive no special privileges due to their election (in terms of more income, better housing, and so on).

Therefore, such "*public officials*" would be under the strict control of the organisations that elected them to administration posts. But, as Kropotkin argued, the general assembly of the community "*in permanence - the forum always open -- is the only way . . . to assure an honest and intelligent administration . . . [and is based upon] distrust of all executive powers.*" [**The Great French Revolution** Vol. 1, p. 211]

As Murray Bookchin argues, a *"confederalist view involves a clear distinction between policy making and the co-ordination and execution of adopted policies. Policy making is exclusively the right of popular community assemblies based on the practices of participatory democracy. Administration and co-ordination are the responsibility of confederal councils, which become the means for interlinking villages, towns, neighbourhoods, and cities into confederal networks. Power flows from the bottom up instead of from the top down, and in confederations, the flow of power from the bottom up diminishes with the scope of the federal council ranging territorially from localities to regions and from regions to ever-broader territorial areas."* [From **Urbanisation to Cities**, p. 253]

Thus the people will have the final word on policy, which is the essence of self-government, and each citizen will have his or her turn to participate in the co-ordination of public affairs. In other words, the *"legislative branch"* of self-government will be the people themselves organised in their community assemblies and their confederal co-ordinating councils, with the *"executive branch"* (public officials) limited to implementing policy formulated by the legislative branch, that is, by the people.

Besides rotation of public officials, means to ensure the accountability of such officials to the people will include a wider use of elections and sortitions, open access to proceedings and records of *"executive"* activities by computer or direct inspection, the right of citizen assemblies to mandate delegates to higher-level confederal meetings, recall their officials, and revoke their decisions, and the creation of accountability boards, elected or selected by lot (as for jury duty), for each important administrative branch, from local to national.

Thus confederations of communes are required to co-ordinate joint activity and discuss common issues and interests. Confederation is also required to protect individual, community and social freedom. The current means of co-ordinating wide scale activity -- centralism via the state -- is a threat to freedom as, to quote Proudhon, *"the citizen divests himself of sovereignty, the town and the Department and province above it, absorbed by central authority, are no longer anything but agencies under direct ministerial control."* He continues:

*"The Consequences soon make themselves felt: the citizen and the town are deprived of all dignity, the state's depredations multiply, and the burden on the taxpayer increases in proportion. It is no longer the government that is made for the people; it is the people who are made for the government. Power invades everything, dominates everything, absorbs everything. . ."* [The **Principle of Federation**, p. 59]

Moreover, *"[t]he principle of political centralism is openly opposed to all laws of social progress and of natural evolution. It lies in the nature of things that every cultural advance is first achieved within a small group and only gradually finds adoption by society as a whole. Therefore, political decentralisation is the best guaranty for the unrestricted possibilities of new experiments. For such an environment each community is given the opportunity to carry through the things which it is capable of accomplishing itself without imposing them on others. Practical experimentation is the parent of ever development in society. So long as each distinct is capable of effecting the changes within its own sphere*

*which its citizens deem necessary, the example of each becomes a fructifying influence on the other parts of the community since they will have the chance to weigh the advantages accruing from them without being forced to adopt them if they are not convinced of their usefulness. The result is that progressive communities serve the others as models, a result justified by the natural evolution of things.*" [Rudolf Rocker, **Pioneers of American Freedom**, pp. 16-7]

The contrast with centralisation of the state could not be more clear. As Rocker argues, "*[i]n a strongly centralised state, the situation is entirely reversed and the best system of representation can do nothing to change that. The representatives of a certain district may have the overwhelming majority of a certain district on his [or her] side, but in the legislative assembly of the central state, he [or she] will remain in the minority, for it lies in the nature of things that in such a body not the intellectually most active but the most backward districts represent the majority. Since the individual district has indeed the right to give expression of its opinion, but can effect no changes without the consent of the central government, the most progressive districts will be condemned to stagnate while the most backward districts will set the norm.*" [Op. Cit., p. 17]

Little wonder anarchists have always stressed what Kropotkin termed "*local action*" and considered the libertarian social revolution as "*proceed[ing] by proclaiming independent Communes which Communes will endeavour to accomplish the economic transformation within . . . their respective surroundings.*" [Peter Kropotkin, **Act For Yourselves**, p. 43] Thus the advanced communities will inspire the rest to follow them by showing them a practical example of what is possible. Only decentralisation and confederation can promote the freedom and resulting social experimentation which will ensure social progress and make society a good place to live.

Moreover, confederation is required to maximise self-management. As Rocker explains, "*[i]n a smaller community, it is far easier for individuals to observe the political scene and become acquainted with the issues which have to be resolved. This is quite impossible for a representative in a centralised government. Neither the single citizen nor his [or her] representative is completely or even approximately to supervise the huge clockwork of the central state machine. The deputy is forced daily to make decisions about things of which he [or she] has no personal knowledge and for the appraisal of which he must therefore depend on others [i.e. bureaucrats and lobbyists]. That such a system necessarily leads to serious errors and mistakes is self-evident. And since the citizen for the same reason is not able to inspect and criticise the conduct of his representative, the class of professional politicians is given added opportunity to fish in troubled waters.*" [Op. Cit., p. 17-18]

In other words, confederations are required to protect society and the individual against the dangers of centralisation. As Bakunin stressed, there are two ways of organising society, "*as it is today, from high to low and from the centre to circumference by means of enforced unity and concentration*" and the way of the future, by federalism "*starting with the free individual, the free association and the autonomous commune, from low to high and from circumference to centre, by means of free federation.*" [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, p. 88] In other words, "*the organisation of society from the bottom up.*" [The Basic Bakunin, p. 131]



Thus confederations of participatory communities are required to co-ordinate joint activities, allow social experimentation and protect the distinctiveness, dignity, freedom and self-management of communities and so society as a whole. This is why "*socialism is federalist*" and "*true federalism, the political organisation of socialism, will be attained only when these popular grass-roots institutions [namely, "communes, industrial and agricultural associations"] are organised in progressive stages from the bottom up.*" [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 402]

### I.5.3 What will be the scales and levels of confederation?

This can only be worked out in practice. In general, it would be save to say that confederations would be needed on a wide scale, including in towns and cities. No village, town or city could be self-sufficient nor would desire to be -- communication and links with other places are part and parcel of live and anarchists have no desire to retreat back into an isolated form of localism:

*"No community can hope to achieve economic autarchy, nor should it try to do so. Economically, the wide range of resources that are needed to make many of our widely used goods preclude self-enclosed insularity and parochialism. Far from being a liability, this interdependence among communities and regions can well be regarded as an asset -- culturally as well as politically . . . Divested of the cultural cross-fertilisation that is often a product of economic intercourse, the municipality tends to shrink into itself and disappear into its own civic privatism. Shared needs and resources imply the existence of sharing and, with sharing, communication, rejuvenation by new ideas, and a wider social horizon that yields a wider sensibility to new experiences."* [Murray Bookchin, **From Urbanisation to Cities**, p. 237]

This means that the scale and level of the confederations created by the communes will be varied and extensive. It would be hard to generalise about them, particularly as different confederations will exist for different tasks and interests. Moreover, any system of communes would start off based on the existing villages, towns and cities of capitalism. That is unavoidable and will, of course, help determine the initial scale and level of confederations.

It seems likely that the scale of the confederation will be dependent on the inhabited area in question. A village, for example, would be based on one assembly and (minimally) be part of a local confederation covering all the villages nearby. In turn, this local confederation would be part of a district confederation, and so on up to (ultimately) a continental and world scale. Needless to say, the higher the confederation the less often it would meet and the less it would have to consider in terms of issues to decide. On such a level, only the most general issues and decisions could be reached (in effect, only guidelines which the member confederations would apply as they saw fit).

In urban areas, the town or city would have to be broken down into confederations and these confederations would constitute the town or city assembly of delegates. Given a huge city like London, New York or Mexico City it would be impossible to organise in any other way. Smaller towns would

probably be able to have simpler confederations. We must stress here that few, if any, anarchists consider it desirable to have huge cities in a free society and one of the major tasks of social transformation will be to break the metropolis into smaller units, integrated with the local environment. However, a social revolution will take place in these vast metropolises and so we have to take them into account in our discussion.

Thus the issue of size would determine when a new level of confederation would be needed. A town or village of several thousand people could be organised around the basic level of the commune and it may be that a libertarian socialist society would probably form another level of confederation once this level has been reached. Such units of confederation would, as noted above, include urban districts within today's large cities, small cities, and rural districts composed of several nearby towns. The next level of confederation would, we can imagine, be dependent on the number of delegates required. After a certain number, the confederation assembly may become difficult to manage, so implying that another level of confederation is required. This would, undoubtedly, be the base for determining the scale and level of confederation, ensuring that any confederal assembly can actually manage its activities and remain under the control of lower levels.

Combined with this consideration, we must also raise the issue of economies of scale. A given level of confederation may be required to make certain social and economic services efficient (we are thinking of economies of scale for such social needs as universities, hospitals, and cultural institutions). While every commune may have a doctor, nursery, local communal stores and small-scale workplaces, not all can have a university, hospital, factories and so forth. These would be organised on a wider level, so necessitating the appropriate confederation to exist to manage them.

However, face-to-face meetings of the whole population are impractical at this size. Therefore, the decision making body at this level would be the **confederal council**, which would consist of mandated, recallable, and rotating delegates from the neighbourhood assemblies. These delegates would co-ordinate policies which have been discussed and voted on by the neighbourhood assemblies, with the votes being summed across the district to determine district policy by majority rule. The issues to be discussed by these confederal meetings/assemblies would be proposed by local communes, the confederal council would collate these proposals and submit them to the other communes in the confederation for discussion. Thus the flow of decision making would be from the bottom up, with the "*lowest*" bodies having the most power, particularly the power to formulate, suggest, correct and, if need be, reject decisions made at "*higher*" levels in the confederation.

Ties between bioregions or larger territories based on the distribution of such things as geographically concentrated mineral deposits, climate dependent crops, and production facilities that are most efficient when concentrated in one area will unite communities confederally on the basis of common material needs as well as values. At the bioregional and higher levels of confederation, councils of mandated, recallable, and rotating delegates will co-ordinate policies at those levels, but such policies will still be subject to approval by the neighbourhood and community assemblies through their right to recall their delegates and revoke their decisions.

In the final analysis, libertarian socialism cannot function optimally -- and indeed may be fatally undermined -- unless the present system of competing nation-states is replaced by a co-operative system of decentralised bioregions of self-governing communities confederated on a global scale. For, if a libertarian socialist nation is forced to compete in the global market for scarce raw materials and hard cash with which to buy them, the problems of "*petty-bourgeois co-operativism*," previously noted, will have merely been displaced to a higher level of organisation. That is, instead of individual co-operatives acting as collective capitalists and competing against each other in the national market for profits, raw materials, etc., the nation or community **as a whole** will become the "*collective capitalist*" and compete against other nations in the global capitalist market -- a situation that is bound to reintroduce many problems, e.g. militarism, imperialism, and alienating/disempowering measures in the workplace, justified in the name of "*efficiency*" and "*global competitiveness*."

To some extent such problems can be reduced in the revolutionary period by achieving self-sufficiency within bioregions as Kropotkin argued (see [section I.3.8](#)). This should be easier to achieve in a libertarian socialist economy as artificial needs are not manufactured by massive advertising campaigns of giant profit-seeking corporations. As a social revolution would, as Kropotkin predicted, suffer (initially) from isolation and disrupted trade patterns such a policy would have to be applied anyway and so interbioregional trade would be naturally be limited to other members of the libertarian socialist federation to a large degree. However, to eliminate the problem completely, anarchists envision a global council of bioregional delegates to co-ordinate global co-operation based on policies formulated and approved at the grassroots by the confederal principles outlined above. As noted above, most anarchists think that the "*higher*" the confederation, the more its decisions will be guidelines rather than anything else.

In summary, the size and scale of confederations will depend on practical considerations, based on what people found were optimal sizes for their neighbourhood assemblies and the needs of co-operation between them, towns, cities, regions and so on. We cannot, and have no wish, to predict the development of a free society. Therefore the scale and levels of confederation will be decided by those actually creating an anarchist world. All we can do is make a few suggestions of what seems likely.

## **I.5.4 How will anything ever be decided by all these meetings?**

Anarchists have little doubt that the confederal structure will be an efficient means of decision making and will not be bogged down in endless meetings. We have various reasons for thinking this.

Firstly, we doubt that a free society will spend all its time in assemblies or organising confederal conferences. Certain questions are more important than others and few anarchists desire to spend all their time in meetings. The aim of a free society is to allow individuals to express their desires and wants freely -- they cannot do that if they are continually at meetings (or preparing for them). So while communal and confederal assemblies will play an important role in a free society, do not think that they will be occurring all the time or that anarchists desire to make meetings the focal point of individual life. Far from it!

Thus communal assemblies may occur, say, once a week, or fortnightly or monthly in order to discuss truly important issues. There would be no real desire to meet continuously to discuss every issue under the sun and few people would tolerate this occurring. This would mean that such meetings would current regularly and when important issues needed to be discussed, **not** continuously (although, if required, continuous assembly or daily meetings may have to be organised in emergency situations but this would be rare).

Secondly, it is extremely doubtful that a free people would desire waste vast amounts of time at such meetings. While important and essential, communal and confederal meetings would be functional in the extreme and not forums for hot air. It would be the case that those involved in such meetings would quickly make their feelings known to time wasters and those who like the sound of their own voices. Thus Cornelius Castoriadis:

*"It might be claimed that the problem of numbers remains and that people never would be able to express themselves in a reasonable amount of time. This is not a valid argument. There would rarely be an assembly over twenty people where everyone would want to speak, for the very good reason that when there is something to be decided upon there are not an infinite number of options or an infinite number of arguments. In unhampered rank-and-file workers' gatherings (convened, for instance, to decide on a strike) there have never been 'too many' speeches. The two or three fundamental opinions having been voiced, and various arguments exchanged, a decision is soon reached.*

*"The length of speeches, moreover, often varies inversely with the weight of their content. Russian leaders sometimes talk on for four hours at Party Congresses without saying anything . . . For an account of the laconicism of revolutionary assemblies, see Trotsky's account of the Petrograd soviet of 1905 -- or accounts of the meetings of factory representatives in Budapest in 1956." [Political and Social Writings, vol. 2, pp. 144-5]*

As we shall see below, this was definitely the case during the Spanish Revolution as well.

Thirdly, as these assemblies and congresses are concerned purely with joint activity and co-ordination, it is likely that they will not be called very often. Different associations, syndicates and co-operatives have a functional need for co-operation and so would meet more regularly and take action on practical activity which affects a specific section of a community or group of communities. Not every issue that a member of a community is interested in is necessarily best discussed at a meeting of all members of a community or at a confederal conference.

In other words, communal assemblies and conferences will have specific, well defined agendas, and so there is little danger of "*politics*" taking up everyone's time. Hence, far from discussing abstract laws and pointless motions which no one actually knows much about, the issues discussed in these conferences will be on specific issues which are important to those involved. In addition, the standard procedure may

be to elect a sub-group to investigate an issue and report back at a later stage with recommendations. The conference can change, accept, or reject any proposals.

As Kropotkin argued, anarchy would be based on *"free agreement, by exchange of letters and proposals, and by congresses at which delegates met to discuss well specified points, and to come to an agreement about them, but not to make laws. After the congress was over, the delegates [would return] . . . not with a law, but with the draft of a contract to be accepted or rejected."* [**Conquest of Bread**, p. 131]

By reducing conferences to functional bodies based on concrete issues, the problems of endless discussions can be reduced, if not totally eliminated. In addition, as functional groups would exist outside of these communal confederations (for example, industrial collectives would organise conferences about their industry with invited participants from consumer groups), there would be a limited agenda in most communal get-togethers.

The most important issues would be to agree on the guidelines for industrial activity, communal investment (e.g. houses, hospitals, etc.) and overall co-ordination of large scale communal activities. In this way everyone would be part of the commonwealth, deciding on how resources would be used to maximise human well-being and ecological survival. The problems associated with *"the tyranny of small decisions"* would be overcome without undermining individual freedom. (In fact, a healthy community would enrich and develop individuality by encouraging independent and critical thought, social interaction, and empowering social institutions based on self-management).

Is such a system fantasy? Given that such a system has existed and worked at various times, we can safely argue that it is not. Obviously we cannot cover **every** example, so we point to just two -- revolutionary Paris and Spain.

As Murray Bookchin points out, Paris *"in the late eighteenth century was, by the standards of that time, one of the largest and economically most complex cities in Europe: its population approximated a million people . . . Yet in 1793, at the height of the French Revolution, the city was managed institutionally almost entirely by [48] citizen assemblies. . . and its affairs were co-ordinated by the Commune . . . and often, in fact, by the assemblies themselves, or sections as they were called, which established their own interconnections without recourse to the Commune."* [**Society and Nature**, no. 5, p. 96]

Here is his account of how communal self-government worked in practice:

*"What, then, were these little-known forty-eight sections of Paris . . . How were they organised? And how did they function?"*

*"Ideologically, the **sectionnaires** (as their members were called) believed primarily in sovereignty of the people. This concept of popular sovereignty, as Albert Soboul observes, was for them 'not an abstraction, but the concrete reality of the people united in sectional*

*assemblies and exercising all their rights.' It was in their eyes an inalienable right, or, as the section de la Cite declared in November 1792, 'every man who assumes to have sovereignty [over others] will be regarded as a tyrant, usurper of public liberty and worthy of death.'*

*"Sovereignty, in effect, was to be enjoyed by **all** citizens, not pre-empted by 'representatives' . . . The radical democrats of 1793 thus assumed that every adult was, to one degree or another, competent to participate in management public affairs. Thus, each section . . . was structured around a **face-to-face democracy**: basically a general assembly of the people that formed the most important deliberative body of a section, and served as the incarnation of popular power in a given part of the city . . . each elected six deputies to the Commune, presumably for the pursue merely of co-ordinating all the sections in the city of Paris.*

*"Each section also had its own various administrative committees, whose members were also recruited from the general assembly." [The Third Revolution, vol. 1, p. 319]*

Little wonder Kropotkin argued that these "sections" showed "the principles of anarchism, expressed some years later in England by W. Godwin, . . . had their origin, not in theoretical speculations, but in the **deeds** of the Great French Revolution" [The Great French Revolution, vol. 1, p. 204]

Communal self-government was also practised, and on a far wider scale, in revolutionary Spain. All across Republican Spain, workers and peasants formed communes and federations of communes (see [section I.8](#) for fuller details). As Gaston Leval summarises the experience:

*"There was, in the organisation set in motion by the Spanish Revolution and by the libertarian movement, which was its mainspring, a structuring from the bottom to the top, which corresponds to a real federation and true democracy . . . the controlling and co-ordinating Comites, clearly indispensable, do not go outside the organisation that has chosen them, they remain in their midst, always controllable by and accessible to the members. If any individuals contradict by their actions their mandates, it is possible to call them to order, to reprimand them, to replace them. It is only by and in such a system that the 'majority lays down the law.'*

*"The syndical assemblies were the expression and the practice of libertarian democracy, a democracy having nothing in common with the democracy of Athens where the citizens discussed and disputed for days on end on the Agora; where factions, clan rivalries, ambitions, personalities conflicted, where, in view of the social inequalities precious time was lost in interminable wrangles. Here a modern Aristophenes would have had no reason to write the equivalent of **The Clouds**.*

*"Normally those periodic meetings would not last more than a few hours. They dealt with*

*concrete, precise subjects concretely and precisely. And all who had something to say could express themselves. The Comite presented the new problems that had arisen since the previous assembly, the results obtained by the application of such and such a resolution . . . relations with other syndicates, production returns from the various workshops or factories. All this was the subject of reports and discussion. Then the assembly would nominate the commissions, the members of these commissions discussed between themselves what solutions to adopt, if there was disagreement, a majority report and a minority report would be prepared.*

*"This took place in **all** the syndicates **throughout Spain**, in **all** trades and **all** industries, in assemblies which, in Barcelona, from the very beginnings of our movement brought together hundreds or thousands of workers depending on the strength of the organisations. So much so that the awareness of the duties, responsibilities of each spread all the time to a determining and decisive degree. . .*

*"The practice of this democracy also extended to the agricultural regions . . . the decision to nominate a local management Comite for the villages was taken by general meetings of the inhabitants of villages, how the delegates in the different essential tasks which demanded an indispensable co-ordination of activities were proposed and elected by the whole assembled population. But it is worth adding and underlining that in all the collectivised villages and all the partially collectivised villages, in the 400 Collectives in Aragon, in the 900 in the Levante region, in the 300 in the Castilian region, to mention only the large groupings . . . the population was called together weekly, fortnightly or monthly and kept fully informed of everything concerning the commonweal.*

*"This writer was present at a number of these assemblies in Aragon, where the reports on the various questions making up the agenda allowed the inhabitants to know, to so understand, and to feel so mentally integrated in society, to so participate in the management of public affairs, in the responsibilities, that the recriminations, the tensions which always occur when the power of decision is entrusted to a few individuals, be they democratically elected without the possibility of objecting, did not happen there. The assemblies were public, the objections, the proposals publicly discussed, everybody being free, as in the syndical assemblies, to participate in the discussions, to criticise, propose, etc. Democracy extended to the whole of social life." [Collectives in the Spanish Revolution, pp. 205-7]*

These collectives organised federations embracing thousands of communes and workplaces, whole branches of industry, hundreds of thousands of people and whole regions of Spain.

In other words, it **is** possible. It **has** worked. With the massive improvements in communication technology it is even more viable than before. Whether or not we reach such a self-managed society depends on whether we desire to be free or not.

## I.5.5 Aren't participatory communities and confederations just new states?

No. As we have seen in [section B.2](#), a state can be defined both by its structure and its function. As far as structure is concerned, a state involves the politico-military and economic domination of a certain geographical territory by a ruling elite, based on the delegation of power into the hands of the few, resulting in hierarchy (centralised authority). As Kropotkin argued, *"the word 'State' . . . should be reserved for those societies with the hierarchical system and centralisation."* [**Ethics**, p. 317f]

In a system of federated participatory communities, however, there is no ruling elite, and thus no hierarchy, because power is retained by the lowest-level units of confederation through their use of direct democracy and mandated, rotating, and recallable delegates to meetings of higher-level confederal bodies. This eliminates the problem in "representative" democratic systems of the delegation of power leading to the elected officials becoming isolated from and beyond the control of the mass of people who elected them. As Kropotkin pointed out, an anarchist society would make decisions by *"means of congresses, composed of delegates, who discuss among themselves, and submit **proposals**, not **laws**, to their constituents"*, and so is based on **self**-government, **not** representative government (i.e. statism). [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 135]

In addition, in representative democracy, elected officials who must make decisions on a wide range of issues inevitably gather an unelected bureaucracy around them to aid in their decision making, and because of its control of information and its permanency, this bureaucracy soon has more power than the elected officials (who themselves have more power than the people). In the system we have sketched, policy proposals formulated by higher-level confederal bodies would often be presented to the grassroots political units for discussion and voting (though the grassroots units could also formulate policy proposals directly), and these higher-level bodies would often need to consult experts in formulating such proposals. But these experts would not be retained as a permanent bureaucracy, and all information provided by them would be available to the lower-level units to aid in their decision making, thus eliminating the control of information on which bureaucratic power is based.

Perhaps it will be objected that communal decision making is just a form of *"statism"* based on direct, as opposed to representative, democracy -- *"statist"* because the individual is still be subject to the rules of the majority and so is not free. This objection, however, confuses statism with free agreement (i.e. co-operation). Since participatory communities, like productive syndicates, are voluntary associations, the decisions they make are based on self-assumed obligations (see section A.2.11 -- ["Why are most anarchists in favour of direct democracy?"](#)), and dissenters can leave the association if they so desire. Thus communes are no more *"statist"* than the act of promising and keeping ones word.

In addition, in a free society, dissent and direct action can be used by minorities to press their case (or defend their freedom) as well as debate. As Carole Pateman argues, *"[p]olitical disobedience is merely one possible expression of the active citizenship on which a self-managing democracy is based."* [**The**



**Problem of Political Obligation**, p. 162] In this way, individual liberty can be protected in a communal system and society enriched by opposition, confrontation and dissent.

Without self-management and minority dissent, society would become an ideological cemetery which would stifle ideas and individuals as these thrives on discussion (*"those who will be able to create in their mutual relations a movement and a life based on the principles of free understanding . . . will understand that **variety, conflict even, is life and that uniformity is death**"* [Kropotkin, **Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 143]). Therefore it is likely that a society based on voluntary agreements and self-management would, out of interpersonal empathy and self-interest, create a society that encouraged individuality and respect for minorities.

Therefore, a commune's participatory nature is the opposite of statism. April Carter, in **Authority and Democracy** agrees. She states that *"commitment to direct democracy or anarchy in the socio-political sphere is incompatible with political authority"* and that the *"only authority that can exist in a direct democracy is the collective 'authority' vested in the body politic . . . it is doubtful if authority can be created by a group of equals who reach decisions be a process of mutual persuasion."* [p. 69 and p. 380] Which echoes, we must note, Proudhon's comment that *"the true meaning of the word 'democracy'"* was the *"dismissal of government."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 42] Bakunin argued that when the *"whole people govern"* then *"there will be no one to be governed. It means that there will be no government, no State."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 287] Malatesta, decades later, made the same point -- *"government by everybody is no longer government in the authoritarian, historical and practical sense of the word."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 38] And, of course, Kropotkin argued that by means of the directly democratic sections of the French Revolution the masses *"practic[ed] what was to be described later as Direct Self-Government"* and expressed *"the principles of anarchism."* [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 200 and p. 204]

Anarchists assert that individuals and the institutions they create cannot be considered in isolation. Authoritarian institutions will create individuals who have a servile nature, who cannot govern themselves. Anarchists, therefore, consider it common sense that individuals, in order to be free, **must** have take part in determining the general agreements they make with their neighbours which give form to their communities. Otherwise, a free society could not exist and individuals would be subject to rules others make **for** them (following orders is hardly libertarian). Therefore, anarchists recognise the social nature of humanity and the fact any society based on contracts (like capitalism) will be marked by authority, injustice and inequality, **not** freedom. As Bookchin points out, *"[t]o speak of 'The Individual' apart from its social roots is as meaningless as to speak of a society that contains no people or institutions."* ["**Communalism: The Democratic Dimension of Anarchism**", **Society and Nature** no. 8, p. 15]

Society cannot be avoided and *"[u]nless everyone is to be psychologically homogeneous and society's interests so uniform in character that dissent is simply meaningless, there must be room for conflicting proposals, discussion, rational explication and majority decisions - in short, democracy."* [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 15-16] Those who reject democracy in the name of liberty (such as many supporters of capitalism claim to do) usually also see the need for laws and hierarchical authority (particularly in the

workplace). This is unsurprising, as such authority is the only means left by which collective activity can be co-ordinated if "*democracy*" (i.e. self-management) is rejected (usually as "*statist*", which is ironic as the resulting institutions, such as a capitalist company, are far more statist than self-managed ones).

However, it should be noted that communities can expel individuals or groups of individuals who constantly hinder community decisions. As Malatesta argued, "*for if it is unjust that the majority should oppress the minority, the contrary would be quite as unjust; and if the minority has a right to rebel, the majority has a right to defend itself. . . it is true that this solution is not completely satisfactory. The individuals put out of the association would be deprived of many social advantages, which an isolated person or group must do without, because they can only be procured by the co-operation of a great number of human beings. But what would you have? These malcontents cannot fairly demand that the wishes of many others should be sacrificed for their sakes.*" [A **Talk about Anarchist-Communism**, p. 29]

Nevertheless, such occurrences would be rare (for reasons discussed in [section I.5.6](#)), and their possibility merely indicates that free association also means the freedom **not** to associate. This a very important freedom for both the majority and the minority, and must be defended. However, as an isolated life is impossible, the need for communal associations is essential. It is only by living together in a supportive community can individuality be encouraged and developed along with individual freedom. However, anarchists are aware that not everyone is a social animal and that there are times that people like to withdraw into their own personal space. Thus our support for free association and federalism along with solidarity, community and self-management.

Lastly, that these communities and confederations are not just states with new names is indicated by two more considerations. Firstly, in regard to the activities of the confederal conferences, it is clear that they would **not** be passing laws on personal behaviour or ethics, i.e. not legislating to restrict the liberty of those who live in these communities they represent. For example, a community is unlikely to pass laws outlawing homosexuality or censoring the press, for reasons discussed in the [next section](#). Hence they would not be "*law-making bodies*" in the modern sense of the term, and thus not statist. Secondly, these confederations have no means to enforce their decisions. In other words, if a confederal congress makes a decision, it has no means to force people to act or not act in a certain way. We can imagine that there will be ethical reasons why participants will not act in ways to oppose joint activity -- as they took part in the decision making process they would be considered childish if they reject the final decision because it did not go in their favour. Moreover, they would also have to face the reaction of those who also took part in the decision making process. It would be likely that those who ignored such decisions (or actively hindered them) would soon face non-violent direct action in the form of non-co-operation, shunning, boycotting and so on.

So, far from being new states by which one section of a community imposes its ethical standards on another, the anarchist commune is just a public forum. In this forum, issues of community interest (for example, management of the commons, control of communalised economic activity, and so forth) are discussed and policy agreed upon. In addition, interests beyond a local area are also discussed and

delegates for confederal conferences are mandated with the wishes of the community. Hence, administration of things replaces government of people, with the community of communities existing to ensure that the interests of all are managed by all and that liberty, justice and equality are more than just ideals.

For these reasons, a libertarian-socialist society would not create a new state as far as structure goes. But what about in the area of function?

As noted in [section B.2.1](#), the function of the state is to enable the ruling elite to exploit subordinate social strata, i.e. to derive an economic surplus from them, which it does by protecting certain economic monopolies from which the elite derives its wealth, and so its power. But this function is completely eliminated by the economic structure of anarchist society, which, by abolishing private property, makes it impossible for a privileged elite to form, let alone exploit "*subordinate strata*" (which will not exist, as no one is subordinate in power to anyone else). In other words, by placing the control of productive resources in the hands of the workers councils and community assemblies, every worker is given free access to the means of production that he or she needs to earn a living. Hence no one will be forced to pay usury (i.e. a use-fee) in the form of appropriated surplus value (profits) to an elite class that monopolises the means of production. In short, without private property, the state loses its reason for existence.

## I.5.6 Won't there be a danger of a "*tyranny of the majority*" under libertarian socialism?

While the "*tyranny of the majority*" objection does contain an important point, it is often raised for self-serving reasons. This is because those who raised the issue (for example, creators of the 1789 US constitution like Hamilton and Madison) saw the "*minority*" to be protected as the rich. In other words, the objection is not opposed to majority tyranny as such (they have no objections when the majority support their right to their riches) but rather attempts of the majority to change their society to a fairer one. However, as noted, the objection to majority rule **does** contain a valid point and one which anarchists have addressed -- namely, what about minority freedom within a self-managed society.

There is, of course, this danger in **any** society, be its decision making structure direct (anarchy) or indirect (by some form of government). Anarchists are at the forefront in expressing concern about it (see, for example, Emma Goldman's classic essay "*Minorities versus Majorities*" in **Anarchism and Other Essays**). We are well aware that the mass, as long as the individuals within it do not free themselves, can be a dead-weight on others, resisting change and enforcing conformity. As Goldman argued, "*even more than constituted authority, it is social uniformity and sameness that harass the individual the most.*" [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 93] Hence Malatesta's comment that anarchists "*have the special mission of being vigilant custodians of freedom, against all aspirants to power and against the possible tyranny of the majority.*" [**Life and Ideas**, p. 161]

However, rather than draw elitist conclusions from this fact of life under capitalism and urge forms of government and organisation which restrict popular participation (and promote rule, and tyranny, by the few) -- as classical liberals do -- libertarians argue that only a process of self-liberation through struggle and participation can break up the mass into free, self-managing individuals. Moreover, we also argue that participation and self-management is the only way that majorities can come to see the point of minority ideas and for seeing the importance of protecting minority freedoms. This means that any attempt to restrict participation in the name of minority rights actually enforces the herd mentality, undermining minority and individual freedom rather than protecting it. As Carole Pateman argues:

*"the evidence supports the arguments . . . that we do learn to participate by participating and that feelings of political efficacy are more likely to be developed in a participatory environment. Furthermore, the evidence indicates that experience of a participatory authority structure might also be effective in diminishing tendencies towards non-democratic attitudes in the individual."* [**Participation and Democratic Theory**, p. 105]

However, while there is cause for concern (and anarchists are at the forefront in expressing it), the *"tyranny of the majority"* objection fails to take note of the vast difference between direct and *"representative"* forms of democracy.

In the current system, as we pointed out in [section B.5](#), voters are mere passive spectators of occasional, staged, and highly rehearsed debates among candidates pre-selected by the corporate elite, who pay for campaign expenses. More often the public is expected to choose simply on the basis of political ads and news sound bites. Once the choice is made, cumbersome and ineffective recall procedures insure that elected representatives can act more or less as they (or rather, their wealthy sponsors) please. The function, then, of the electorate in bourgeois *"representative government"* is ratification of *"choices"* that have been **already made for them!**

By contrast, in a direct, libertarian democracy, decisions are made following public discussion in community assemblies open to all. After decisions have been reached, outvoted minorities -- even minorities of one -- still have ample opportunity to present reasoned and persuasive counter-arguments to try to change the decision. This process of debate, disagreement, challenge, and counter-challenge, which goes on even after the defeated minority has temporarily acquiesced in the decision of the majority, is virtually absent in the representative system, where *"tyranny of the majority"* is truly a problem. In addition, minorities can secede from an association if the decision reached by it are truly offensive to them.

And let us not forget that in all likelihood, issues of personal conduct or activity will not be discussed in the neighbourhood assemblies. Why? Because we are talking about a society in which most people consider themselves to be unique, free individuals, who would thus recognise and act to protect the uniqueness and freedom of others. Unless people are indoctrinated by religion or some other form of ideology, they can be tolerant of others and their individuality. If this is not the case now, then it has more to do with the existence of authoritarian social relationships -- relationships that will be dismantled

under libertarian socialism -- and the type of person they create rather than some innate human flaw.

Thus there will be vast areas of life in a libertarian socialist community which are none of other people's business. Anarchists have always stressed the importance of personal space and "*private*" areas. Indeed, for Kropotkin, the failure of many "*utopian*" communities directly flowed from a lack personal space. One of the mistakes made by such "*utopian*" communities within capitalism was "*the desire to manage the community after the model of a family, to make it 'the great family.'* *They lived all in the same house and were thus forced to continuously meet the same 'brethren and sisters.'* *It is already difficult often for two real brothers to live together in the same house, and family life is not always harmonious; so it was a fundamental error to impose on all the 'great family' instead of trying, on the contrary, to guarantee as much freedom and home life to each individual.*" [Small Communal Experiments and Why they Fail, pp. 8-9]

Thus in an anarchist society, continual agreement on all issues is not desired. The members of a free society "*need only agree as to some advantageous method of common work, and are free otherwise to live in their own way.*" [Op. Cit., p. 22]

Which brings us to another key point. When anarchists talk of democratising or communalising the household or any other association, we do not mean that it should be stripped of its private status and become open to the "*tyranny of the majority*" or regulation by general voting in a single, universal public sphere. Rather, we mean that households and other relationships should take in libertarian characteristics and be consistent with the liberty of all its members. Thus a society based on self-management does not imply the destruction of private spheres of activity -- it implies the extension of anarchist principles into all spheres of life, both private and public. It does not mean the subordination of the private by the public, or vice versa.

So, in other words, it is highly unlikely that the "*tyranny of the majority*" will exert itself where most rightly fear it -- in their homes, how they act with friends, their personal space, how they act, and do on. As long as individual freedom and rights are protected, it is of little concern what people get up to (included the rights of children, who are also individuals and **not** the property of their parents). Direct democracy in anarchist theory is purely concerned with common resources and their use and management. It is highly unlikely that a free society would debate issues of personal behaviour or morality and instead would leave them to those directly affected by them -- as it should be, as we all need personal space and experimentation to find the way of life that best suits us.

Today an authoritarian worldview, characterised by an inability to think beyond the categories of domination and submission, is imparted by conditioning in the family, schools, religious institutions, clubs, fraternities, the army, etc., and produces a type of personality that is intolerant of any individual or group perceived as threatening to the perpetuation of that worldview and its corresponding institutions and values. Thus, as Bakunin argues, "*public opinion*" is potentially intolerant "*simply because hitherto this power has not been humanised itself; it has not been humanised because the social life of which it is ever the faithful expression is based . . . in the worship of divinity, not on respect for*

*humanity; in authority, not on liberty; on privilege, not on equality; in the exploitation, not on the brotherhood, of men; on iniquity and falsehood, not on justice and truth. Consequently its real action, always in contradiction of the humanitarian theories which it professes, has constantly exercised a disastrous and depraving influence.*" [**God and the State**, p. 43f] In other words, *"if society is ever to become free, it will be so through liberated individuals, whose free efforts make society."* [Emma Goldman, **Anarchism and Other Essays**, p. 44]

In an anarchist society, however, a conscious effort will be made to dissolve the institutional and traditional sources of the authoritarian/submissive type of personality, and thus to free "*public opinion*" of its current potential for intolerance. In addition, it should be noted that as anarchists recognise that the practice of self-assumed political obligation implied in free association also implies the right to practice dissent and disobedience as well. As Carole Pateman notes, *"[e]ven if it is impossible to be unjust to myself, I do not vote for myself alone, but alone with everyone else. Questions about injustice are always appropriate in political life, for there is no guarantee that participatory voting will actually result in decisions in accord with the principles of political morality."* [**The Problem of Political Obligation**, p. 160]

If an individual or group of individuals feel that a specific decision threatens their freedom (which is the basic principle of political morality in an anarchist society) they can (and must) act to defend that freedom. *"The political practice of participatory voting rests in a collective self-consciousness about the meaning and implication of citizenship. The members of the political association understand that to vote is simultaneously to commit oneself, to commit one's fellow citizens, and also to commit oneself to them in a mutual undertaking . . . a refusal to vote on a particular occasion indicates that the refusers believe . . . [that] the proposal . . . infringes the principle of political morality on which the political association is based . . . A refusal to vote [or the use of direct action] could be seen as an appeal to the 'sense of justice' of their fellow citizens."* [Carole Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 161]

As they no longer "*consent*" to the decisions made by their community they can appeal to the "*sense of justice*" of their fellow citizens by direct action and indicate that a given decision may have impacts which the majority were not aware. Hence direct action and dissent is a key aspect of an anarchist society and help ensure against the tyranny of the majority. Anarchism rejects the "*love it or leave it*" attitude that marks classical liberalism as well as Rousseau (this aspect of his work being inconsistent with its foundations in participation).

This vision of self-assumed obligation, with its basis in individual liberty, indicates the basic flaw of Joseph Schumpeter's argument against democracy as anything bar a political **method** of arriving at decisions (in his case who will be the leaders of a society). Schumpeter proposed the "*mental experiment*" of imagining a country which, democratically, persecuted Jews, witches and Christians (see his famous work **Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy**). He argues that we should not approve of these practices just because they have been decided upon by the democratic method and, therefore, democracy cannot be an end in itself.

However, such systematic persecution would conflict with the rules of procedure required if a country's or community's political method is to be called "*democratic*." This is because, in order to be democratic, the minority must be in a position for its ideas to become the majority's via argument and convincing the majority (and that requires freedom of discussion and association). A country or community in which the majority persecutes or represses a minority automatically ensures that the minority can never be in a position to become the majority (as the minority is barred by force from becoming so) or convince the majority of the errors of its way (even if it cannot become the majority physically, it can become so morally by convincing the majority to change its position). Schumpeter's example utterly violates democratic principles and so cannot be squared with the rules of democratic procedure. Thus majority tyranny is an outrage against both democratic theory **and** individual liberty (unsurprisingly, as the former has its roots in the latter).

This argument applies with even more force to a self-managed community too and so any system in which the majority tyrannises over a minority is, by definition, **not** self-managed as one part of the community is excluded from convincing the other ("*the enslavement of part of a nation denies the federal principal itself*." [P-J Proudhon, **The Principle of Federation**, p. 42f]). Thus individual freedom and minority rights are essential to direct democracy/self-management.

It should be stressed, however, that most anarchists do not think that the way to guard against possible tyranny by the majority is to resort to decision-making by consensus (where no action can be taken until every person in the group agrees) or a property system (based in contracts). Both consensus (see section A.2.12 -- "[Is consensus an alternative to direct democracy?](#)") and contracts (see section A.2.14 -- "[Why is voluntarism not enough?](#)") soon result in authoritarian social relationships developing in the name of "liberty."

For example, decision making by consensus tends to eliminate the creative role of dissent and mutate into a system that pressures people into psychic and intellectual conformity -- hardly a libertarian ideal. In the case of property and contract based systems, those with property have more power than those without, and so they soon determine what can and cannot be done -- in other words, the "*tyranny of the minority*" and hierarchical authority. Both alternatives are deeply flawed.

Hence most anarchists have recognised that majority decision making, though not perfect, is the best way to reach decisions in a political system based on maximising individual (and so social) freedom. Direct democracy in grassroots confederal assemblies and workers' councils ensures that decision making is "*horizontal*" in nature (i.e. between **equals**) and not hierarchical (i.e. governmental, between order giver and order taker). In other words, it ensures liberty.

## I.5.7 What if I don't want to join a commune?

As would be expected, no one would be **forced** to join a commune nor take part in its assemblies. To suggest otherwise would be contrary to anarchist principles. We have already indicated (in the last two sections) why the communes would not be likely to restrict individuals with new "*laws*." Thus a

commune would be a free society, in which individual liberty would be respected and encouraged.

However, what about individuals who live within the boundaries of a commune but decide not to join? For example, a local neighbourhood may include households that desire to associate and a few that do not (this is actually happened during the Spanish Revolution). What happens to the minority of dissenters?

Obviously individuals can leave to find communities more in line with their own concepts of right and wrong if they cannot convince their neighbours of the validity of their ideas. And, equally obviously, not everyone will want to leave an area they like. So we must discuss those who decide to not to find a more suitable community. Are the communal decisions binding on non-members? Obviously not. If an individual or family desire **not** to join a commune (for whatever reason), their freedoms must be respected. However, this also means that they cannot benefit from communal activity and resources (such a free housing, hospitals, and so forth) and, possibly, have to pay for their use. As long as they do not exploit or oppress others, an anarchist community would respect their decision. After all, as Malatesta argued, *"free and voluntary communism is ironical if one has not the right and the possibility to live in a different regime, collectivist, mutualist, individualist -- as one wishes, always on condition that there is no oppression or exploitation of others."* [**Life and Ideas**, p. 103]

Many who oppose anarchist self-management in the name of freedom often do so because they desire to oppress and exploit others. In other words, they oppose participatory communities because they (rightly) fear that this would restrict their ability to oppress, exploit and grow rich off the labour of others. This type of opposition can be seen from history, when rich elites, in the name of liberty, have replaced democratic forms of social decision making with representative or authoritarian ones (see [section B.2.6](#)). Regardless of what defenders of capitalism claim, *"voluntary bilateral exchanges"* affect third parties and can harm others indirectly. This can easily be seen from examples like concentrations of wealth which have effects across society, or crime in the local community, or the ecological impacts of consumption and production. This means that an anarchist society would be aware that inequality and so statism could develop again and take precautions against it. As Malatesta put it, some *"seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of respect for the **freedom** of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas."* [**Anarchy**, p. 41]

So, it goes without saying that the minority, as in any society, will exist within the ethical norms of the surrounding society and they will be *"forced to adhere"* to them in the same sense that they are *"forced to adhere"* to not murdering people. Few people would say that forcing people not to commit murder is a restriction of their liberty. Therefore, while allowing the maximum of individual freedom of dissent, an anarchist community would still have to apply its ethical standards to those beyond that community. Individuals would not be allowed to murder, harm or enslave others and claim that they are allowed to do so because they are not part of the local community (see [section I.5.8](#) on crime in an anarchist society).



Similarly, individuals would not be allowed to develop private property (as opposed to possession) simply because they wanted to. Such a "ban" on private property would not be a restriction on liberty simply because stopping the development of authority hardly counts as an authoritarian act (for an analogy, supporters of capitalism do not think that banning theft is a restriction of liberty and because this view is -- currently -- accepted by the majority, it is enforced on the minority). Even the word "ban" is wrong, as it is the would-be capitalist who is trying to ban freedom for others on their "property." Members of a free society would simply refuse to recognise the claims of private property -- they would simply ignore the would-be capitalist's pretensions and "keep out" signs. Without a state, or hired thugs, to back up their claims, they would just end up looking silly. "Occupancy and use" (to use Tucker's term) would be the limits of possession -- and so property would become "that control of a thing by a person which will receive either social sanction, or else unanimous individual sanction, when the laws of social expediency shall have been fully discovered." [B. Tucker, **Instead of a Book**, p. 131]

Tucker explains this system further:

*"Suppose that all the municipalities have adopted the voluntary principle, and that compulsory taxation has been abolished. Now after this let us suppose that the Anarchistic view that occupancy and use should condition and limit landholding becomes the prevailing view. Evidently then these municipalities will proceed to formulate and enforce this view. What the formula will be no one can foresee. But continuing with our suppositions, we will say that they decide to protect no one in the possession of more than ten acres. In execution of this decision, they . . . notify all holders of more than ten acres within their limits that . . . they will cease to protect them in the possession of more than ten acres . . ."* [The Individualist Anarchists, pp. 159-60]

A similar process would occur for housing, with tenants "would not be forced to pay [the landlord] rent, nor would [the landlord] be allowed to seize their property. The Anarchistic associations would look upon . . . tenants very much as they would look upon . . . guests." [Op. Cit., p. 162]

Therefore anarchists support the maximum of experiments while ensuring that the social conditions that allow this experimentation are protected against concentrations of wealth and power. As Malatesta put it, "Anarchism involves all and only those forms of life that respect liberty and recognise that every person has an equal right to enjoy the good things of nature and the products of their own activity." [The Anarchist Revolution, p. 14]

This means that Anarchists do not support the liberty of being a boss (anarchists will happily work **with** someone but not **for** someone). Of course, those who desire to create private property against the wishes of others expect those others to respect their wishes. So, when the would-be propertarians happily fence off their "property" and exclude others from it, could not these others remember these words from Woody Guthrie's **This Land is Your Land**, and act accordingly?

*"As I went rumbling that dusty highway*

*I saw a sign that said private property  
But on the other side it didn't say nothing  
This land was made for you and me''*

While happy to exclude others from "their" property, such owners seem more than happy to use the resources held in common by others. They are the ultimate "free riders," desiring the benefits of society but rejecting the responsibilities that go with it. In the end, such "individualists" usually end up supporting the state (an institution they claim to hate) precisely because it is the only means by which private property and their "freedom" to exercise authority can be defended.

So, as a way to eliminate the problem of minorities seeking power and property for themselves, an anarchist revolution places social wealth (starting with the land) in the hands of all and promises to protect only those uses of it which are considered just by society as a whole. In other words, by recognising that "property" is a product of society, an anarchist society will ensure that an individual's "property" is protected by his or her fellows when it is based purely upon actual occupancy and use. Thus attempts to transform minority dissent into, say, property rights would be fought by simply ignoring the "keep out" signs of property owned, but not used, by an individual or group.

Therefore, individuals are free not to associate, but their claims of "ownership" will be based around **use** rights, not property rights. Individuals will be protected by their fellows only in so far as what they claim to "own" is related to their ability to personally use said "property." As Kropotkin argued, *"when we see a peasant who is in possession of just the amount of land he can cultivate, we do not think it reasonable to turn him off his little farm. He exploits nobody, and nobody would have the right to interfere with his work. But if he possesses under the capitalist law more than he can cultivate himself, we consider that we must not give him the right of keeping that soil for himself, leaving it uncultivated when it might be cultivated by others, or of making other cultivate it for his benefit."* [**Act for Yourselves**, p. 104] Without a state to back up and protect property "rights," we see that all rights are, in the end, what society considers to be fair (the difference between law and social custom is discussed in [section I.7.3](#)). What the state does is to impose "rights" which do not have such a basis (i.e. those that protect the property of the elite) or "rights" which have been corrupted by wealth and would have been changed because of this corruption had society been free to manage its own affairs.

In summary, individuals will be free not to join a participatory community, and hence free to place themselves outside its decisions and activities on most issues that do not apply to the fundamental ethical standards of a society. Hence individuals who desire to live outside of anarchist communities would be free to live as they see fit but would not be able to commit murder, rape, create private property or other activities that harmed individuals. It should be noted, moreover, that this does not mean that their possessions will be taken from them by "*society*" or that "*society*" will tell them what to do with their possessions. Freedom, in a complex world, means that such individuals will not be in a position to turn their possessions into **property** and thus recreate capitalism (for the distinction between "*property*" and "*possessions*," see [section B.3.1](#)). This will not be done by "anarchist police" or by "banning" voluntary agreements, but purely by recognising that "*property*" is a social creation and by

creating a social system that will encourage individuals to stand up for their rights and co-operate with each other.

## I.5.8 What about crime?

For anarchists, "*crime*" can best be described as anti-social acts, or behaviour which harms someone else or which invades their personal space. Anarchists argue that the root cause for crime is not some perversity of human nature or "*original sin*," but is due to the type of society by which people are moulded. For example, anarchists point out that by eliminating private property, crime could be reduced by about 90 percent, since about 90 percent of crime is currently motivated by evils stemming from private property such as poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and alienation. Moreover, by adopting anarchist methods of non-authoritarian child rearing and education, most of the remaining crimes could also be eliminated, because they are largely due to the anti-social, perverse, and cruel "*secondary drives*" that develop because of authoritarian, pleasure-negative child-rearing practices (See section J.6 -- "[What methods of child rearing do anarchists advocate?](#)")

"*Crime*", therefore, cannot be divorced from the society within which it occurs. Society, in Emma Goldman's words, gets the criminals it deserves. For example, anarchists do not think it unusual nor unexpected that crime exploded under the pro-free market capitalist regimes of Thatcher and Reagan. Crime, the most obvious symptom of social crisis, took 30 years to double in Britain (from 1 million incidents in 1950 to 2.2 million in 1979). However, between 1979 and 1992 the crime rate more than doubled, exceeding the 5 million mark in 1992. These 13 years were marked by a government firmly committed to the "*free market*" and "*individual responsibility*." It was entirely predictable that the social disruption, atomisation of individuals, and increased poverty caused by freeing capitalism from social controls would rip society apart and increase criminal activity. Also unsurprisingly (from an anarchist viewpoint), under these pro-market governments we also saw a reduction in civil liberties, increased state centralisation, and the destruction of local government. As Malatesta put it, the classical liberalism which these governments represented could have had no other effect, for "*the government's powers of repression must perforce increase as free competition results in more discord and inequality*." [**Anarchy**, p. 46]

Hence the paradox of governments committed to "*individual rights*," the "*free market*" and "*getting the state off our backs*" increasing state power and reducing rights while holding office during a crime explosion is no paradox at all. "*The conjuncture of the rhetoric of individual freedom and a vast increase in state power*," argues Carole Pateman, "*is not unexpected at a time when the influence of contract doctrine is extending into the last, most intimate nooks and crannies of social life. Taken to a conclusion, contract undermines the conditions of its own existence. Hobbes showed long ago that contract -- all the way down -- requires absolutism and the sword to keep war at bay*." [**The Sexual Contract**, p. 232]

Capitalism, and the contract theory on which it is built, will inevitably rip apart society. Capitalism is based upon a vision of humanity as isolated individuals with no connection other than that of money and

contract. Such a vision cannot help but institutionalise anti-social acts. As Kropotkin argued *"it is not love and not even sympathy upon which Society is based in mankind. It is the conscience -- be it only at the stage of an instinct -- of human solidarity. It is the unconscious recognition of the force that is borrowed by each man [and woman] from the practice of mutual aid; of the close dependency of every one's happiness upon the happiness of all; and of the sense of justice, or equity, which brings the individual to consider the rights of every other individual as equal to his [or her] own."* [**Mutual Aid**, p. 16]

The social atomisation required and created by capitalism destroys the basic bonds of society - namely human solidarity - and hierarchy crushes the individuality required to understand that we share a common humanity with others and so understand **why** we must be ethical and respect others rights.

We should also point out that prisons have numerous negative affects on society as well as often re-enforcing criminal (i.e. anti-social) behaviour. Kropotkin originated the accurate description of prisons as *"Universities of Crime"* wherein the first-time criminal learns new techniques and have adapt to the prevailing ethical standards within them. Hence, prisons would have the effect of increasing the criminal tendencies of those sent there and so prove to be counter-productive. In addition, prisons do not affect the social conditions which promote many forms of crime.

We are not saying, however, that anarchists reject the concept of individual responsibility. While recognising that rape, for example, is the result of a social system which represses sexuality and is based on patriarchy (i.e. rape has more to do with power than sex), anarchists do not "sit back" and say *"it's society's fault."* Individuals have to take responsibility for their own actions and recognise that consequences of those actions. Part of the current problem with "law codes" is that individuals have been deprived of the responsibility for developing their own ethical code, and so are less likely to develop "civilised" social standards (see [section I.7.3](#)).

Therefore, while anarchists reject the ideas of law and a specialised justice system, they are not blind to the fact that anti-social action may not totally disappear in a free society. Therefore, some sort of *"court"* system would still be necessary to deal with the remaining crimes and to adjudicate disputes between citizens.

These courts would function in one of two ways. One possibility is that the parties involved agree to hand their case to a third party. Then the *"court"* in question would be the arrangements made by those parties. The second possibility is when the parties cannot not agree (or if the victim was dead). Then the issue could be raised at a communal assembly and a *"court"* appointed to look into the issue. These *"courts"* would be independent from the commune, their independence strengthened by popular election instead of executive appointment of judges, by protecting the jury system of selection of random citizens by lot, and by informing jurors of their right to judge the law itself, according to their conscience, as well as the facts of a case. As Malatesta pointed out, *"when differences were to arise between men [sic!], would not arbitration voluntarily accepted, or pressure of public opinion, be perhaps more likely to establish where the right lies than through an irresponsible magistrate which has the right to adjudicate"*

*on everything and everybody and is inevitably incompetent and therefore unjust?"* [**Anarchy**, p. 43]

In the case of a "*police force*," this would not exist either as a public or private specialised body or company. If a local community did consider that public safety required a body of people who could be called upon for help, we imagine that a new system would be created. Such a system would "*not be entrusted to, as it is today, to a special, official body: all able-bodied inhabitants [of a commune] will be called upon to take turns in the security measures instituted by the commune.*" [James Guillaume, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 371] This system would be based around a voluntary militia system, in which all members of the community could serve if they so desired. Those who served would not constitute a professional body; instead the service would be made up of local people who would join for short periods of time and be replaced if they abused their position. Hence the likelihood that a communal militia would become corrupted by power, like the current police force or a private security firm exercising a policing function, would be vastly reduced. Moreover, by accustoming a population to intervene in anti-social as part of the militia, they would be empowered to do so when not an active part of it, so reducing the need for its services even more.

Such a body would not have a monopoly on protecting others, but would simply be on call if others required it. It would no more be a monopoly of defence (i.e. a "*police force*") than the current fire service is a monopoly. Individuals are not banned from putting out fires today because the fire service exists, similarly individuals will be free to help stop anti-social crime by themselves, or in association with others, in an anarchist society.

Of course there are anti-social acts which occur without witnesses and so the "*guilty*" party cannot be readily identified. If such acts did occur we can imagine an anarchist community taking two courses of action. The injured party may look into the facts themselves or appoint an agent to do so or, more likely, an ad hoc group would be elected at a community assembly to investigate specific crimes of this sort. Such a group would be given the necessary "*authority*" to investigate the crime and be subject to recall by the community if they start trying to abuse whatever authority they had. Once the investigating body thought it had enough evidence it would inform the community as well as the affected parties and then organise a court. Of course, a free society will produce different solutions to such problems, solutions no-one has considered yet and so these suggestions are just that, suggestions.

As is often stated, prevention is better than cure. This is as true of crime as of disease. In other words, crime is best fought by rooting out its **causes** as opposed to punishing those who act in response to these causes. For example, it is hardly surprising that a culture that promotes individual profit and consumerism would produce individuals who do not respect other people (or themselves) and see them as purely means to an end (usually increased consumption). And, like everything else in a capitalist system, such as honour and pride, conscience is also available at the right price -- hardly an environment which encourages consideration for others, or even for oneself.

In addition, a society based on hierarchical authority will also tend to produce anti-social activity because the free development and expression it suppresses. Thus, irrational authority (which is often

claimed to be the only cure for crime) actually helps produce it. As Emma Goldman argued, crime *"is naught but misdirected energy. So long as every institution of today, economic, political, social, moral conspires to misdirect human energy into wrong channels; so long as most people are out of place doing things they hate to do, living a life they loathe to live, crime will be inevitable, and all the laws on the statues can only increase, but never do away with, crime"* [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 57]

Eric Fromm, decades latter, makes the same point:

*"It would seem that the amount of destructiveness to be found in individuals is proportionate to the amount to which expansiveness of life is curtailed. By this we do not refer to individual frustrations of this or that instinctive desire but to the thwarting of the whole of life, the blockage of spontaneity of the growth and expression of man's sensuous, emotional, and intellectual capacities. Life has an inner dynamism of its own; it tends to grow, to be expressed, to be lived . . . the drive for life and the drive for destruction are not mutually interdependent factors but are in a reversed interdependence. The more the drive towards life is thwarted, the stronger is the drive towards destruction; the more life is realised, the less is the strength of destructiveness. **Destructiveness is the outcome of unlived life.** Those individual and social conditions that make for suppression of life produce the passion for destruction that forms, so to speak, the reservoir from which particular hostile tendencies -- either against others or against oneself -- are nourished"* [**The Fear of Freedom**, p. 158]

Therefore, by reorganising society so that it empowers everyone and actively encourages the use of all our intellectual, emotional and sensuous abilities, crime would soon cease to be the huge problem that it is now. As for the anti-social behaviour or clashes between individuals that might still exist in such a society, it would be dealt with in a system based on respect for the individual and a recognition of the social roots of the problem. Restraint would be kept to a minimum.

Anarchists think that public opinion and social pressure would be the main means of preventing anti-social acts in an anarchist society, with such actions as boycotting and ostracising used as powerful sanctions to convince those attempting them of the errors of their way. Extensive non-co-operation by neighbours, friends and work mates would be the best means of stopping acts which harmed others.

An anarchist system of justice, we should note, would have a lot to learn from aboriginal societies simply because they are examples of social order without the state. Indeed many of the ideas we consider as essential to justice today can be found in such societies. As Kropotkin argued, *"when we imagine that we have made great advances in introducing, for instance, the jury, all we have done is to return to the institutions of the so-called 'barbarians' after having changed it to the advantage of the ruling classes."* [**The State: Its Historic Role**, p. 18]

Like aboriginal justice (as documented by Rupert Ross in **Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice**) anarchists contend that offenders should not be punished but justice achieved by the

teaching and healing of all involved. Public condemnation of the wrongdoing would be a key aspect of this process, but the wrong doer would remain part of the community and so see the effects of their actions on others in terms of grief and pain caused. It would be likely that wrong doers would be expected to try to make amends for their act by community service or helping victims and their families.

So, from a practical viewpoint, almost all anarchists oppose prisons on both practical grounds (they do not work) and ethical grounds ("*We know what prisons mean -- they mean broken down body and spirit, degradation, consumption, insanity*" Voltairine de Cleyre, quoted by Paul Avrich in **An American Anarchist**, p. 146]). The Makhnovists took the usual anarchist position on prisons:

*"Prisons are the symbol of the servitude of the people, they are always built only to subjugate the people, the workers and peasants. . . Free people have no use for prisons. Wherever prisons exist, the people are not free. . . In keeping with this attitude, they [the Makhnovists] demolished prisons wherever they went."* [Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 153]

With the exception of Benjamin Tucker, no major anarchist writer supported the institution. Few anarchists think that private prisons (like private policemen) are compatible with their notions of freedom. However, all anarchists are against the current "*justice*" system which seems to them to be organised around **revenge** and punishing effects and not fixing causes.

However, there are psychopaths and other people in any society who are too dangerous to be allowed to walk freely. Restraint in this case would be the only option and such people may have to be isolated from others for their own, and others, safety. Perhaps mental hospitals would be used, or an area quarantined for their use created (perhaps an island, for example). However, such cases (we hope) would be rare.

So instead of prisons and a legal code based on the concept of punishment and revenge, anarchists support the use of public opinion and pressure to stop anti-social acts and the need to therapeutically rehabilitate those who commit anti-social acts. As Kropotkin argued, "*liberty, equality, and practical human sympathy are the most effective barriers we can oppose to the anti-social instinct of certain among us*" and **not** a parasitic legal system. [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 117]

## I.5.9 What about Freedom of Speech under Anarchism?

Many express the idea that **all** forms of socialism would endanger freedom of speech, press, and so forth. The usual formulation of this argument is in relation to state socialism and goes as follows: if the state (or "*society*") owned all the means of communication, then only the views which the government supported would get access to the media.

This is an important point and it needs to be addressed. However, before doing so, we should point out that under capitalism the major media are effectively controlled by the wealthy. As we argued in [section](#)

D.3, the media are **not** the independent defenders of freedom that they like to portray themselves as. This is hardly surprising, since newspapers, television companies, and so forth are capitalist enterprises owned by the wealthy and with managing directors and editors who are also wealthy individuals with a vested interest in the status quo. Hence there are institutional factors which ensure that the "*free press*" reflects the interests of capitalist elites.

However, in democratic capitalist states there is little overt censorship. Radical and independent publishers can still print their papers and books without state intervention (although market forces ensure that this activity can be difficult and financially unrewarding). Under socialism, it is argued, because "*society*" owns the means of communication and production, this liberty will not exist. Instead, as can be seen from all examples of "*actually existing socialism*," such liberty is crushed in favour of the government's point of view.

As anarchism rejects the state, we can say that this danger does not exist under libertarian socialism. However, since social anarchists argue for the communalisation of production, could not restrictions on free speech still exist? We argue no, for three reasons.

Firstly, publishing houses, radio stations, and so on will be run by their workers directly. They will be supplied by other syndicates, with whom they will make agreements, and **not** by "*central planning*" officials, who would not exist. In other words, there is no bureaucracy of officials allocating (and so controlling) resources (and so the means of communication). Hence, anarchist self-management will ensure that there is a wide range of opinions in different magazines and papers. There would be community papers, radio stations, etc., and obviously they would play an increased role in a free society. But they would not be the only media. Associations, political parties, industrial syndicates, and so on would have their own media and/or would have access to the resources of communication workers' syndicates, so ensuring that a wide range of opinions can be expressed.

Secondly, the "*ultimate*" power in a free society will be the individuals of which it is composed. This power will be expressed in communal and workplace assemblies that can recall delegates and revoke their decisions. It is doubtful that these assemblies would tolerate a set of would-be bureaucrats determining what they can or cannot read, see, or hear.

Thirdly, individuals in a free society would be interested in hearing different viewpoints and discussing them. This is the natural side-effect of critical thought (which self-management would encourage), and so they would have a vested interest in defending the widest possible access to different forms of media for different views. Having no vested interests to defend, a free society would hardly encourage or tolerate the censorship associated with the capitalist media ("*I listen to criticism because I am greedy. I listen to criticism because I am selfish. I would not deny myself another's insights*" [**The Right to be Greedy**]).

Therefore, anarchism will **increase** freedom of speech in many important ways, particularly in the workplace (where it is currently denied under capitalism). This will be a natural result of a society based



on maximising freedom and the desire to enjoy life.

We would also like to point out that during both the Spanish and Russian revolutions, freedom of speech was protected within anarchist areas.

For example, the Makhnovists in the Ukraine *"fully applied the revolutionary principles of freedom of speech, of thought, of the Press, and of political association. In all the cities and towns occupied . . . Complete freedom of speech, Press, assembly, and association of any kind and for everyone was immediately proclaimed."* [Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 153] This is confirmed by Michael Malet who notes that *"[o]ne of the most remarkable achievements of the Makhnovists was to preserve a freedom of speech more extensive than any of their opponents."* [**Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War**, p. 175]

In revolutionary Spain republicans, liberals, communists, Trotskyites and many different anarchist groups all had freedom to express their views. Emma Goldman writes that *"[o]n my first visit to Spain in September 1936, nothing surprised me so much as the amount of political freedom I found everywhere. True, it did not extend to Fascists . . . [but] everyone of the anti-Fascist front enjoyed political freedom which hardly existed in any of the so-called European democracies."* [**Vision on Fire**, p.147] This is confirmed in a host of other eye-witnesses, including George Orwell in **Homage to Catalonia** (in fact, it was the rise of the pro-capitalist republicans and communists that introduced censorship).

Both movements were fighting a life-and-death struggle against communist, fascist and pro-capitalist armies and so this defence of freedom of expression, given the circumstances, is particularly noteworthy.

Therefore, based upon both theory and practice, we can say that anarchism will not endanger freedom of expression. Indeed, by breaking up the capitalist oligopoly which currently exists and introducing workers' self-management of the press, a far wider range of opinions will become available in a free society. Rather than reflect the interests of a wealthy elite, the media would reflect the interests of society as a whole and the individuals and groups within it.

## I.5.10 What about political parties?

Political parties and other interest groups will exist in an anarchist society as long as people feel the need to join them. They will not be *"banned"* in any way, and their members will have the same rights as everyone else. Individuals who are members of political parties or associations can take part in communal and other assemblies and try to convince others of the soundness of their ideas.

However, there is a key difference between such activity and politics under a capitalist democracy. This is because the elections to positions of responsibility in an anarchist society will not be based on party tickets nor will it involve the delegation of power. Emile Pouget's description of the difference between the syndicalist trade union and elections drives this difference home:

*"The constituent part of the trade union is the individual. Except that the union member is spared the depressing phenomenon manifest in democratic circles where, thanks to the veneration of universal suffrage, the trend is towards the crushing and diminution of the human personality. In a democratic setting, the elector can avail of his [or her] will only in order to perform an act of abdication: his role is to 'award' his 'vote' to the candidate whom he [or she] wishes to have as his [or her] 'representative.'*

*"Affiliation to the trade union has no such implication . . . In joining the union, the worker merely enters into a contract -- which he may at any time abjure -- with comrades who are his equals in will and potential . . . In the union, say, should it come to the appointment of a trade union council to take charge of administrative matters, such 'selection' is not to be compared with 'election': the form of voting customarily employed in such circumstances is merely a means whereby the labour can be divided and is not accompanied by any delegation of authority. The strictly prescribed duties of the trade union council are merely administrative. The council performs the task entrusted to it, without ever overruling its principals, without supplanting them or acting in their place.*

*"The same might be said of all decisions reached in the union: all are restricted to a definite and specific act, whereas in democracy, election implies that the elected candidate has been issued by his [or her] elector with a carte blanche empowering him [or her] to decide and do as he [or she] pleases, in and on everything, without even the hindrance of the quite possibly contrary views of his [or her] principals, whose opposition, in any case, no matter how pronounced, is of no consequence until such time as the elected candidate's mandate has run its course.*

*"So there cannot be any possible parallels, let alone confusion, between trade unions activity and participation in the disappointing chores of politics." [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, pp. 67-68]*

In other words, when individuals are elected to administrative posts they are elected to carry out their mandate, **not** to carry out their party's programme. Of course, if the individuals in question had convinced their fellow workers and citizens that their programme was correct, then this mandate and the programme would be identical. However this is unlikely in practice. We would imagine that the decisions of collectives and communes would reflect the complex social interactions and diverse political opinions their members and of the various groupings within the association.

Hence anarchism will likely contain many different political groupings and ideas. The relative influence of these within collectives and communes would reflect the strength of their arguments and the relevance of their ideas, as would be expected in a free society. As Bakunin argued, *"[t]he abolition of this mutual influence would be death. And when we vindicate the freedom of the masses, we are by no means suggesting the abolition of any of the natural influences that individuals or groups of individuals exert on them. What we want is the abolition of influences which are artificial, privileged, legal,*

*official.*" [quoted by Malatesta in **Anarchy**, p. 50]

It is only when representative government replaces self-management that political debate results in "*elected dictatorship*" and centralisation of power into the hands of one party which claims to speak for the whole of society, as if the latter had one mind.

## I.5.11 What about interest groups and other associations?

Anarchists do not think that social life can be reduced to political and economic associations alone. Individuals have many different interests and desires which they must express in order to have a truly free and interesting life. Therefore an anarchist society will see the development of numerous voluntary associations and groups to express these interests. For example, there would be consumer groups, musical groups, scientific associations, art associations, clubs, housing co-operatives and associations, craft and hobby guilds, fan clubs, animal rights associations, groups based around sex, sexuality, creed and colour and so forth. Associations will be created for all human interests and activities.

As Kropotkin argued:

*"He who wishes for a grand piano will enter the association of musical instrument makers. And by giving the association part of his half-days' leisure, he will soon possess the piano of his dreams. If he is fond of astronomical studies he will join the association of astronomers. . . and he will have the telescope he desires by taking his share of the associated work. . . In short, the five or seven hours a day which each will have at his disposal, after having consecrated several hours to the production of necessities, would amply suffice to satisfy all longings for luxury, however varied. Thousands of associations would undertake to supply them."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 120]

We can imagine, therefore, an anarchist society being based around associations and interest groups on every subject which fires the imagination of individuals and for which individuals want to meet in order to express and further their interests. Housing associations, for example, would exist to allow inhabitants to manage their local areas, design and maintain their homes and local parks and gardens. Animal rights and other interest groups would produce information on issues they consider important, trying to convince others of the errors of eating meat or whatever. Consumer groups would be in dialogue with syndicates about improving products and services, ensuring that syndicates produce what is required by consumers. Environment groups would exist to watch production and make sure that it is not creating damaging side effects and informing both syndicates and communes of their findings. Feminist, homosexual, bisexual and anti-racist groups would exist to put their ideas across, highlighting areas in which social hierarchies and prejudice still existed. All across society, people would be associating together to express themselves and convince others of their ideas on many different issues.

Hence in a anarchist society, free association would take on a stronger and more positive role than under capitalism. In this way, social life would take on many dimensions, and the individual would have the

choice of thousands of societies to join to meet his or her interests or create new ones with other like-minded people. Anarchists would be the last to deny that there is more to life than work!

## I.5.12 Would an anarchist society provide health care and other public services?

It depends on the type of anarchist society you are talking about. Different anarchists propose different solutions.

In an individualist-mutualist society, for example, health care and other public services would be provided by individuals or co-operatives on a pay-for-use basis. It would be likely that individuals or co-operatives/associations would subscribe to various insurance providers or enter into direct contracts with health care providers. Thus the system would be similar to privatised health care but without the profit margins as competition, it is hoped, would drive prices down to cost.

Other anarchists reject such a system. They are favour of socialising health care and other public services. They argue that a privatised system would only be able to meet the requirements of those who can afford to pay for it and so would be unjust and unfair. The need for medical attention is not dependent on income and so a civilised society would recognise this fact. Under capitalism, profit-maximising medical insurance sets premiums according to the risks of the insured getting ill or injured, with the riskiest may not being able to find insurance at any price. Private insurers shun entire industries, such as logging, as too dangerous for their profits due to the likelihood of accidents or illness. They review contracts regularly and drop people who get sick. Hardly a vision to inspire a free society or one compatible with equality and mutual respect.

Moreover, competition would lead to inefficiencies as prices would be inflated to pay for advertising, competition related administration costs, paying dividends to share-holders and so on. For example, in 1993, Canada's health plans devoted 0.9% of spending to overhead, compared to U.S. figures of 3.2% for Medicare and 12% for private insurers. In addition, when Canada adopted its publicly financed system in 1971, it and the U.S. both spent just over 7% of GDP on health care. By 1990, the U.S. was up to 12.3%, verses Canada's 9%.

As can be seen, social anarchists point to what happens under capitalism when discussing the benefits of a socialised system of health care in an anarchist society. Competition, they argue, harms health-care provision. According to Alfie Kohn:

*"More hospitals and clinics are being run by for-profit corporations; many institutions, forced to battle for 'customers,' seem to value a skilled director of marketing more highly than a skilled caregiver. As in any other economic sector, the race for profits translates into pressure to reduce costs, and the easiest way to do it here is to cut back on services to unprofitable patients, that is, those who are more sick than rich . . ."*

He concludes:

*"The result: hospital costs are actually **higher** in areas where there is more competition for patients."* [Alfie Kohn, **No Contest**, p. 240]

As Robert Kuttner notes:

*"The American health-care system is a tangle of inequity and inefficiency -- and getting worse as private-market forces seek to rationalise it. A shift to a universal system of health coverage would cut this Gordian knot at a stroke. It would not only deliver the explicitly medical aspects of health more efficiently and fairly, but, by socialising costs of poor health, it would also create a powerful financial incentive for society as a whole to stress primary prevention. . . every nation with a universal system spends less of its GDP on health care than the United States . . . And nearly every other nation with a universal system has longer life spans from birth (though roughly equivalent life spans from adulthood) . . . most nations with universal systems also have greater patient satisfaction.*

*"The reasons . . . should be obvious. By their nature, universal systems spend less money on wasteful overhead, and more on primary prevention. Health-insurance overhead in the United States alone consumes about 1 percent of the GDP, compared to 0.1 percent in Canada. Though medical inflation is a problem everywhere, the universal systems have had far lower rates of cost inflation . . . In the years between 1980 and 1987, total health costs in the United States increased by 2.4 times the rate of GDP growth. In nations with universal systems, they increased far more slowly. The figures for Sweden, France, West Germany, and Britain were 1.2, 1.6, 1.8, and 1.7 percent, respectively . . .*

[. . . ]

*"Remarkably enough, the United States spends most money on health care, but has the fewest beds per thousand in population, the lowest admission rate, and the lowest occupancy rate -- coupled with the highest daily cost, highest technology-intensiveness, and greatest number of employees per bed."* [**Everything for Sale**, pp. 155-6]

In 1993, the US paid 13.4% of its GDP towards health care, compared to 10% for Canada, 8.6% for Sweden and Germany, 6.6% for Britain and 6.8% for Japan. Only 40% of the US population was covered by public health care and over 35 million people, 14% of the population, went without health insurance for all of 1991, and about twice that many were uninsured for some period during the year. In terms of health indicators, the US people are not getting value for money. Life expectancy is higher in Canada, Sweden, Germany, Japan and Britain. The USA has the highest levels of infant mortality and is last in basic health indicators as well as having fewer doctors per 1,000 people than the OECD average. All in all, the US system is miles behind the universal systems of other countries.

Of course, it will be argued that the USA is not an anarchy and so comparisons are pointless. However, it seems strange that the more competitive system, the more privatised system, is less efficient and less fair than the universal systems. It also seems strange that defenders of competition happily use examples from "*actually existing*" capitalism to illustrate their politics but reject negative examples as being a product of an "*impure*" system. They want to have their cake and eat it to.

Therefore, most anarchists are in favour of a socialised and universal health-care system for both ethical and efficiency reasons. Needless to say, an anarchist system of socialised health care would differ in many ways to the current systems of universal health-care provided by the state.

Such a system of socialised health-care will be built from the bottom-up and based around the local commune. In a social anarchist society, "*medical services . . . will be free of charge to all inhabitants of the commune. The doctors will not be like capitalists, trying to extract the greatest profit from their unfortunate patients. They will be employed by the commune and expected to treat all who need their services.*" Moreover, prevention will play an important part, as "*medical treatment is only the **curative** side of the science of health care; it is not enough to treat the sick, it is also necessary to prevent disease. That is the true function of hygiene.*" [James Guillaume, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 371]

How would an anarchist health service work? It would be based on self-management, of course, with close links to the local commune and federations of communes. Each hospital or health centre would be autonomous but linked in a federation with the others, allowing resources to be shared as and when required while allowing the health service to adjust to local needs and requirements as quickly as possible.

The Spanish Revolution indicates how an anarchist health service would operate. In rural areas local doctors would usually join the village collective and provided their services like any other worker. Where local doctors were not available, "*arrangements were made by the collectives for treatment of their members by hospitals in nearby localities. In a few cases, collectives themselves build hospitals; in many they acquired equipment and other things needed by their local physicians.*" For example, the Monzon comarcal (district) federation of collectives in Aragon established maintained a hospital in Binefar, the Casa de Salud Durruti. By April 1937 it had 40 beds, in sections which included general medicine, prophylaxis and gynaecology. It saw about 25 outpatients a day and was open to anyone in the 32 villages of the comarca. [Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 1, p. 331 and pp. 366-7]

The socialisation of the health care took on a slightly different form in Catalonia but on the same libertarian principles. Gaston Leval provides us with an excellent summary:

*"The socialisation of health services was one of the greatest achievements of the revolution. To appreciate the efforts of our comrades it must be borne in mind that the rehabilitated the health service in all of Catalonia in so short a time after July 19th. The revolution could count on the co-operation of a number of dedicated doctors whose*

*ambition was not to accumulate wealth but to serve the afflicted and the underprivileged.*

*"The Health Workers' Union was founded in September, 1936. In line with the tendency to unite all the different classifications, trades, and services serving a given industry, **all** health workers, from porters to doctors and administrators, were organised into one big union of health workers*

[. . .]

*"Our comrades laid the foundations of a new health service . . . The new medical service embraced all of Catalonia. It constituted a great apparatus whose parts were distributed according to different needs, all in accord with an overall plan. Catalonia was divided into nine zones . . . In turn, all the surrounding villages and towns were served from these centres.*

*"Distributed throughout Catalonia were twenty-seven towns with a total of thirty-six health centres conducting services so thoroughly that every village, every hamlet, every isolated peasant in the mountains, every woman, every child, anywhere, received adequate, up-to-date medical care. In each of the nine zones there was a central syndicate and a Control Committee located in Barcelona. Every department was autonomous within its own sphere. But this autonomy was not synonymous with isolation. The Central Committee in Barcelona, chosen by all the sections, met once a week with one delegate from each section to deal with common problems and to implement the general plan. . .*

*"The people immediately benefited from the projects of the health syndicate. The syndicate managed all hospitals and clinics. Six hospitals were opened in Barcelona. . . Eight new sanitariums were installed in converted luxurious homes ideally situated amidst mountains and pine forests. It was no easy task to convert these homes into efficient hospitals with all new facilities. . ." [quoted by Sam Dolgoff, **The Anarchist Collectives**, pp. 99-100]*

People were no longer required to pay for medical services. Each collective, if it could afford it, would pay a contribution to its health centre. Building and facilities were improved and modern equipment introduced. Like other self-managed industries, the health service was run at all levels by general assemblies of workers who elected delegates and hospital administration.

In the Levante, the CNT built upon its existing Sociedad de Socorros Mutuos de Levante (a health service institution founded by the union as a kind of mutual benefit society which had numerous doctors and specialists). During the revolution, the Mutua had 50 doctors and was available to all affiliated workers and their families.

Thus, all across Spain, the workers in the health service re-organised their industry in libertarian lines

and in association with the local collective or commune and the unions of the CNT. As Gaston Leval summarises:

*"Everywhere that we were able to study the towns and little cities transformed by the revolution, the hospitals, the clinics, the polyclinics and other health establishments have been municipalised, enlarged, modernised, put under the safekeeping of the collectivity. And where they didn't exist, they were improvised. The socialisation of medicine was a work for the benefit of all."* [quoted by Robert Alexander, **Op. Cit.**, p. 677]

We can expect a similar process to occur in the future anarchist society. Workers in the health industry will organise their workplaces, federate together to share resources and information, to formulate plans and improve the quality of service to the public. The communes and their federations, the syndicates and federations of syndicates will provide resources and effectively own the health system, ensuring access for all.

Similar systems would operate in other public services. For example, in education we expect the members of communes to organise a system of free schools. This can be seen from the Spanish revolution. Indeed, the Spanish anarchists organised Modern Schools before the outbreak of the revolution, with 50 to 100 schools in various parts funded by local anarchist groups and CNT unions. During the revolution everywhere across Spain, syndicates, collectives and federations of collectives formed and founded schools. Indeed, education *"advanced at an unprecedented pace. Most of the partly or wholly socialised collectives and municipalities built at least one school. By 1938, for example, every collective in the Levant Federation had its own school."* [Gaston Leval, quoted by Sam Dolgoff, **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 168] These schools aimed, to quote the CNT's resolution on Libertarian Communism, to *"help mould men with minds of their own -- and let it be clear that when we use the word 'men' we use it in the generic sense -- to which end it will be necessary for the teacher to cultivate every one of the child's faculties so that the child may develop every one of its capacities to the full."* [quoted by Jose Perriats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 70] The principles of libertarian education, of encouraging freedom instead of authority in the school, was applied on vast scale (see [section J.5.13](#) for more details on Modern Schools and libertarian education).

This educational revolution was not confined to collectives or children. For example, the Federacion Regional de Campesinos de Levante formed institutes in each of its five provinces. The first was set up in October 1937 in an old convent with 100 students. The Federation also set up two *"universities"* in Valencia and Madrid which taught a wide variety of agricultural subjects and combined learning with practical experience in an experimental form attached to each university. The Aragon collectives formed a similar specialised school in Binefar. The CNT was heavily involved in transforming education in Catalonia. In addition, the local federation of the CNT in Barcelona established a school to train women workers to replace male ones being taken into the army. The school was run by the anarchist-feminist group the Mujeres Libres. [Robert Alexander, **Op. Cit.**, p. 406, p. 670 and pp. 665-8 and p. 670]

Ultimately, the public services that exist in a social anarchist society will be dependent on what



members of that society desire. If, for example, a commune or federation of communes desires a system of communal health-care or schools then they will allocate resources to implement it. They will allocate the task of creating such a system to, say, a special commission based on volunteers from the interested parties such as the relevant syndicates, professional associations, consumer groups and so on. For example, for communal education a commission or working group would include delegates from the teachers union, from parent associations, from student unions and so on. The running of such a system would be based, like any other industry, on those who work in it. Functional self-management would be the rule, with doctors managing their work, nurses theirs and so on, while the general running of, say, a hospital would be based on a general assembly of all workers there who would elect and mandate delegates, the administration staff and decide the policy the hospital would follow. Needless to say, other interested parties would have a say, including patients in the health system and students in the education system.

Thus, as would be expected, public services would be organised by the public, organised in their syndicates and communes. They would be based on workers' self-management of their daily work and of the system as a whole. Non-workers who took part in the system (patients, students) would not be ignored and would also place a role in providing essential feedback to assure quality control of services and to ensure that the service is responsive to users needs. The resources required to maintain and expand the system would be provided by the communes, syndicates and their federations. For the first time, public services would truly be public and not a statist system imposed upon the public from above.

Needless to say, any system of public services would not be imposed on those who did not desire it. They would be organised for and by members of the communes. Therefore, individuals who were not part of a local commune or syndicate would have to pay to gain access to the communal resources. However, it is unlikely that an anarchist society would be as barbaric as a capitalist one and refuse entry to cases who were ill and could not pay, nor turn away emergencies because they did not have enough money to pay. And just as other workers need not join a syndicate or commune, so doctors, teachers and so on could practice their trade outside the communal system as either individual artisans or as part of a co-operative. However, given the availability of free medical services it is doubtful they would grow rich doing so. Medicine, teaching and so on would revert back to what usually initially motivates people to take these up professions -- the desire to help others and make a positive impact in peoples lives.

## **I.5.13 Won't an anarchist society be vulnerable to the power hungry?**

A common objection to anarchism is that an anarchist society will be vulnerable to be taken over by thugs or those who seek power. A similar argument is that a group without a leadership structure becomes open to charismatic leaders so anarchy would just lead to tyranny.

For anarchists, such arguments are strange. Society already **is** run by thugs and/or the off-spring of thugs. Kings were originally just successful thugs who succeeded in imposing their domination over a given territorial area. The modern state has evolved from the structure created to impose this

domination. Similarly with property, with most legal titles to land being traced back to its violent seizure by thugs who then passed it on to their children who then sold it or gave it to their offspring. The origins of the current system in violence can be seen by the continued use of violence by the state and capitalists to enforce and protect their domination over society. When push comes to shove, the dominant class will happily re-discover their thug past and employ extreme violence to maintain their privileges. The descent of large parts of Europe into Fascism during the 1930s, or Pinochet's coup in Chile in 1973 indicates how far they will go. As Peter Arshinov argued (in a slightly different context):

*"Statists fear free people. They claim that without authority people will lose the anchor of sociability, will dissipate themselves, and will return to savagery. This is obviously rubbish. It is taken seriously by idlers, lovers of authority and of the labour of others, or by blind thinkers of bourgeois society. The liberation of the people in reality leads to the degeneration and return to savagery, not of the people, but of those who, thanks to power and privilege, live from the labour of the people's arms and from the blood of the people's veins . . . The liberation of the people leads to the savagery of those who live from its enslavement."* [The History of the Makhnovist Movement, p. 85]

Anarchists are not impressed with the argument that anarchy would be unable to stop thugs seizing power. It ignores the fact that we live in a society where the power-hungry already hold power. As an argument against anarchism it fails and is, in fact, an argument against capitalist and statist societies.

Moreover, it also ignores fact that people in an anarchist society would have gained their freedom by overthrowing every existing and would-be thug who had or desired power over others. They would have defended that freedom against those who desired to re-impose it. They would have organised themselves to manage their own affairs and, therefore, to abolish all hierarchical power. And we are to believe that these people, after struggling to become free, would quietly let a new set of thugs impose themselves? As Kropotkin argued:

*"The only way in which a state of Anarchy can be obtained is for each man [or woman] who is oppressed to act as if he [or she] were at liberty, in defiance of all authority to the contrary . . . In practical fact, territorial extension is necessary to ensure permanency to any given individual revolution. In speaking of the Revolution, we signify the aggregate of so many successful individual and group revolts as will enable every person within the revolutionised territory to act in perfect freedom . . . without having to constantly dread the prevention or the vengeance of an opposing power upholding the former system . . . Under these circumstance it is obvious that any visible reprisal could and would be met by a resumption of the same revolutionary action on the part of the individuals or groups affected, and that the **maintenance** of a state of Anarchy in this manner would be far easier than the gaining of a state of Anarchy by the same methods and in the face of hitherto unshaken opposition . . . They have it in their power to apply a prompt check by boycotting such a person and refusing to help him with their labour or to willing supply him with any articles in their possession. They have it in their power to use force against him. They have these powers individually as well as collectively. Being either past rebels*

*who have been inspired with the spirit of liberty, or else habituated to enjoy freedom from their infancy, they are hardly to rest passive in view of what they feel to be wrong."* [Kropotkin, **Act for Yourselves**, pp. 87-8]

Thus a free society would use direct action to resist the would-be ruler just as it had used direct action to free itself from existing rulers. An anarchist society would be organised in a way which would facilitate this direct action as it would be based on networks of solidarity and mutual aid. An injury to one is an injury to all and a would-be ruler would face a whole liberated society acting against him or her. Faced with the direct action of the population (which would express itself in non-co-operation, strikes, demonstrations, occupations, insurrections and so on) a would be power seeker would find it difficult to impose themselves. Unlike those accustomed to rulership in existing society, an anarchist people would be a society of rebels and so difficult to dominate and conquer.

Anarchists point to the example of the rise of Fascism in Italy, Spain and Germany to prove their point. In areas with strong anarchist movements the fascists were resisted most strongly. While in Germany Hitler took power with little or no opposition, in Italy and Spain the fascists had to fight long and hard to gain power. The anarchist and anarcho-sindicalist organisations fought the fascists tooth and nail, with some success before betrayal by the Republicans and Marxists. From this historical experience anarchists argue that an anarchist society would quickly and easily defeat would-be thugs as people would be used to practising direct action and self-management and would have no desire to stop practising them.

As for self-management resulting in "*charismatic*" leaders, well the logic is astounding. As if hierarchical structures are **not** based on leadership structures and do not require a charismatic leader! Such an argument is inherently self-contradictory -- as well as ignoring the nature of modern society and its leadership structures. Rather than mass assemblies being dominated by leaders, it is the case that hierarchical structures are the natural breeding ground for dictators. All the great dictators the world have seen have come to the forefront in **hierarchical** organisations, **not** libertarian structured ones. Hitler, for example, did not come to power via a libertarian organisation. Rather he used a highly centralised and hierarchically organised party to take control of a centralised, hierarchical state. The very disempowerment of the population in capitalist society results in them looking to leaders to act for them and so "*charismatic*" leaders are a natural result. An anarchist society, by empowering all, would make it more difficult, not less, for a would-be leader to gain power -- few people, if any, would be willing to sacrifice and negate themselves for the benefit of another.

As would be expected, given our comments above, anarchists think an anarchist society must defend itself against attempts to re-introduce the state or private property. The question of defence of an anarchist society is discussed in the [next section](#) and so we will not do so here.

Our discussion on the power hungry obviously relates to the more general the question of whether ethical behaviour be rewarded in an anarchist society. In other words, could an anarchist society be stable or would the unethical take over?

It is one of the most disturbing aspects of living in a world where the rush to acquire wealth is the single most important aspect of living is what happens to people who follow an ethical path in life.

Under capitalism, the ethical generally do not succeed as well as those stab their fellows in the back, those who cut corners, indulge in sharp business practises, drive competitors into the ground and live their lives with an eye on the bottom line but they do survive. Loyalty to a firm or a group, bending over backwards to provide a service, giving a helping hand to somebody in need, placing friendship above money, count for nothing when the bills come in. People who act ethically in a capitalist society are usually punished and penalised for their ethical, moral and principled behaviour. Indeed, the capitalist market rewards unethical behaviour as it generally reduces costs and so gives those who do it a competitive edge.

It is different in a free society. Anarchism is based on two principles of association, equal access to power and wealth. Everybody in an anarchist society irrespective of what they do, or who they are or what type of work they perform is entitled to share in society's wealth. Whether a community survives or prospers depends on the combined efforts of the people in that community. Ethical behaviour would become the norm in an anarchist community; those people who act ethically would be rewarded by the standing they achieve in the community and by others being more than happy to work with and aid them. People who cut corners, try to exercise power over others, refuse to co-operate as equals or otherwise act in an unethical manner would lose their standing in an anarchist society. Their neighbours and work mates would refuse to co-operate with them (or reduce co-operation to a minimum) and take other forms of non-violent direct action to point out that certain forms of activity was inappropriate. They would discuss the issue with the unethical person and try to convince them of the errors of their way. In a society where the necessities are guaranteed, people would tend to act ethically because ethical behaviour raises an individuals profile and standing within such a community. Capitalism and ethical behaviour are mutually exclusive concepts; anarchism encourages and rewards ethical behaviour.

Therefore, as can be seen, anarchists argue that a free society would not have to fear would-be thugs, "*charismatic*" leaders or the unethical. An anarchist society would be based on the co-operation of free individuals. It is unlikely that they would tolerate such behaviour and would use their own direct action as well as social and economic organisations to combat it. Moreover, the nature of free co-operation would reward ethical behaviour as those who practice it would have it reciprocated by their fellows.

One last point. Some people seem to think that anarchism is about the powerful being appealed to **not** to oppress and dominate others. Far from it. Anarchism is about the oppressed and exploited refusing to let others dominate them. It is **not** an appeal to the "*better side*" of the boss or would-be boss; it is about the solidarity and direct action of those subject to a boss **getting rid of the boss** -- whether the boss agrees to it or not! Once this is clearly understood the idea that an anarchist society is vulnerable to the power-hungry is clearly nonsense -- anarchy is based on resisting power and so is, by its very nature, more resistant to would-be rulers than a hierarchical one.

## I.5.14 How could an anarchist society defend itself?

Anarchists are well aware that an anarchist society will have to defend itself from both inside and outside attempts to re-impose capitalism and the state. Indeed, every revolutionary anarchist has argued that a revolution will have to defend itself.

Unfortunately, Marxists have consistently misrepresented anarchist ideas on this subject. Lenin, for example, argued that the *"proletariat needs the state only temporarily. We do not at all disagree with the anarchists on the question of the abolition of the state as an aim. We maintain that, to achieve this aim, we must temporarily make use of the instruments, resources and methods of state power against the exploiters, just as the dictatorship of the oppressed class is temporarily necessary for the abolition of classes. Marx chooses the sharpest and clearest way of stating his position against the anarchists: after overthrowing the yoke of the capitalists, should workers 'lay down their arms' or use them against the capitalists in order to crush their resistance? But what is the systematic use of arms by one class against the other, if not a 'transitory form' of state."* ["*The State and Revolution*", **Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 316]

Fortunately, as Murray Bookchin points out, anarchists are *"not so naive as to believe anarchism could be established overnight. In imputing this notion to Bakunin, Marx and Engels wilfully distorted the Russian anarchist's views. Nor did the anarchists . . . believe that the abolition of the state involved 'laying down arms' immediately after the revolution. . ."* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 213] Even a basic familiarity with the work of anarchist thinkers would make the reader aware that Bookchin is right. As we shall see, anarchists have consistently argued that a revolution and an anarchist society needs to be defended against those who would try and re-introduce hierarchy, domination, oppression and exploitation (even, as with Leninists, they call themselves *"socialists"*). As Malatesta argued in 1891:

*"Many suppose that . . . anarchists, in the name of their principles, would wish to see that strange liberty respected which violates and destroys the freedom and life of others. They seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of a respect for the **freedom** of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas!"* [**Anarchy**, p. 41]

Anarchists reject the idea that defending a revolution, or even the act of revolution itself, represents or requires a *"state."* As Malatesta argued, the state *"means the delegation of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands of a few."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 40] Luigi Fabbri stresses this when he argued that, for anarchists, *"the essence of the state . . . [is] centralised power or to put it another way the coercive authority of which the state enjoys the monopoly, in that organisation of violence know as 'government'; in the hierarchical despotism, juridical, police and military despotism that imposes laws on everyone."* ["*Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism*", in **The Poverty of Statism**, pp. 13-49, Albert Meltzer (ed.), pp. 24-5] Therefore the state is the delegation of power, the centralisation of authority into the hands of a few at the top of society rather than a means of defending a revolution against the expropriated ruling class. To confuse the defence of a revolution and the state is,

therefore, a great mistake as it introduces an inequality of power into a so-called socialist society. In the words of Voline:

*"All political power inevitably creates a privileged situation for the men who exercise it. Thus it violates, from the beginning, the equalitarian principle and strikes at the heart of the Social Revolution . . . [and] becomes the source of other privileges . . . power is compelled to create a bureaucratic and coercive apparatus indispensable to all authority . . . Thus it forms a new privileged caste, at first politically and later economically. . . It sows everywhere the seed of inequality and soon infects the whole social organism . . . It predisposes the masses to passivity, and all spirit and initiative is stifled by the very existence of power, in the extent to which it is exercised."* [The Unknown Revolution, p. 249]

Unsurprisingly, anarchists think a revolution should defend itself in the same way that it organises itself -- from the bottom up, in a self-managed way. The means to defend an anarchist society or revolution are based around the organs of self-management that revolution creates. In the words of Bakunin:

*"[T]he federative Alliance of all working men's associations . . . constitute the Commune . . . Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades and by the creation of a Revolutionary Communal Council composed of one or two delegates from each barricade . . . vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates . . . all provinces, communes and associations . . . reorganising on revolutionary lines . . . [would] send . . . their representatives to an agreed meeting place . . . vested with similar mandates to constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces . . . [which would] organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction . . . it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution. . .*

*"Since revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised in a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations . . . organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation. . . "* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, pp. 170-2]

Thus we have a dual framework of revolution. On the one hand, the federation of workers' councils based on self-managed assemblies nominating mandated and accountable delegates. On the other, we have a federation of barricades, again based on self-management and mandated delegates, which actually defends the revolution against reaction. The success of the revolution depends on spreading it and organising joint self-defence. He stressed the importance of co-ordinating defence two years later, in 1870:

*"[L]et us suppose . . . it is Paris that starts [the revolution] . . . Paris will naturally make*

*haste to organise itself as best it can, in revolutionary style, after the workers have joined into associations and made a clean sweep of all the instruments of labour, every kind of capital and building; armed and organised by streets and **quartiers**, they will form the revolutionary federation of all the **quartiers**, the federative commune. . . All the French and foreign revolutionary communes will then send representatives to organise the necessary common services . . . and to organise common defence against the enemies of the Revolution, together with propaganda, the weapon of revolution, and practical revolutionary solidarity with friends in all countries against enemies in all countries."* [Op. Cit., p. 178-9]

As can be seen, the revolution not only abolishes the state by a free federation of workers associations, it also expropriates capital and ends wage labour. Thus the "*political revolution is transformed into social revolution.*" [Op. Cit., p. 171] Which, we must add, destroys another Marxist myth that claims that anarchists think, to quote Engels, that "*the state is the chief evil, [and] it is above all the state which must be done away with and then capitalism will go to blazes,*" in other words, the "*abolition of the state*" comes before the "*social revolution.*" [Marx and Engels, **The Marx-Engels Reader** p. 728] As can be clearly seen, anarchists consider the social revolution to be, **at the same time**, the abolition of the state **along with** the abolition of capitalism.

Therefore, Bakunin was well aware of the needs to defend a revolution after destroying the state and abolishing capitalism. It is clear that after a successful rising, the revolutionary population does **not** "*lay down their arms*" but rather organises itself in a federal to co-ordinate defence against reactionary areas which seek to destroy it.

Nor was Bakunin alone in this analysis. For example, we discover Errico Malatesta arguing that during a revolution we should "*[a]rm all the population.*" The revolution would have "*armed the people so that it can resist any armed attempt by reaction to re-establish itself.*" This revolution would involve "*creation of a voluntary militia, without powers to interfere as militia in the life of the community, but only to deal with any armed attacks by the forces of reaction to re-establish themselves, or to resist outside intervention by countries as yet not in a state of revolution.*" Like Bakunin, Malatesta stresses the importance of co-ordinating activity via free federations of workers' associations -- "*the development of the revolution would be the task of volunteers, by all kinds of committees, local, intercommunal, regional and national congresses which would attend to the co-ordination of social activity,*" the "[o]rganisation of social life by means of free association and federations of producers and consumers, created and modified according to the wishes of their members," and so be "*under the direct control of the people.*" Again, like Bakunin, the revolution would abolish state and capital, and "*the workers . . . [should] take possession of the factories . . . federate among themselves . . . the peasants should take over the land and the produce usurped by the landlords.*" Ultimately, the "*most powerful means for defending the revolution remains always that of taking away from the bourgeois the economic means on which their power rests, and of arming everybody (until such time as one will have managed to persuade everybody to throw away their arms as useless and dangerous toys), and of interesting the mass of the population in the victory of the revolution.*" [**Life and Ideas**, p. 170, p. 165, p. 166, pp. 165-6, p. 184, p. 175, p. 165 and p. 173]

Malatesta stresses that a government is not required to defend a revolution:

*"But, by all means, let us admit that the governments of the still unemancipated countries were to want to, and could, attempt to reduce free people to a state of slavery once again. Would this people require a government to defend itself? To wage war men are needed who have all the necessary geographical and mechanical knowledge, and above all large masses of the population willing to go and fight. A government can neither increase the abilities of the former nor the will and courage of the latter. And the experience of history teaches us that a people who really want to defend their own country are invincible: and in Italy everyone knows that before the corps of volunteers (anarchist formations) thrones topple, and regular armies composed of conscripts or mercenaries disappear."* [**Anarchy**, pp. 40-1]

The Spanish anarchist D. A. Santillan argued that the *"local Council of Economy will assume the mission of defence and raise voluntary corps for guard duty and if need be, for combat"* in the *"cases of emergency or danger of a counter-revolution."* These Local Councils would be a federation of workplace councils and would be members of the Regional Council of the Economy which, like the Local Council, would be *"constitute[d] by delegations or through assemblies."* [**After the Revolution**, p. 80 and pp. 82-83] Yet again we see the defence of the revolution based on the federation of workers' councils and so directly controlled by the revolutionary population.

Lastly, we turn to the Spanish CNT's 1936 resolution on Libertarian Communism. In this document is a section entitled *"Defence of the Revolution"* which argues:

*"We acknowledge the necessity to defend the advances made through the revolution . . . So . . . the necessary steps will be taken to defend the new regime, whether against the perils of a foreign capitalist invasion . . . or against counter-revolution at home. It must be remembered that a standing army constitutes the greatest danger for the revolution, since its influence could lead to dictatorship, which would necessarily kill off the revolution. . .*

*"The people armed will be the best assurance against any attempt to restore the system destroyed from either within or without. . .*

*"Let each Commune have its weapons and means of defence . . . the people will mobilise rapidly to stand up to the enemy, returning to their workplaces as soon as they may have accomplished their mission of defence. . . .*

*"1. The disarming of capitalism implies the surrender of weaponry to the communes which be responsible for ensuring defensive means are effectively organised nationwide.*

*"2. In the international context, we shall have to mount an intensive propaganda drive*



*among the proletariat of every country so that it may take an energetic protest, calling for sympathetic action against any attempted invasion by its respective government. At the same time, our Iberian Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes will render material and moral assistance to all the world's exploited so that these may free themselves forever from the monstrous control of capitalism and the State."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 110]

Therefore, an anarchist society defends itself in a non-statist fashion. Defence is organised in a libertarian manner, based on federations of free communes and workers' councils and incorporating self-managed workers' militias. This was exactly what the CNT-FAI did in 1936 to resist Franco's fascists. The militia bodies that were actually formed by the CNT in the revolution were internally self-governing, not hierarchical. Each militia column was administered by its own "*war committee*," made up of elected delegates, which in turn sent delegates to co-ordinate action on a specific front. Similarly, the Makhnovists during the Russian Revolution also organised in a democratic manner, subject to the decisions of the local workers' councils and their congresses.

Thus Anarchist theory and practice indicate that defence of a revolution need not involve a hierarchical system like the Bolshevik Red Army where the election of officers, soldiers' councils and self-governing assemblies were abolished by Trotsky in favour of officers appointed from above (see Trotsky's article **The Path of the Red Army** in which he freely admits to abolishing the soldiers "*organs of revolutionary self-government*" the Soviets of Soldiers' Deputies as well as "*the system of election*" of commanders by the soldiers themselves in favour of a Red Army "*built from above*" with appointed commanders).

As can be seen, the only armed force for the defence of the an anarchist society would be the voluntary, self-managed militia bodies organised by the free communes and federations of workers' associations. The militias would be unified and co-ordinated by federations of communes while delegates from each militia unit would co-ordinate the actual fighting. In times of peace the militia members would be living and working among the rest of the populace, and, thus, they would tend to have the same outlook and interests as their fellow workers.

Instead of organising a new state, based on top-down command and hierarchical power, anarchists argue that a revolutionary people can build and co-ordinate a militia of their own and control the defence of their revolution directly and democratically, through their own organisations (such as unions, councils of delegates elected from the shop floor and community, and so on). Where they have had the chance, anarchists have done so, with remarkable success. Therefore, an anarchist society can be defended against attempts to re-impose hierarchy and bosses (old or new).

For more discussion of this issue, see section J.7.6 ( "[How could an anarchist revolution defend itself?](#)")