

MARXISM VS. ANARCHISM

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INTRODUCTION

This Spartacist pamphlet, *Marxism vs. Anarchism*, reprints articles by Spartacist League/U.S. Central Committee member Joseph Seymour which were originally published as a series in *Workers Vanguard* running from 1 March to 30 August 1996. Parts One through Three (published in *WV* Nos. 640, 641 and 642) deal with the origins of anarchism and the views of its leading figures such as Proudhon and Bakunin up through the 1871 Paris Commune and the split in the First International. Parts Four and Five (published in *WV* Nos. 643 and 646) analyze the anarchist and syndicalist movements in the period preceding World War I. Parts Six and Seven (published in *WV* Nos. 649 and 650) discuss the realignment of the left and international workers movement under the impact of the first imperialist world war, the 1917 October Revolution and the founding of the Communist International.

The introductory article to this pamphlet, "The Roots of Anarchism" (published in *WV* No. 740, 25 August 2000), is an edited transcript of a class given by comrade Seymour to the New York Spartacus Youth Club. Here he traces the origins of classical anarchism in the radical bourgeois idealism of the 17th and 18th centuries, and draws parallels with the attitudes encountered among radical youth today, not only those who call themselves anarchists but Green radicals and left liberals as well.

In an ideological climate conditioned by the imperialist rulers' celebration of the "death of communism" and derision of Marxism as a "failed experiment," it is not surprising that there is something of a revival of miscellaneous anarchist tendencies among radicalizing youth. These run the gamut from petty-bourgeois anti-communists to those who appeal to the imperialist powers to bring "freedom" and "democracy" to the oppressed masses around the globe, to those who genuinely want to fight for the overthrow of imperialist rule. In the latter case, many are animated by a healthy revulsion for those self-proclaimed "socialists" whose whole activity is defined by a reformist cringing before the capitalist state, its parties and agencies.

In 1917, Lenin himself was denounced as an anarchist when he called for a workers revolution in Russia. As he wrote in *State and Revolution*: "The opportunists of modern Social-Democracy accepted the bourgeois political forms of a parliamentary, democratic state as the limit which cannot be overstepped; they broke their foreheads praying before this idol, denouncing as Anarchism every attempt to *destroy* these forms."

For the radical movement, the impact of the Russian Revolution—including the events leading up to it and the revolutionary years following it—was decisive. At the height of the international revolutionary upheavals spurred by the Russian Revolution, the best of the anarchist and syndicalist movements—those like James P. Cannon, Victor Serge, Andrés Nin, Alfred Rosmer and Harrison George—became dedicated and disciplined

fighters for the communism of Lenin and Trotsky. Although he later broke from Marxism, the anarchist Victor Serge traveled to Soviet Russia to support the new workers state. In the course of the struggle against counterrevolutionary forces (which some anarchists criminally supported), Serge joined the Bolshevik Party and wrote to his French anarchist friends motivating communism against anarchism:

"What is the Communist Party in a time of revolution? It is the revolutionary elite, powerfully organised, disciplined, obeying a consistent direction, marching towards a single clearly defined goal along the paths traced for it by a scientific doctrine. Being such a force, the party is the product of the necessity, that is the laws of history itself. That revolutionary elite which in a time of violence remains unorganised, undisciplined, without consistent direction and open to variable or contradictory impulses, is heading for suicide. No view at odds with this conclusion is possible."

— *La Vie ouvrière*, 21 March 1922, reprinted in *The Serge-Trotsky Papers*, Cotteril, ed. (1994)

The isolation of the Soviet Union, the failure of a revolutionary opportunity in Germany in 1923 and the general restabilization of the capitalist order in Europe led to the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, with a political counterrevolution installing a bureaucratic caste headed by J. V. Stalin in power. Under the rubric of building "socialism in one country," which turned the Communist parties internationally into border guards for the Kremlin's foreign policy of conciliating capitalist imperialism in the name of "peaceful coexistence," Stalin destroyed Lenin and Trotsky's proletarian revolutionary Communist International.

In "Ninety Years of the Communist Manifesto" (30 October 1937) Trotsky wrote: "The decomposition of the Social Democracy and the Communist International at every step engenders monstrous ideological relapses. Senile thought seems to have become infantile. In search of all-saving formulas the prophets in the epoch of decline discover anew doctrines long since buried by scientific socialism" (*Writings, 1937-38*). The final proof of the complete bankruptcy of Stalinism (that of the Social Democrats having been long since proven) only came with the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union and the deformed workers states in East Europe.

In the wake of these monumental defeats for the world's working class, the recrudescence of disparate anarchist tendencies is its own demonstration of the revival of "doctrines long since buried by scientific socialism." Part of our task in winning a new generation to revolutionary Marxism, the communism which animated Lenin and Trotsky's Bolshevik Party, is to bring home the essential lessons from the history of the international workers movement. It is that purpose to which this pamphlet is dedicated.

—20 June 2001

THE ROOTS OF ANARCHISM

From Bourgeois Idealism to "Green Radicalism"

What I want to try to do here is discuss those ideas and attitudes of classical anarchism which we encounter among American radical youth today, not only those who call themselves anarchists, but the Green radicals and left-liberals; that is, the kind of people who were at the Seattle and D.C. protests, many of whom are now around the Nader campaign. As we shall see, the youth who demanded that the directors of the World Bank cancel the debts of poor Third World countries were expressing an attitude and a position entirely compatible with the doctrines of Peter Kropotkin, the foremost anarchist spokesman and theoretician in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Basically, anarchism is part of a family—one might call it the slightly nutso second cousin in this family—of radical democratic idealism. Now all forms of radical democratic idealism derive in an intellectual sense from the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries, or more precisely its left wing, and they achieved organized expression as a result of the French Revolution of 1789, which attempted to translate the ideals of the left wing of the Enlightenment into reality. In the early 19th century, the various schools of socialism which Marx and Engels later called utopian socialism were a form of radical democratic idealism. In our day, Green radicalism is a form of radical democratic idealism, which, as we'll see, has a close family resemblance to classical anarchism in some ways. Mainstream liberalism also draws from this same intellectual tradition.

The central premise of radical democratic idealism is that the world can be more or less instantaneously restructured so as to conform to the ideals of the classic bourgeois-democratic revolution—expressed, for example, as "the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" in the American Declaration of Independence or the more radical expression "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" of the far more radical French Revolution. How these are interpreted varies, but they all stem from the same basic premise. By their nature, all forms of radical democratic idealism are trans-class doctrines. That is, they appeal to all men of all social classes, including the "progressive" or "enlightened" elements of the propertied and ruling class, to carry out these principles which many of them claim to uphold—to practice what they preach.

That anarchism is really a form of and derives from radical democratic idealism is very clear in the career of the most historically important figure of the anarchist movement, the man who actually founded the movement, Mikhail Bakunin. While Bakunin is mostly known only as an anarchist, he was actually an anarchist only for the last decade of his career as a leftist radical, which lasted from the mid-1840s to his death



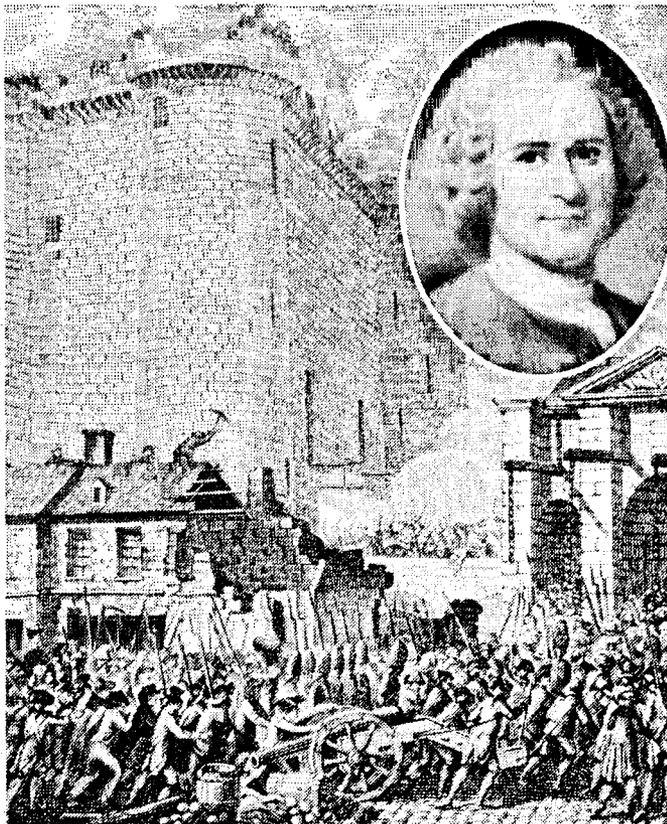
Reuters

Anti-WTO demonstrators in Seattle, November 1999. Self-described anarchists joined with liberal activists in reformist appeals to "humanitarian" sentiments against "globalization."

in the mid-1870s. He began as a student radical at the University of Berlin, as a left Hegelian. Interestingly enough, he and Friedrich Engels were sort of like chums, they were sort of the "big reds on campus." They were part of a left Hegelian circle which called themselves "the Free."

Bakunin came to prominence during the European bourgeois-democratic revolutions of 1848 as an exponent of what was called "democratic pan-Slavism," which was a form of extreme left-wing national liberationism. At this point, all of the Slavic peoples (except for the Russians) were subjugated and oppressed by other peoples. The South Slavs—the Serbs and the Bulgars—were part of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. The western Slavs—the Czechs and the Slovaks—were part of the German-dominated Hapsburg Empire. Poland, which was the biggest Slavic country besides Russia, was divided at that time between the Hapsburg Empire, Prussia and the fellow Slavic empire of tsarist Russia.

Bakunin put out what he called an "Appeal to the Slavs," to unite and liberate all of the Slavic peoples and establish a radical democratic federation of the Slavic peoples. This was not an appeal to the Slavic peasantry or the oppressed and exploited masses. It was literally an appeal to the Slavs, all of them. Engels subjected Bakunin's manifesto to a scathing



Mansell Collection/Maurice Quentin de La Tour

Storming of Bastille in July 1789 sparked Great French Revolution, which gave organized expression to democratic idealism of thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Anarchist conception of "revolution" as moral regeneration of all classes is based on Rousseau's trans-class doctrines.

criticism. What's significant is that he went beyond the specifics of the Slavic national question to the underlying worldview expressed in this appeal, which today still has much influence. Engels wrote:

"There is not a word about the actually existing obstacles to such a universal liberation, or about the very diverse degrees of civilization and the consequent equally diverse political needs of the individual peoples. The word 'freedom' replaces all that. There is not a word about the actual state of things, or, insofar as it does receive attention, it is described as absolutely reprehensible, arbitrarily established by 'congresses of despots' and 'diplomats'."

If you replace "congresses of despots" and "diplomats" with "multinational corporations," this passage should sound very familiar to you. To this bad reality is counterposed the alleged will of the people with its categorical imperative, the absolute demand for freedom. Engels goes on: "'Justice,' 'humanity,' 'freedom,' 'equality,' 'fraternity,' 'independence'—so far we have found nothing in the pan-Slavist manifesto but these more or less ethical categories, which sound very fine, it is true, but *prove absolutely nothing* in historical and political questions. 'Justice,' 'humanity,' 'freedom,' etc. may demand this or that a thousand times over; but if the thing is impossible it does not take place and in spite of everything, remains an 'empty fragment of a dream'" [emphasis in original].

I believe that this passage contains the crux of 90 percent of the discussions and arguments that we have with Ameri-

can radical youth today. In the name of justice and humanity, they call upon the World Bank to forgive the debts of poor countries, they call upon the Clinton administration to promote an international code of labor and environmental standards, they call upon NATO to liberate the Albanian Kosovars from the oppressive yoke of Serbia.

Rousseau and "Human Nature"

The dominant intellectual influence on the left prior to Marx was Jean Jacques Rousseau, who summed up his political philosophy as "man is naturally good; it is only by institutions that men become evil." This discourse on the origin and foundations of inequality among men was the single most important intellectual influence on generations of revolutionaries, from the Jacobins of the French Revolution through the various radicals of early 19th-century Europe to most of the "Red '48ers" in the 1848 Revolution. The central premise of Rousseau is that there is in the human species a natural—not socially and historically conditioned but a natural—instinct for sympathy and empathy with the sufferings of other members of that species.

The most ambitious attempt to provide a sort of scientific substantiation for this view—which could be called "species solidarity"—was that of the anarchist Kropotkin, in a book called *Mutual Aid*, which was considered the authoritative statement of anarchist doctrine in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The first two chapters are devoted to mutual aid among animals, that is, non-human animals. To give you a flavor of the argument (I am not making this up; I am not that creative):

"As to the big Molucca crab (*Limulus*), I was struck (in 1882, at the Brighton Aquarium) with the extent of mutual assistance which these clumsy animals are capable of bestowing upon a comrade in case of need. One of them had fallen upon its back in a corner of the tank, and its heavy saucepan-like carapace prevented it from returning to its natural position.... Its comrades came to the rescue, and for one hour's time I watched how they endeavoured to help their fellow-prisoner."

Now I think, just by reading that, one can easily see the connection with Green radicalism.

The very close family resemblance between classical anarchism, especially in its Kropotkinite version, and Green radicalism is personified by the career of Murray Bookchin. In the 1960s and '70s, Bookchin was the pre-eminent anarchist intellectual in the U.S. That is, his role in American left politics and the intelligentsia was very similar to that of Noam Chomsky today. In fact, Bookchin was even more aggressively anti-Marxist than Chomsky, because "Marxism-Leninism" was then fashionable. But at some point, Bookchin shifted over to the more fashionable doctrine of Green radicalism, which he called social ecology. But he didn't change his worldview. It's the same worldview, just expressed slightly differently.

Implicit in all forms of Green radicalism is that all people should basically govern their social and political behavior by the perceived future interests of the human species. In other words, if you could convince people that automobiles are harmful to the environment and harmful to the future of humanity and other species, they'll presumably give up automobiles. It doesn't matter that modern industrial society is built around the automobile, that you can't get to work without it most of the time.

If man is naturally good, naturally empathetic, as Rousseau argued, how do we then get into the mess we are in?

How come we get war, slavery, the conquest and subjugation of one people by another, class exploitation, torture, murder, the whole kit and caboodle? Well, Rousseau's answer is that this comes from the institution of private property, which was for Rousseau basically "a bad idea." In his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, he writes:

"The first man who, having enclosed a piece of land, thought of saying 'This is mine' and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. How many crimes, wars, murders; how much misery and horror the human race would have been spared if someone had pulled up the stakes and filled in the ditch and cried out to his fellow men: 'Beware of listening to this impostor. You are lost if you forget that the fruits of the earth belong to everyone and that the earth itself belongs to no one!'"

And Rousseau goes on to attribute all malignant and ignoble emotions and attitudes to property and resulting inequality:

"Insatiable ambition, the thirst of raising their respective fortunes, not so much from real want as from the desire to surpass others, inspired all men with a vile propensity to injure one another, and with a secret jealousy, which is the more dangerous, as it puts on the mask of benevolence, to carry its point with greater security.... All these evils were the first effects of property, and the inseparable attendants of its growing inequality."

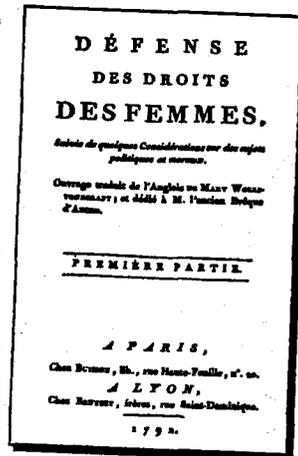
Those of you who are blessed or cursed with a Catholic school background, or are otherwise familiar with Christian doctrine, may immediately recognize a close similarity between Rousseau's conception of private property and the Augustinian doctrine of original sin. This is the point where paradise was lost, where man's natural innocence was lost, and where sin and evil enter the world of men. The parallel is actually quite exact, because Rousseau himself was not a revolutionary. He was not even a reformer. He was a historical pessimist. He was a moralistic critic of civilization. He considered that man in society had become so corrupted and so depraved that there was no hope for general moral regeneration.

But it sometimes happens that the ideas of powerful, original and unorthodox thinkers, especially those who denounce the existing state of society, are radically reinterpreted by subsequent generations in light of their own very different experiences. And that's what happened to Rousseau during the French Revolution. Here was a revolution which in the space of a few years not only radically changed all of the political and social institutions but brought about a change in mass psychology that would have been inconceivable even a year or two before the revolution. So the leftist intellectuals at the time concluded that Rousseau had been too pessimistic. Man was not so corrupted and depraved; the moral regeneration of society was in fact possible through revolutionary action. Rousseau's historical pessimism was sort of inverted into a naive historical optimism, that the paradise that was lost with private property could instantaneously be regained.

The first work which contains a doctrine that is distinctly anarchist was written in 1793, the same year as the radical climax of the French Revolution under the Jacobin regime. It was written by an Englishman called William Godwin. It was called *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*. And Godwin in this book advocated, in his words, "a well conceived form of society without government." Godwin was part of a circle of English radicals who were both profoundly influenced by the French Revolution and in turn became defenders of the French Revolution, propagandists for the ideals of the French Revolution, in the English-speaking world. The best-known



John Opie



English radical democrat Mary Wollstonecraft with 1792 French translation of her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

representatives of this circle were Tom Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft, the pioneer advocate of women's rights. Interestingly, Mary Wollstonecraft married William Godwin. They had a daughter, also named Mary, who later married another famous English radical, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley is also famous in her own right, as the author of the novel *Frankenstein*.

Godwin made it very clear that his conception of anarchism was simply a shifting of what Rousseau had placed in the distant past, in the Golden Age, into the immediate future. Thus he wrote:

"It was however by a very slight mistake that he missed the opposite opinion which it is the business of the present enquiry to establish. He only substituted as the topic of his eulogium, the period that preceded government and laws instead of the period that may possibly follow upon their abolition."

Marxism vs. Anarchism

Now at this point I want to elaborate on an aspect of anarchism that is not generally appreciated, including among people who call themselves anarchists, because it shares a fundamental point of convergence with liberalism in opposition to Marxism. Anarchism really is a doctrine of class collaboration. In the first part of the anarchism series (see page 13), I quoted from the then-Trotskyist Felix Morrow who explained that when the Spanish anarchists entered the capitalist Popular Front government during the Spanish Civil War of the late 1930s, at one level this seemed to be a violent violation of their principles, and many anarchists denounced them for it. But at a higher level, it was consistent with their principles, because they had always believed that following the revolution the capitalists too would undergo a moral regeneration and work for the betterment of humanity.

Bakunin today has a posthumous reputation as some kind of revolutionary wild man. Turn him loose and he's trying to overthrow the state and abolish it forever. But that reputation is undeserved. Most of Bakunin's career was actually spent in liberal and liberal-nationalist circles. In the late 1860s, there were two competing left-wing international organizations. There was, of course, the International Workingmen's Association, the First International, dominated by Marx. But there was a rival, liberal body called the League for Peace and



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History Today

May 1849 Dresden uprising (left). Mikhail Bakunin first gained prominence as a left-wing, pan-Slavic nationalist in the European democratic revolutions of 1848.

Freedom, which was led by liberal politicians and intellectuals like John Stuart Mill in England and the novelist Victor Hugo in France. At first, Bakunin didn't join the workers international, he joined the bourgeois-liberal international, and only when he couldn't convince the bourgeois liberals to embrace anarchism did he go over to the workers international.

But even more so than Bakunin, Kropotkin was very explicit in appealing to capitalists. And here the difference between anarchism and syndicalism actually is of some importance. In the 1890s, the anarchist movement split into two rival competing tendencies. Generally the syndicalists denounced the anarchists as woolly-headed idealists and ivory tower intellectuals. The American syndicalists said, "The anarchists deny the class struggle and we fight it." In turn, the anarchists condemned the syndicalists for what we later would call "economism," for reducing the noble goals of the anarchist revolution to the small change of trade-union struggle for higher wages and better working conditions. They denounced some anarcho-syndicalist leaders, not without justification, as aspiring trade-union bureaucrats, although the term was not yet in vogue. But the important point is that like the Marxists, the syndicalists maintained that consciousness was socially determined. They maintained that it was the workers, by their role in society and their experience, who would be uniquely attracted to and disposed to accept the program of anarcho-communism; they had an interest in this program. The capitalists, by their role in society, had become so selfish and egotistical that they were hostile to the program of anarcho-communism. And of course the classic anarchists, of which Kropotkin was the dominant figure, had to answer this challenge. So in *Mutual Aid* he writes:

"Men who have acquired wealth very often do not find in it the expected satisfaction.... The conscience of human solidarity begins to tell; and, although society life is so arranged as to stifle that feeling by thousands of artful means, it often gets the upper hand; and then they try to find an outcome for that deeply human need by giving their fortune; or their forces, to something which, in their opinion, will promote general welfare."

So as I said at the beginning of this talk, the youth who called upon the directors of the World Bank to forgive the debt of poor Third World countries were entirely consistent

with the doctrines of Kropotkin, expressed through human solidarity.

Let's deal with another aspect of the question. In the Spartacist pamphlet "Enlightenment Rationalism and the Origins of Marxism," I noted that in some ways Rousseau and Adam Smith represented the poles of Enlightenment thought. Adam Smith argued that social and economic inequality is a necessary overhead cost for technological progress, raising the general standards of living, increasing what he called *The Wealth of Nations*. Rousseau accepted that argument, but drew the reverse conclusion: equality and social harmony and communal values could exist only with a static and relatively primitive economy. Consistent with his entire doctrine, he maintained that man was happiest, indeed he was only happy, at the most primal level of economic existence:

"As long as men remained satisfied with their rustic huts; as long as they were content with clothes made of the skins of animals, sewn with thorns and fish bones; as long as they continued to consider feathers and shells as sufficient ornaments, and to paint their bodies different colors, to improve or ornament their bows and arrows, to fashion with sharp-edged stones...they lived free, healthy, honest and happy as much as their nature would admit, and continued to enjoy with each other all the pleasures of an independent intercourse."

Now, Marx maintained that such subjective attitudes as ambition, selfishness, envy of people who were wealthier or more successful were ultimately the product of economic scarcity. Rousseau inverted this. For Rousseau, economic scarcity derived from the fact that people wanted to be better than their fellows.

A conventional understanding of socialism and communism, of what motivates us, is that we are hostile to capitalism because of the extremes of economic and social inequality. There are people who work hard and are destitute, especially in but not limited to Third World countries. And then there are people who do nothing, who are strictly parasitic, and live in the lap of luxury. Well, certainly an important goal of communism is to eliminate that. But that is not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal lies in a whole other sphere of human activity, the sphere outside of consumption, and it is precisely this sphere that requires a much higher level of labor productivity than exists even in the most

advanced capitalism. In other words, if our goal were simply to provide everybody in this country with a decent standard of living, say, equivalent to \$80,000 or \$100,000 for a family of four, we could do that with the existing American economy just by a little rearranging. That is not what we're ultimately about. What we're ultimately about is providing all members of society, here and elsewhere, with the capacity to do creative work, what Marx called free or unalienated labor. We are not basically in the business of equality of consumption.

Now precisely because of this aspect, Marxism, the concept of communism, is fundamentally different from both the earlier socialists and the anarchists. For the pre-Marxian socialists, the ultimate goal was equality. The first revolutionary communist organization, derived in the last stages of the French Revolution, was called the "Conspiracy of Equals." If you ask an anarchist what his ultimate goal is, he would say "freedom." When Kropotkin formed a journal in England in the late 19th century, he called it *Freedom*. Although we recognize that equality and freedom have value in themselves, ultimately for us these are a means to an end. What does equality mean under communism? It certainly doesn't mean that people have the same living standards, or consume or utilize the same material resources. Equality simply means equal access. There'll be a huge range of lifestyles, consuming very differently.

People will be free to do what they want. It's not merely that there won't be a coercive state, but most time will be what is now called "free time." The question for Marx was, how will people utilize that free time? Will they do it like they do now, which is mainly entertainment, sports, games, socializing, vegging out, hanging out, you know, not working? Marx envisioned most people spending their free time in "free labor," that is, creative, artistic, scientific or related work, which he described in this way:

"Really free labour, the composing of music for example, is at the same time damned serious and demands the greatest effort. The labour concerned with material production can only have this character if (1) it is of a social nature, (2) it has a scientific character and at the same time is general work, i.e. if it ceases to be human effort as a definite, trained natural force, gives up its purely natural, primitive aspects and becomes the activity of a subject controlling all the forces of nature in the production process."

Well, to control all the forces of nature in the productive process involves the expenditure of very considerable material resources. First, there is the question of acquiring the knowledge of the forces of nature. Consider the vast resources necessary to acquire a PhD in physics or chemistry or biology—not for the privileged few, but for anybody who wants to. Also, many spheres of scientific research require vast expenditures of material resources—space exploration, genetic engineering, robotics, paleontology, on and on. The point basically is that Marx's conception of communism is one in which all the progressive achievements of civilization are fully utilized, made accessible to all members of society and vastly expanded. It's a concept quite alien to the Rousseauian idea of some kind of primitive economic harmony or communal values.

The Workers State and the Anarcho-Commune

I want to discuss a couple of aspects of Marx's conflict with Bakunin, or Bakuninist doctrine, which bear very much on our current work with anarchoid-liberal-Green-radical youth. We are not interested in anarchist youth because they are anarchists as such. We are interested in anarchist youth only because they are involved, even if wrong-headedly, in struggles on behalf of the oppressed and exploited. We are interested in the anarchist youth who are involved in the Mumia campaign and even in the "anti-globalization" campaign. In a number of West European countries, the anarchists or the anarchoids are sort of the most militant defenders of the rights of immigrants against the attacks of fascists and the government. Well, so are we.

So, presumably a lot of anarchists really want to overcome the vast difference between the Third World and the First World. That is, they are opposed to and want to overcome the impoverishment of much of humanity, which is entirely consistent with anarchist doctrine as a goal. The problem is that it contradicts anarchist program and means. If you read, for example, Bakunin's *Revolutionary Catechism*, in which he spells out in great detail the organization of the future anarcho-communist society, it is based on extreme economic as well as political decentralization. You have these little local anarcho-communes which get together to form regional anarcho-communes, which are basically economically self-sufficient, though they may trade with one another. But the problem is, an anarcho-commune in upper Manhattan and one in a peasant village in India are going to be very different kinds of anarcho-communes. That's not equality. Freedom maybe, equality no. How do you get equality? Well, the one way you're going to get that is the Marxist program, which is an internationally planned, socialized economy with a central political government, at least during the transition to a classless, communist society.

Let me give you a concrete example. Parts of the Persian Gulf area have two-thirds of the world's oil reserves, and you can extract oil from this region at a mere fraction of the cost pretty much anywhere else. But let's say that you have a Bakunite world in which you have these self-governing regions in the oil-rich areas of the Persian Gulf. What's to prevent the inhabitants of these regions from taking advantage of their oil monopoly just like the Saudi monarchy and the oil companies do today and charging the rest of the world extortionate prices? Now of course the Bakunites never answer that

Enlightenment Rationalism and the Origins of Marxism

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Marxism and Religion



N. N. Zhukova

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (inset). Marx and Engels counterposed the revolutionary mobilization of the proletariat against capitalism to the class-collaborationist doctrines of anarchism.



G. Lester

question, but one can answer it from their logic. They would say, "After the anarchist revolution, everybody will undergo a moral regeneration. They will identify their interests themselves with the rest of humanity and therefore they will provide the oil which they extract, because of uneven natural resources, to the rest of the world, gratis."

At bottom, anarchism is the Rousseauian version of an essentially benevolent human nature and the "revolution" therefore is essentially close to religion. And in the U.S. today, there's a lot of religiosity in left circles. The revolution is basically seen as a change in subjectivity, and in institutions only insofar as they follow from that change in subjectivity, where people give up their individual selfishness and identify with the interests of humanity.

The Workers State and Bureaucratism

The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party, made a very important point. He said that military strategy is based on attacking the weak points of your enemy and avoiding the strong points. In political and polemical struggle, you do just the opposite. You want to attack and polemicize against the strongest arguments of your opponent, presented by the

most intelligent and coherent representatives. If you're writing a polemic against somebody, you don't single out some indefensible formulation which everybody knows they don't really mean. That's not going to convince them. Now, the strongest arguments for Bakuninite anarchism are actually provided retrospectively by the phenomenon of Stalinism. This is Bakunin against Marx on the workers state:

"So the result is the control of the vast majority of the people by a privileged minority. But this minority, the Marxists say, will consist of workers. Yes, quite possibly of former workers, but, as soon as they have become the representatives or rulers of the people, *they cease to be workers* and will gaze down upon the whole world of the common workers from the eminence of 'statehood'; they will no longer represent the people, but only themselves and their 'claims' to govern the people. Anyone who can doubt this knows nothing of human nature."

Now wouldn't a typical American liberal see in this that Bakunin was predicting the rise of a Stalinist bureaucracy, which ruled in its own interest while claiming to be Marxist and to represent the interests of the working class? And in fact a number of left-wing writers who in general reject and oppose anarchism have argued that Bakunin on this question was more prescient, more realistic, less utopian than Marx, because he worried about the bureaucracy of a post-revolutionary society. How does one answer that argument?

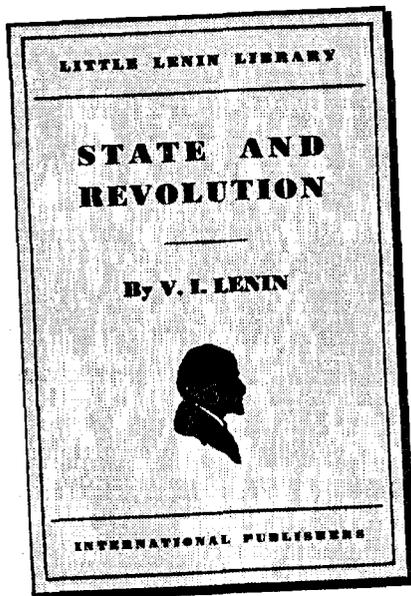
When Bakunin asked, "Will perhaps the entire proletariat stand at the head of the government?" Marx replied, "In a trades union, for example, does the entire union form its executive committee?" But in point of fact, in the unions of Marx's day—and he was fully aware of this—the leaders did not represent the interests of the ranks. The only mass unions at the time when Marx said this were the British trade unions. The leaders were political liberals. They were openly pro-capitalist. Moreover, Marx just a few years earlier had engaged in a factional struggle against them in the First International. (Ironically, the liberal leaders of the unions blocked with the anarchists against Marx. So Bakunin was not in a position to denounce Marx on that score. But that's *Realpolitik*, not ideas.)

You get the same apparent contradiction in Lenin. By the time you get to Lenin, you have mass workers parties as well as unions, but these are thoroughly bureaucratized. And in 1916, Lenin wrote *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, and a central aspect of that book is an analysis of and attack on the pro-capitalist bureaucracy of the workers movement. But the next year, when he wrote *State and Revolution*, there was an implicit assumption that there would be no bureaucracy in a workers state after the overthrow of capitalism. Thus he writes:

"It is quite possible, after the overthrow of the capitalists and the bureaucrats, to proceed immediately, overnight, to replace them in the *control* over production and distribution, in the work of *keeping account* of labour and products, by the armed workers, by the whole of the armed population. (The question of control and accounting should not be confused with the question of the scientifically trained staff of engineers, agronomists and so on. These gentlemen are working today in obedience to the wishes of the capitalists, and will work even better tomorrow in obedience to the wishes of the armed workers.)"

So how does one account for this apparent contradiction? Why did Marx and Lenin recognize the role of bureaucracy in the workers organizations under capitalism but implicitly assume this would not be a problem in a workers state following the overthrow of capitalism?

First, Marx and Lenin recognized that in order to have a



V.I. Lenin in the presidium of the First Congress of the Communist International, March 1919, Moscow. *State and Revolution* was written shortly before the October Revolution.

M.S. Nappelbaum



workers revolution in the first place, the workers would have to have a much higher level of political consciousness and a different leadership. That is, as long as the British workers supported the openly pro-capitalist union leaders, supported the British Empire, there could be no workers revolution. So it's not that somehow you go from what exists to a workers state with no change in leadership and consciousness on the part of the working class. As long as the American working class more or less subscribes to the politics of AFL-CIO leader John Sweeney, there's not going to be a proletarian revolution in this country. So that's part of the answer.

The second part, which is more fundamental, is that Marx and Lenin, when they were talking about a workers state, were not talking about Soviet Russia in the early 1920s. They were talking about a workers state in an advanced capitalist country, an advanced industrial country. Moreover, they were talking about it in an international context in which proletarian revolution had triumphed in the major capitalist countries. Obviously there can be no "withering away" of the state even in an advanced capitalist country if you are involved in a cold and maybe hot war against another equally or more powerful capitalist state, like the U.S. So if we take power in Japan, believe me, the state is not going to wither away as long as a capitalist U.S. is there.

So again, one comes back to the fundamental question of economic scarcity. Why is there a labor bureaucracy, ultimately? Is it, as Bakunin would argue, because of a natural desire on the part of men to lord it over and dominate other men? Well, if that's true, that's an inconsistent argument even on his part, because then how do you get anarchism? No. Ultimately a labor bureaucracy has the same cause as classes in general. It arises from conditions of economic scarcity. As Leon Trotsky explained in his classic work on Stalinism, *The Revolution Betrayed*:

"The basis of bureaucratic rule is the poverty of society in objects of consumption, with the resulting struggle of each against all. Where there is enough goods in a store, the purchasers can come whenever they want to. When there is little goods, the purchasers are compelled to stand in line. When the lines are very long, it is necessary to appoint a policeman to keep order. Such is the starting point of the power of the Soviet bureaucracy. It 'knows' who is to get something and who has to wait."

Now in the U.S. today, the labor bureaucracy is pretty much petty-bourgeois careerists from the get-go. But in the 1930s and '40s in this country, and in other countries today, many of the labor bureaucrats were people who began as militant young workers, members of left-wing organizations who thought of themselves as reds. But they went into the union officialdom, and gradually they lost their belief in revolution and acquired certain material and social privileges.

I suppose the most extreme case would be South Africa, because there the existence of a labor bureaucracy is so recent and the result of such a rapid change in the political situation. Consider that 15 years ago all of the trade-union leaders and Communist Party government officials in South Africa were either in prison, underground or in exile. And if these people 15 years ago could have looked into the future and seen what they had become, they would be horrified. But the difference, especially in South Africa, between the life you can live as a union official and the life of a rank-and-file worker is vast.

Ultimately of course, as Marx and Engels wrote, the withering away of the state is premised on a rapid rise in the level of labor productivity, making it higher than the advanced capitalist countries.

Anarchism and Stalinism

In reality, Stalinism as a doctrine is actually closer to Bakuninism than it is to Marxism. Stalin maintained that you could build socialism in one country, Russia, but at least he thought you could raise the level of productivity. Bakunin thought you could have anarcho-communism in a Russia that was basically on a primitive peasant base. In both cases there's a divorcing of what could be called social psychology from the economic basis. In other words, there's a denial of the fundamental premise of Marx that right cannot stand higher than the economic structure of society and the cultural level conditioned thereby. And that's the real answer. Ultimately the Stalinist bureaucracy is a product of the continued world domination of capitalism, which prevents the raising of the general level of productivity in deformed workers states, like China. The more intellectually honest anarchists actually recognize the similarity between certain

strands of Stalinism and Bakuninism, so that anarchist intellectual Paul Avrich argues that Maoism and Guevarism—which really maintain that socialism is basically a change in psychology in the masses with no relation to the level of production—were actually closer to Bakuninism than Marxism, and he was right.

If you read some of the old Stalinist propaganda about the “new Soviet man,” it’s very much consistent with the Bakuninist notion of a moral regeneration. The Marxist scholar Isaac Deutscher, for example, characterized the “socialist man” Stalin presented to the world as working 12 hours a day under conditions that no American worker would accept.

In his *Revolutionary Catechism*, Bakunin in many ways paints a very attractive society. But he maintained that society could exist, and was in fact even more likely to exist, in the most backward, rural regions of Europe—Italy and Russia. It is no coincidence that anarchism as a doctrine and a movement took hold in backward European countries like Spain and Italy; tsarist Russia, which never had a mass anarchist movement, produced some of the most influential anarchist thinkers.

Bakunin was an advocate of, by the very nature of his doctrine, socialism in one country, or even in one region of one country. For Bakunin, consistent with the whole Rousseauian tradition, the main effect of the revolution was not a reorganization of production to a higher level but a change in the political consciousness, so that people identified their



Novosti

Soldiers march in Moscow after October 1917 Revolution with banner reading “Communism.” The Bolshevik Revolution won the best of the anarchists to communism.

own personal interests with humanity in general.

Marxists, on the other hand, reject the spurious arguments of both the Stalinists and the anarchists that classless communism is simply the product of a psychological regeneration. We fight to overthrow the capitalist system in order to reorganize production so as to raise it to such a high level that scarcity will no longer exist. Only then can we lay the material basis for the emancipation of humanity from exploitation, war and poverty.

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MARXISM vs. ANARCHISM

From 1848 to the Bolshevik Revolution

Part 1: The Origins of Anarchism

Youth today are being told from all points on the political compass that the failure of communism is an incontrovertible historical fact. It is not only right-wing ideologues and social democrats who denounce Marxism and Leninism as at best utopian and at worst deeply evil, but also erstwhile leading figures of the Stalinized "Communist" movement.

The Stalinist bureaucracy—which arose in the Soviet workers state under conditions of economic backwardness and isolation when the post-World War I revolutionary wave failed to bring the workers to power in any of the advanced capitalist countries—traded on the misidentification of its repressive rule with the authority of the Bolshevik Revolution and Lenin's Communist International. The Stalinist usurpers, gravediggers of revolutionary opportunities throughout the world, claimed they were going to build "socialism in one country"—an impossibility, as Leon Trotsky explained, since socialism is necessarily international in scope. When the Soviet bureaucracy finally collapsed under the pressure of imperialist militarism and of the world capitalist market on the mismanaged collectivized economy, the Stalinists blithely proclaimed—eagerly echoing the ideologues of the triumphalist bourgeoisie—that "communism is dead."

It is understandable that many leftist youth coming to political consciousness in the post-Soviet period express sympathy for anarchism as they understand it. Here is a doctrine and set of beliefs which appears uncompromisingly hostile to the capitalist system, which poses as an alternative to the Stalinist "Communism" that has so recently and dramatically collapsed, and whose own decisive testing by history—in key events such as the 1917 Russian Revolution and the revolution and Civil War in Spain in the 1930s—lies buried in what for today's youth is the remote past. And since there has never been a successful revolution led by anarchists, they can claim that their system, unlike Marxist communism, has never really been tried.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, anarchism meant a definite program based on the doctrines of Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin and others whose theories were widely discussed and debated on the left. But today, many participants in the broad milieu which express sympathy for anarchism—for instance the German and Italian "autonome" activists—are not really partisans of the doctrines of Proudhon, Bakunin or Kropotkin.

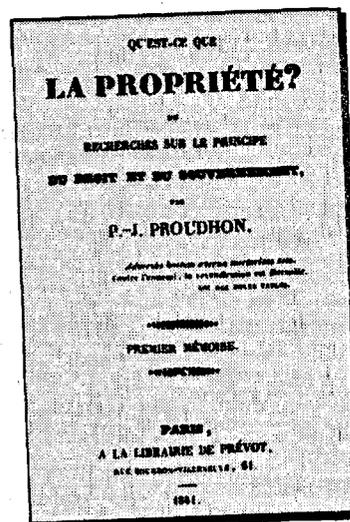
Many if not most of those calling themselves anarchists are rather expressing a characteristic set of mainly negative attitudes: hostility to existing

governments and in general the present-day bourgeois order; militant opposition to the right, especially the fascists and other

violent racists; contempt for parliamentary politics, which they identify with every kind of reformist sellout; rejection of the Marxist program of proletarian dictatorship and centralized economic planning which they identify with Stalinist tyranny; and mistrust of all parties, including a Leninist revolutionary vanguard party.

Given the decline among the masses of identification of proletarian socialism with the possibility for human liberation, there has been an upsurge of sympathy for anarchism, which is at bottom a version of radical-democratic ideology. Anarchism originated in the mid-19th century as a form of resistance to the shift from petty commodity producers—artisans and peasants—to wage laborers. The movement was strongest in Latin Europe, especially Spain—a late-developing capitalist country where, moreover, a series of brutal dictatorships foreclosed much possibility of parliamentary reformism. With the industrialization of Latin Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, anarchism gave rise to syndicalism, a movement which advocated management of a collectivized economy by the trade unions.

While the anarchistic youth of today are certainly not the continuators of classic anarchism, they do share certain attitudes and values with the followers of Proudhon and Bakunin. Among these are indifference or hostility to technological progress and to the needs of a complex industrial



New York Public Library
Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who first coined the term "anarchy" in his 1840 *What Is Property?*, was later described by Marx as purveyor of petty-bourgeois fantasies.

economy. In his autobiography, *My Life*, Leon Trotsky recounts his first meeting with an anarchist militant while in a Moscow prison around the turn of the century: "He avoided discussions of theory. But once when I pressed him to tell how railways would be managed by autonomous communities, he answered: 'Why the hell should I want to travel on railways under anarchism?'" Similar discussions can be had with today's anarchist-minded youth, for example, the transport of oil by sea.

In the era of Proudhon and Bakunin, the difference in the economic conditions of workers and peasants in Europe and those in the colonial world was far narrower than today. So it was understandable that anarchists and early socialists conceived of establishing an egalitarian society within a national or, at most, Europe-wide context. Pro-anarchist youth today have to be acutely aware of the hideous poverty in Third World countries compared to the relative wealth of West Europe and North America. Indeed, many are in the forefront of defending immigrant workers and asylum-seekers from these countries against fascist and government attacks.

Yet key elements of anarchism as an economic program—extreme decentralization and technological standstill—could only perpetuate the division between the imperialist countries and the neocolonial Third World. How could a world system based on autonomous communes ever bridge the gap between rural Mexico and India on the one hand and the German Ruhr or California's Silicon Valley on the other? Only global exchange on terms favorable to the "underdeveloped" nations and centralized economic planning on an international scale can narrow and eventually overcome the gulf separating the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America from the U.S., West Europe and Japan.

The classic anarchists and pre-Marxian socialist tendencies (except for Saint-Simon) envisioned an egalitarian society on the basis of the then-prevailing standards of living. Proudhon, in particular, preached that the workers should not aspire to live like the wealthy classes but should rather cultivate the Spartan virtues of self-restraint and self-reliance. "The essence of our dignity," he proclaimed, "is to do without the aid of others" (*Justice in the Revolution and the Church* [1858]). Such a message, shared on today's political spectrum with the "Green" petty-bourgeois and bourgeois movements, will obviously find little resonance among the oppressed neocolonial masses for whom a world socialist revolution leading to a vast *increase* in energy and technol-

ogy is required even to secure the things that working people in the advanced countries usually take for granted: electricity, decent housing, literacy, clean water. Indeed, "self-restraint" is the program cynically preached by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to the masses of Bangladesh and South Africa.

With the history of the anarchist movement and the views of its leading figures so little known even on the left, today's radicalized youth can invest the anarchist tradition with all manner of revolutionary virtues and high-minded idealism which it did not in reality possess. The original theorist of anarchism, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, was an anti-Semite, a racist who supported the slaveholding South in the American Civil War and a gross male chauvinist. These repugnant views were not just a personal peculiarity but reflected the characteristic prejudices of petty proprietors and smallholding peasants in the France of his day. Mikhail Bakunin, the founder of the anarchist movement, at one point appealed to Tsar Nicholas I to bring about the "final liberation of all the Slav tribes from the foreign yoke." Here again this was not just a personal idiosyncrasy but coincided with widespread illusions among Russian peasants at the time in the good will of "their" Tsar.

Peter Kropotkin, the late 19th century's foremost anarchist spokesman, became an ardent supporter of British and French imperialism against Germany in the First World War. The Ukrainian anarchist Nestor Makhno, who led a peasant-based military force during the Russian Civil War of 1918-21, carried out pogroms against Jewish communities and blocked with White counterrevolutionary armies against the Bolsheviks. During the Spanish revolution of the mid-1930s, the anarcho-syndicalist leaders became ministers in the popular-front (i.e., capitalist) government which provoked and then suppressed a workers' uprising in Barcelona.

Even those who explicitly solidarize with well-known historical stands of the anarchist movement often have little familiarity with the real history. For instance, a sine qua non for hard-core anarchist spokesmen is to denounce Trotsky for suppressing the 1921 Kronstadt mutiny. But at the time, many former anarchist and syndicalist militants who came over to Bolshevism, such as Victor Serge and Alfred Rosmer, recognized that a victory for the "anarchist" mutineers could only have led to a bloody capitalist counterrevolution against the besieged Soviet Russian workers state.

Anarchism and Marxism: The Fundamental Difference

While it is necessary to debunk the idealization of the anarchist tradition among radicalized youth, it is also important not to equate the classic anarchists' espousal of individual freedom with the present-day "free market" right wing, especially its "libertarian" component. Proudhon and Bakunin were not precursors of Milton Friedman and Margaret Thatcher! A central theme of classic anarchism was the denunciation of possessive individualism glorified by bourgeois ideologues then and now. Proudhon attacked "egoism, disguised under the false name of liberty." "Bourgeois individualism," declared Kropotkin, "cannot exist unless the masses are oppressed." The anarchists believed in a just, harmonious and *egalitarian* society. Anarchism and its offshoot syndicalism were thus tendencies within the left and workers movement.



Proliferation of anarchist journals in Europe included *Alternative Libertaire* and *No Pasaran!* in France.



Der Spiegel

German *Autonome* battling cops. With the collapse of Stalinism, anarchism has become attractive among radicalized youth.



Spartaco

In Italy, neo-syndicalist COBAS (workers rank-and-file committees) have been in the forefront of militant class struggle in post-Soviet period.

How could an egalitarian society be maintained if independent producers were free to act as they chose without any coordination or control by a central political authority? Would not such a system reproduce the conditions of “free market” capitalism? No late 19th century syndicalist imagined a collective of railway workers acting like a capitalist monopoly to charge all that the traffic would bear. But what would prevent them from doing so?

The anarchists answered in a word: morality. Harking back to Rousseau, the classic anarchists believed there existed a natural moral order which had been corrupted and debased by class divisions maintained by a repressive state. Bakunin spoke of “the idea of justice inherent in man.” Kropotkin’s journal *Freedom* stated: “We dream of the positive freedom which is essentially one with social feeling; of free scope for the social impulses, now distorted and compressed by Property, and its guardian the Law” (quoted in George Crowder, *Classical Anarchism* [1991]).

The fundamental differences between anarchism and Marxism go beyond the basic question of the state to encompass a different conception of the relationship between nature and society. Proudhon asserted that “man has a constant,

unchangeable nature.” Bakunin similarly maintained that “human society is, after all, nothing but the last great manifestation or creation of Nature on earth” and that “social solidarity is the first human law” (*The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution* [1871]). Likewise, Kropotkin asserted that “nature is the ethical teacher of man.”

For Marx, society was not determined by the innate psychological properties of *Homo sapiens* but by *mankind’s self-development through labor*, leading to progressively higher levels of productive forces. As he wrote in his early polemic against Proudhon, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847): “M. Proudhon does not know that all history is nothing but a continuous transformation of human nature.” A socialist transformation—in both its objective and subjective aspects—becomes possible only with the emergence of an industrial economy, originally a product of capitalist development.

For Marxists, human history is the story of the desperate struggle not to be slaves to the “natural order” but to master through labor the harsh world of nature. The early human societies lived constantly on the brink of extinction: you were old at age 20 and typically dead by 30. The first advances in production—the development of agriculture and the domestication of animals—opened the road to conquering the tyranny of nature, also ushering in the development of inequality and class divisions in the fight for control of the newly created surplus. Only with the overcoming of scarcity through the further development of the productive forces can the antagonism between individual self-interest and collective well-being be transcended. And only then will the state wither away: in Engels’ words, the government of people will be replaced by the administration of things.

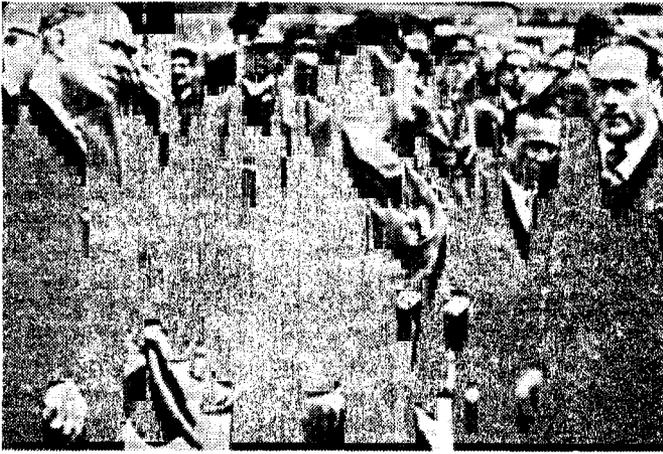
Although anarchists think of themselves as polar opposites of Stalinism, in its theoretical premises Stalinism is actually closer to anarchism than to Marxism. Both anarchism and Stalinism attribute to the state a nearly omnipotent capacity to shape social, economic and cultural life. Both Bakunin and Stalin asserted that collectivist consciousness could be established under even the most miserably impoverished economic conditions once the bourgeois state and capitalist property had been done away with.

Anarchism and Stalinism converge in another important respect, literally so in the Spanish Popular Front government of the mid-1930s. Despite its hostility to authority and the bourgeois order, anarchism is at its theoretical core a doctrine of *class collaboration*, not class struggle. The wealthy and powerful can participate in “the ethical progress of man”—to use Kropotkin’s phrase—no less than the downtrodden and exploited workers and peasants. As a Trotskyist historian of the Spanish revolution, Felix Morrow, wrote at the time:

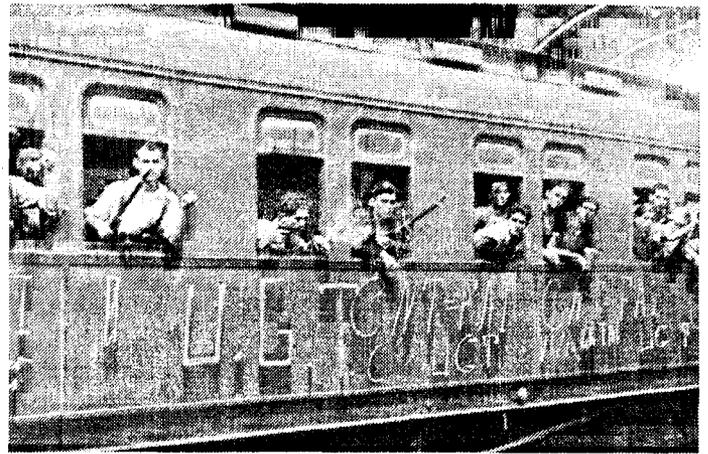
“Class collaboration, indeed, lies concealed in the heart of anarchist philosophy. It is hidden, during periods of reaction, by the anarchist hatred of capitalist oppression. But, in a revolutionary period of dual power, it must come to the surface. For then the capitalist smilingly offers to share in building the new world. And the anarchist, being opposed to ‘all dictatorships,’ including the dictatorship of the proletariat, will require of the capitalist merely that he throw off the capitalist outlook, to which he agrees, naturally, the better to prepare the crushing of the workers.”

—*Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain* (1938)

Marx and Engels maintained that after the social revolution a workers state (proletarian dictatorship) was necessary



Historia 16



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During Spanish Civil War, anarchist leaders Juan García Oliver (far left) and Federica Montseny joined Stalinists and social democrats as ministers in Popular Front government, which sabotaged and suppressed armed workers struggle against the capitalist order. Right: Madrid workers detachment leaving for the front.

in order to suppress the dispossessed bourgeoisie, who would strive to restore their property, privileges and power. The anarchists projected that the former propertied class would undergo a moral regeneration and become productive members of the new, egalitarian social system. Hence they envisioned a social revolution that after some short-lived initial violence would be essentially harmonious. These differences between Marxists and anarchists could not be resolved simply through debate and polemical exchange. They could not be tested so long as the European bourgeois order remained stable. Moreover, in the era before World War I, the social-democratic “mainstream” of supposedly “orthodox” Marxists, typified by Karl Kautsky, obfuscated Marx/Engels’ position that a proletarian revolution would have to *smash* the existing bourgeois state apparatus. Instead, they projected that the working class could attain political power within the framework of parliamentary democracy.

It was the experience of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution which convinced many anarchist and syndicalist militants that proletarian dictatorship was indeed necessary and not a product of Marx’s supposedly “authoritarian” prejudices. It was not so much the workers’ insurrection in October 1917 that exploded the anarchist notion of a harmonious social transformation but rather the subsequent Civil War and the military interventions/economic blockades against Soviet Russia by the Central (German-led), Western (Allied) and Japanese imperialist powers. Alfred Rosmer, a leading French syndicalist who became a founder of the Communist International, explained:

“The dictatorship of the proletariat, hitherto a theoretical question, was now posed as a concrete problem—in fact, as the most urgent problem. Yet this transitional period, this passage from capitalism to socialism, had never been studied in depth.... The transition had been seen as a leap from capitalist society into an ideal society to be constructed at leisure. Even syndicalist militants such as Pataud and Pouget, in a book called *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution*, had not made any precise contribution to the problem of the transitional period, though they were committed to doing so by the very title of their book. A short general strike, and the régime would collapse...after a few days of agitation, and with minimal violence, the syndicalists would peacefully proceed to the building of the new society. But this was the realm of fairy-tales. In Moscow, in 1920, we were facing reality.”

—*Lenin’s Moscow* (1971)

Rosmer’s political evolution was in no way exceptional. The Bolshevik Revolution brought about a fundamental realignment and regrouping of the international left, which had already begun with the outbreak of World War I in 1914. The war produced a deep and irrevocable *split* in the anarchist and syndicalist movements, as it did in the socialist movement, with the right wing of both currents becoming social-chauvinists supporting their “own” imperialist states. Kropotkin, who became a champion of “democratic” Britain and France, was now denounced by his longtime colleague Errico Malatesta as a “government anarchist.” Léon Jouhaux, head of the French syndicalist trade-union movement, joined the “*union sacrée*” (sacred union) in defense of the French bourgeois state as did the “orthodox” Marxist leader Jules Guesde.

At the same time, the revolutionary syndicalists Rosmer and Pierre Monatte collaborated closely with the Russian revolutionary Marxist Trotsky, then in exile in France, in building the antiwar Zimmerwald movement, whose left wing prefigured the Communist International (Comintern). Lenin, by restoring and modernizing the genuinely revolutionary and liberating content of Marxism, was able to win the best anarchist and syndicalist militants to the banner of communism. Hence, with some important exceptions such as Spain, the anarchist movement tended to disappear—the right wing exposed as chauvinist, the left wing deserted by its most vital elements who broke in the direction of the Comintern. But after decades of betrayal by Stalinists and social-democratic reformists, anarchism regained a certain following among anti-capitalist youth. With this revival of anarchist sympathies, it becomes useful again to review the history of the anarchist movement from its origins in the mid-19th century through its demise in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Proudhonism: A Petty-Bourgeois Utopia

More so than in the case of most social theorists, the doctrines of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon—who first coined the term “anarchy” in 1840—were directly and obviously shaped by his personal experience. Proudhon was born in the rural Jura region of eastern France. His father was a brewer of beer and a cooper (barrel maker) of an unusually honest and upright

nature. When this region was besieged at the end of the Napoleonic wars, most brewers took advantage of the situation to raise their prices. Not so Claude-François Proudhon, who declared: "So much for my raw materials plus so much for my work, that's my price" (Edward Hyams, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: His Revolutionary Life, Mind and Works* [1979]). This formula would become a key element in Proudhon's economic program, which he termed mutualism.

Because young Pierre-Joseph was highly intelligent as well as devoutly religious, a local clergyman secured for him a place in the best school in the district. His classmates were the sons of the bourgeoisie and landed nobility. However, upon graduation Proudhon was again plunged into the working class. He became a printer and as such suffered the insecurity and periods of abject poverty typical of European artisans in that era. At one point, the young Proudhon scraped together enough money to go into partnership in a small print shop. But his partner was irresponsible and ruined the business before committing suicide. Left with debts he couldn't pay, Proudhon was forced to sell his shop and once again work for wealthier, more successful publishers.

These experiences underlay Proudhon's worldview, as was noted in an introduction to his *Selected Writings* (1969) by the British scholar Stewart Edwards:

"At the heart of all of Proudhon's writings on social questions there is this concern for the small-property holder. His proposals for monetary reform, his idea of a land bank, his mutual-insurance schemes, all reflected the ideals of the *petite-bourgeoisie*, their constant preoccupation with obtaining credit and their envy of the large-scale capitalist."

Proudhon himself summed up his program thus: "It is when all people are owners of property that fortunes are most equal and there is work for everyone." This vision was attractive to many workers, for France was still basically a *pre-industrial* society. The overwhelming majority of wage laborers were the children of peasants, shopkeepers or artisan proprietors. Many, like Proudhon, had once owned small businesses which were driven into bankruptcy by increasing debt.

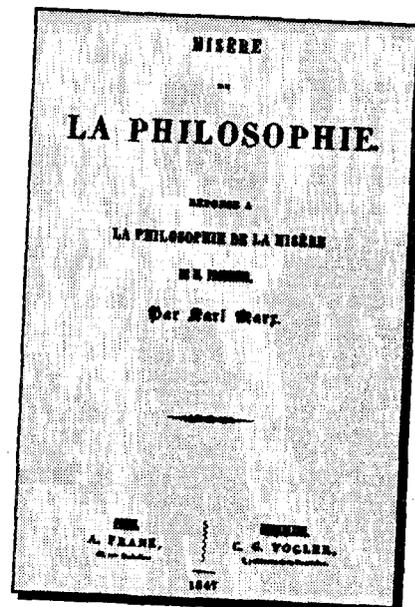
Proudhon invested human nature with the psychology of a peasant smallholder or artisan proprietor. Man, he proclaimed, "wishes to labor when he pleases, where he pleases and as much as he pleases" (*What Is Property?* [1840]). But how can workers in a steel mill, electric power plant or railroad labor when, where and as much as they please? Industrial technology requires the strict coordination of many different types of labor. As Engels explained in his classic anti-anarchist polemic "On Authority" (1873):

"Let us take by way of example a cotton spinning mill. The cotton must pass through at least six successive operations before it is reduced to the state of thread, and these operations take place for the most part in different rooms. Furthermore, keeping the machines going requires an engineer to look after the steam engine, mechanics to make the current repairs, and many other labourers whose business it is to transfer the products from one room to another, and so forth. All these workers, men, and women and children, are obliged to begin and finish their work at the hours fixed by the authority of the steam,



Beard

In his 1847 polemic, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Karl Marx denounced Proudhon's opposition to working-class struggle. Marx argued that only proletarian revolution can open the road to a just and egalitarian society, in which all can freely develop their potential.



which cares nothing for individual autonomy.... Wanting to abolish authority in large-scale industry is tantamount to wanting to abolish industry itself, to destroy the power loom in order to return to the spinning wheel."

This, in substance, was the program of Proudhon's mutualism: "Where there is perfect Mutualism, each producer must, in accepting a certain obligation toward others, who for their part obligate themselves in the same way to him, retain his full and complete independence of action" (*The Political Capacity of the Working Class* [1865]). A basic economic principle of mutualism is that goods will be exchanged on the basis of equal labor input: "All products will be paid for by products that have cost the same in effort and expense."

Such a system presumes a *static technology* available to all producers. Let us say that a small number of shoemakers introduce new machinery which cuts the time needed to produce shoes by a third. If they correspondingly reduce the exchange value of their shoes by a third, all other shoemakers will have to sell below their own labor costs or no one will buy their shoes. But if the more efficient producers maintain the old exchange value of shoes, they will be selling above their labor cost, thereby making a profit. Either way, the principles of Proudhon's mutualism stand in flat contradiction to technological progress. But what will really happen? Will producers embrace "mutualism" and renounce technological progress? Hardly: the more efficient will simply drive the less efficient out of business.

Proudhon Against Class Struggle

Proudhon's first work, *What Is Property?*, written in 1840, was a powerful, if somewhat abstract, denunciation of capitalist exploitation. There was not much explication of his own positive program, doubtless because it was not yet fully developed. Consequently, *What Is Property?* was appreciated by almost all socialists of the day, including the young Karl



Prominent French woman socialist and writer George Sand denounced Proudhon's gross male chauvinism and anti-communism.

Marx. When Marx was in Paris in 1844-45, he established friendly relations with Proudhon and later claimed he had introduced the French radical to Hegelian philosophy. However, Proudhon's views were already too well developed and too divergent to be influenced by the future founder of scientific socialism.

In 1846, Marx, then in Brussels after having been expelled from France, invited Proudhon to become part of an international socialist committee of correspondence. In response, Proudhon effectively broke off relations with Marx primarily because he opposed the revolutionary overthrow of the French, Prussian and other European monarchical governments, which Marx considered a necessary precondition for the socialist reconstruction of society. Proudhon wrote:

"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.... I put the problem this way: *How can we put back into society, through some system of economics, the wealth which has been taken out of society by another system of economics?* In other words, through Political Economy we must turn the theory of Property against Property in such a way as to create what you German socialists call *community*." [emphasis in original]

—"Letter to Marx" (17 May 1846), in *Selected Writings*

What concretely did Proudhon mean by using property against property? He advocated a "people's bank" which would provide "gratuitous" (interest-free) credit to any worker who wanted to buy his own business. The initial capital of the bank would come from taxes on the wealthier classes. At one point he even appealed to Louis Napoleon—then president and soon-to-be emperor of France—to found a "people's bank." As Marx wrote concerning Proudhon: "to regard *interest-bearing capital* as the *main form of capital* and to try to make a particular form of the credit system, comprising the alleged abolition of interest, the basis for a transformation of society is an out-and-out *petty-bourgeois* fantasy" ("On Proudhon," January 1865

[emphasis in original]). Yet as long as large-scale industry was not yet predominant in France, this fantasy was attractive to many workers, since only a relatively modest amount of capital was required to buy and operate a small farm or workshop.

The real beginning of the industrial revolution in France dates from the Second Empire of Louis Napoleon in the 1850s and '60s. The partial liberalization of the Bonapartist regime in the early 1860s also allowed the development in France of trade unions of a more or less modern type. Proudhon was hostile to the emergence of a real workers movement. His last work, *The Political Capacity of the Working Class*, published posthumously, is in large measure an attack on the new trade-union movement: "We will soon have heard the last of association, mutualism and progress if the workers, following the example of the great monopolists, succeed in substituting extortion for free competition."

Like many early socialists, Proudhon believed in the so-called "iron law of wages": that any increase in money wages would always be quickly followed by a proportional increase in prices. Hence he denounced strikes—all strikes—as futile if not harmful to the working people's interests:

"While threatening to strike, some of them [unionists], indeed the majority, have demanded an increase in wages, others have demanded a reduction in working hours, and still others both at the same time. Surely they have always known that increased wages and reduced working hours can only lead to a general price increase."

Almost 20 years earlier, Marx had debunked and refuted "the iron law of wages" in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. His most developed, scientific explanation of how trade-union activity can under certain circumstances reduce the rate of exploitation and increase real wages is to be found in *Value, Price and Profit* (1867).

Proudhon's belief that trade unions and strikes could not benefit and might well be harmful to the working class was commonplace among the socialists of his day. But his position on the woman question was singularly reactionary and was criticized as such by friends and colleagues on the left, not to speak of opponents like the prominent woman socialist and novelist George Sand. The theoretical founder of anarchism was an unshamed male chauvinist: "I do not know which woman it was who was shocked to discover that we men think a woman knows enough if she knows enough to mend our shirts and cook us a steak. I am one of those men" (quoted in Edward Hyams, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*). Even Hyams, a sympathetic modern biographer, acknowledges: "Every illiberal, every cruelly reactionary notion ever used against female emancipation by the most extreme anti-feminist, is to be found in Proudhon's *Pornocratie*."

Of extremely puritanical temperament, Proudhon was horrified by the idea of women achieving sexual freedom and fulfillment:

"As for equality in the matter of the senses, its inevitable consequences are free love, condemnation of marriage, condemnation of womanhood, jealousy and secret hatred of men, and, to crown the system, inextinguishable lechery; such, invariably, is the philosophy of the emancipated woman."

Such were the views of a man who is often held up, in contrast to Marx, as an apostle of "anti-authoritarian" socialism based on individual freedom.

Part 2: Mikhail Bakunin—Founder of the Anarchist Movement

While Proudhon's writings were influential among politically active and advanced French workers, he did not strive to become the leader of an organized movement. The anarchist movement as such originated with Mikhail Bakunin in the 1860s. Proudhon was basically a theorist whose views remained fairly consistent over his 25 years as a radical publicist. By contrast, Bakunin was a political adventurer who operated with very different programs in different movements and milieus. Some latter-day anarchists like Sam Dolgoff argue that Bakunin's views and activities before the mid-1860s—which are quite embarrassing for them—have little or nothing to do with anarchism. However, there are important elements of continuity in Bakunin's checkered career.

Mikhail Bakunin was the eldest son of an aristocratic Russian landowner, a man of considerable culture and respect for education but of conventional political views. Typically for a young Russian nobleman, Mikhail was sent to a military academy and upon graduation became a junior officer in the tsarist army. But Bakunin lacked the discipline for a military career and after a few years got himself dismissed from the service. He then drifted into a bohemian existence in Moscow's intellectual circles. There he established friendly relations with Alexander Herzen, the future founder of Russian populism. But Bakunin was in no sense a political radical when in his mid-twenties he left Russia to study philosophy in Germany.

When Bakunin arrived in Berlin in 1840, intellectual life

was dominated by the Hegelian Left—its adherents and opponents.

This current of democratic-minded intellectuals was being radicalized by the increasingly repressive policies of the new, more reactionary and pietist Prussian king. Fundamentally, the Hegelian Left was an expression among educated German youth of the growing contradiction between the rapid development of bourgeois societies in West and Central Europe and the monarchical regimes derived from the feudal past. That contradiction would soon explode in the Revolutions of 1848.

Bakunin became a member in good standing of the Hegelian Left, his outlook at the time being indistinguishable from mainstream European radicals of the 1840s—the soon-to-be “red '48ers”—except for a penchant for extremist rhetoric. His first writing as a self-declared revolutionary, “Reaction in Germany” (1842), contains the famous aphorism: “The passion for destruction is a creative passion, too.”

To his credit, Bakunin became an ardent supporter of the struggle for the independence of Poland, which had been subjugated and divided between the Russian, Prussian and Austro-Hungarian states. The cause of Polish national liberation from the tripartite oppression of the Romanovs, Hohenzollerns and Habsburgs was near and dear to the hearts of virtually all radicals of the 1840s. But for a young Russian nobleman to link the struggle for Polish independence to a democratic revolution within Russia itself was especially significant, not least in the ever-watchful eyes of the tsarist autocracy.

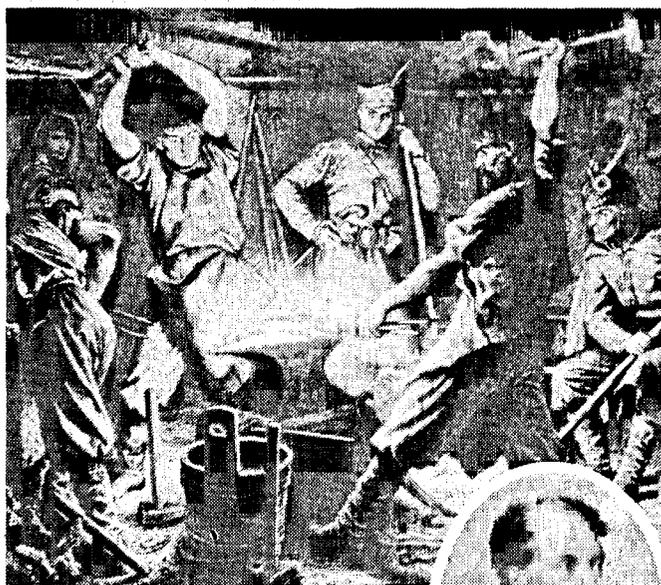
Bakunin as a Left-Wing Pan-Slavic Nationalist

During the epochal year 1848, Karl Marx acted as the leader of an organized group based on a definite program best expressed in the recently published *Communist Manifesto*. By contrast, Bakunin acted as a footloose political adventurer who had scarcely any impact on the momentous events in which he participated. He went from Brussels to Paris, from Paris to various cities in Germany and the Austro-Hungarian empire looking for action or fleeing the authorities.

Nonetheless, it was during the revolutionary *annus mirabilis* that Bakunin emerged as a distinct personality on the European left. He did so not as an advocate of anarchism—the basic doctrine of which had already been developed by Proudhon, with whom Bakunin was personally acquainted—but rather as an advocate of a leftist version of pan-Slavic nationalism. He first voiced this program at the Slav Congress in Prague in June 1848 and elaborated it a few months later in a pamphlet, *Appeal to the Slavs*.

To understand pan-Slavism, including its Bakuninite variant, it is necessary to recognize that at this time all the Slavic peoples, except for the Russians, were subject to foreign rule. The Western Slavs (Czechs and Croats) were incorporated in the German-dominated Austro-Hungarian empire. The Southern or Balkan Slavs (Serbs and Bulgars) were under the yoke of Ottoman Turkey. And the Poles were subjugated by two Germanic states and the Russian state of their fellow Slavs.

Pan-Slavism was essentially a right-wing ideology which sought to invest Russian imperialism, especially in the



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Polish insurgents (above) forge arms to fight tsarist Russian rule in 1863. Bakunin abandoned pan-Slavic nationalism and developed anarchist doctrines following defeat of Polish national uprising. While imprisoned in Russia in the 1850s, Bakunin wrote fawning appeal to Tsar Nicholas I (right) to lead national liberation of Slavic peoples.



Balkans, with the spurious mission of "national liberation." Bakunin, however, gave pan-Slavism a leftward twist by linking Russian support for the liberation of the Western and Southern Slavs to the establishment of a democratic republic in Russia. Referring to the Slav Congress, his *Appeal* states:

"[W]e made a strong appeal to that great Russian people which, alone of all the Slavs, has been able to preserve its national existence. We entreated the Russians to give serious thought to what they know only too well—that their nationality and their greatness mean nothing so long as they themselves are not free, so long as they permit their power to be used as a scourge against unhappy Poland and as a perpetual threat to European civilization.

"This is what we have done and what, jointly with the democrats of all countries, we have demanded: LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY OF NATIONS, within which the Slav peoples, free like these and in fraternal contact with all, but united in a closer alliance among themselves, may soon be transformed into a vast democratic State."

—reproduced in Sam Dolgoff, ed.,
Bakunin on Anarchy (1972)

Bakunin was here projecting onto Russia a political and social revolution modeled on the Great French Revolution of 1789, that is, a radical bourgeois-democratic movement based on an uprising of the urban lower classes (centrally the artisan proletariat) combined with a mass peasant revolt. But the Russia of the 1840s had no significant urban bourgeois sector which could initiate and direct a popular revolution against the tsarist autocracy. In their own way, the petty-bourgeois nationalist leaders (like the Czech Ferdinand Palacky) who organized the Slav Congress in Prague understood this and therefore dismissed Bakunin's notion of a "democratic pan-Slav state" as utopian fantasizing. Except for the Poles, oppressed by the Russian Slavs, the nationalist movements among the Western and Balkan Slavic peoples looked to the tsarist autocracy or the Habsburg monarchy to champion their cause.

Bakunin's *Appeal* concludes with a vague call for social revolution:

"We need to transform the material and moral conditions of our present-day existence, to overturn, from top to bottom, this decrepit social world which has grown impotent and sterile and incapable of containing or supporting so great a mass of liberty. We must, first, purify our atmosphere and make a complete transformation of our environment, for it corrupts our instincts and our will by constricting our hearts and our minds. The social question thus appears to be first and foremost the question of the complete overturn of society."

From a Marxist standpoint, two things are striking about this passage. First, the "we" on whose behalf Bakunin claims to speak are not workers or peasants or even the oppressed and exploited classes as a whole. He is literally appealing to all Slavs of *all* social classes. Secondly, and partly for that reason, Bakunin's call for a social revolution lacks any concrete programmatic content, and is little more than high-flown rhetoric. A constant feature of Bakunin's outlook was an explicit rejection of Marx and Engels' insistence on the laws of history as the basis for elaborating a program for achieving the revolutionary objective. When the historical materialist outlook is rejected, what remains is at bottom moralism in place of a class analysis.

Bakunin's program and views were subjected at the time to incisive criticism by Friedrich Engels in his article "Democratic Pan-Slavism" (February 1849). This polemic is significant primarily because it anticipates the later debate between scientific socialism and anarchism. Engels goes to

the heart of Bakunin's worldview: the belief that national and social liberation is basically an act of will which can be achieved in any place at any time and under any economic conditions. Engels explains:

"There is not a word about the actually existing obstacles to such a universal liberation, or about the very diverse degrees of civilisation and the consequent equally diverse political needs of the individual peoples. The word 'freedom' replaces all that. There is not a word about the actual state of things, or, insofar as it does receive attention, it is described as absolutely reprehensible, arbitrarily established by 'congresses of despots' and 'diplomats.' To this bad reality is counterposed the alleged will of the people with its categorical imperative, with the absolute demand simply for 'freedom'....

"Justice,' 'humanity,' 'freedom,' 'equality,' 'fraternity,' 'independence'—so far we have found nothing in the pan-Slavist manifesto but these more or less ethical categories, which sound very fine, it is true, but *prove absolutely nothing* in historical and political questions. 'Justice,' 'humanity,' 'freedom,' etc. may demand this or that a thousand times over; but if the thing is impossible it does not take place and in spite of everything remains an 'empty figment of a dream.'" [emphasis in original]

Today, no less than in 1848, genuine universal freedom, equality and fraternity will require decades of economic development which can be achieved only under a world communist system.

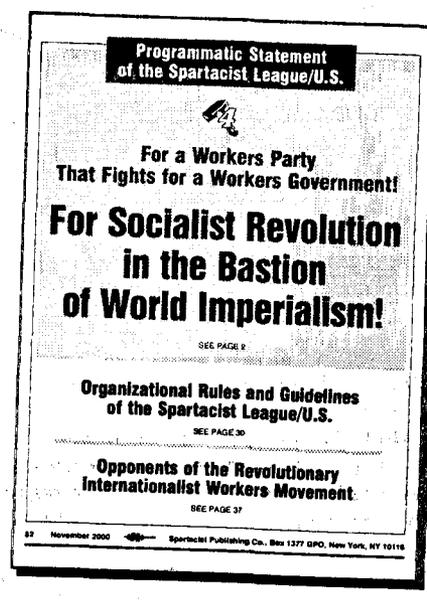
Marx and Engels understood that there was no social basis for a bourgeois-democratic revolution in tsarist Russia at the time. Hence they recognized that, whatever confused notions might exist in Bakunin's head, pan-Slavism could only serve as a cover for tsarist Russian intervention in Central Europe and the Balkans. In fact, just a few months after Engels wrote his polemic against Bakunin, the Russian army in alliance with the Habsburg forces suppressed the bourgeois-democratic government of Louis Kossuth in Hungary.

In one important respect, Marx and Engels' views on the national question during the Revolutions of 1848 were proven wrong by the future course of history. They assessed the aspirations of East European nationalities to national independence according to their ability to consolidate

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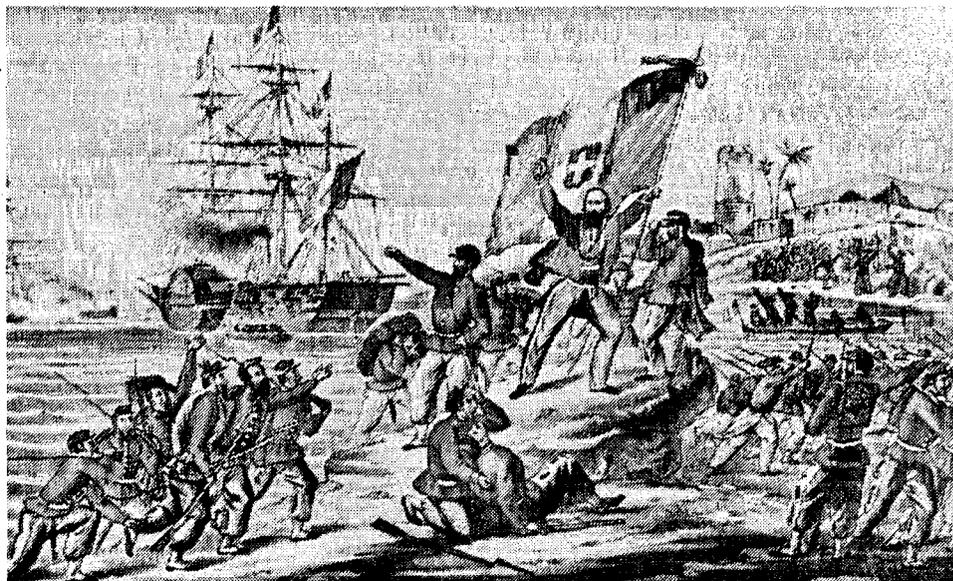
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Garibaldi's insurgents land in Sicily in 1860, overthrowing local Bourbon monarchy and launching campaign for unification of Italy. Italian national revolutionaries, soon disillusioned with the conservative unified bourgeois state, became the first adherents of Bakuninism.

Collection Bertarelli, Milano



modern independent nation-states favorable to economic development. They distinguished between “revolutionary-democratic” and “reactionary” nations on the basis of whether their national struggle contributed to the European revolutions or impeded it. Like Bakunin, Marx and Engels were adamantly committed to an independent Poland, since the partition of Poland was the cement that bound together the reactionary Holy Alliance of Prussia, Austria-Hungary and Russia. But they believed that the Western Slavs (Czechs and Croats) were incapable of an independent national existence and would over time assimilate into the larger German and Hungarian nations.

A later Marxist historian who is highly critical of Engels' views on the Slavic question, Roman Rosdolsky, noted, however, that Marx and Engels were right in assessing the forces in the struggles in 1848-49, commenting that the role played by the “old civilized nations” (Germans, Hungarians and Poles) was “*revolutionary* wholly and overall, while the struggle which the Slavs waged against them benefitted the *counterrevolution*” (*Friedrich Engels und das Problem der geschichtslosen Völker*, 1981). Bakunin's hopes for the oppressed Slavic peoples to play a revolutionary role in 1848 were dashed. The Slav Congress which met in Prague in June of that year was split between a radical wing which looked toward joint action with democratic movements in Germany and Hungary and a right wing which sought “autonomy” for the Slav regions within the framework of the Habsburg monarchy. The Sabor (Diet) of the Southern Slavs meeting at the same time in Zagreb was firmly dominated by the right wing which expressed loyalty to the Habsburgs and pledged to remain within the Austrian Empire; only a small minority sought to link their national struggle to the revolutionary struggle against the feudal monarchist regimes.

Although the *Communist Manifesto* anticipated the struggle for power of the proletariat as a class for itself as the only road to the liberation of humanity from exploitation and oppression, Marx and Engels still looked toward the democratic bourgeoisie to play a revolutionary role in bringing economic development to the more backward regions, including by military conquest, as Napoleon's

armies had once combatted reactionary and clericalist forces in the areas they occupied. The Revolutions of 1848 demonstrated to Marx and Engels that the bourgeoisie—already fearful of the aroused plebeian masses—would no longer stand on a democratic program of “liberty, equality, fraternity.” The defeat of these revolutions thus conditioned Marx and Engels' evolving views on the national question. The prospect of assimilating small nationalities such as the Czechs and Croats in the context of a European-wide social revolution had been removed from the historical agenda.

Over the next decades, Marx and Engels recognized that the conquest and incorporation of more backward regions by more advanced capitalist states would only perpetuate the enslavement of these oppressed peoples as well as of the proletariat of the oppressor nations. In a 10 December 1869 letter to Engels, Marx argued for Irish independence from England and pointed out:

“It is in the direct and absolute interest of the English working class to get rid of their present connection with Ireland.... The English working class will never accomplish anything before it has got rid of Ireland.... The English reaction in England had its roots (as in Cromwell's time) in the subjugation of Ireland.”

Bakunin's Confession to the Tsar

The counterrevolution which swept across Central Europe in mid-1849 found Bakunin in the eastern German state of Saxony. Like Engels in the Rhineland and Baden, he chose to engage in a rearguard action—an uprising in the city of Dresden—against overwhelming military odds. Unlike Engels, Bakunin did not escape safely into exile. He was captured by the Saxon authorities, who turned him over to the Austrians, who after a few years turned him over to the Russians.

Shortly after he was imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress in St. Petersburg in 1851, a senior police official urged Bakunin to confess his crimes to the tsar as if to his “spiritual father.” Amazingly, Bakunin did so:

“My confession to you, as my sovereign, would consist of the following words: Sire! I am entirely guilty before Your Imperial Majesty and before the laws of the fatherland....

“Yes, Sire, I shall confess to you as to a spiritual father from whom a man expects forgiveness, not here but for the other world; and I pray God that He inspire in me words that are

simple, sincere, heartfelt, without contrivance or adulation; in a word, worthy of finding access to the heart of Your Imperial Majesty.”

—*The Confession of Mikhail Bakunin* (1977)

From the Decembrists of the 1820s to the populists of the 1870s to the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries of the early 20th century, thousands of Russian revolutionaries had faced execution, imprisonment and hard labor in Siberia. Yet with the sole exception of Bakunin, no prominent Russian revolutionary ever addressed an abject personal appeal to the tsar.

But it would be wrong to regard Bakunin’s confession as a repudiation of his views or even a hypocritical ploy to secure his freedom or get his sentence commuted to banishment to Siberia. The main theme of this lengthy document is to win Nicholas I to the cause of revolutionary pan-Slavism. In particular, Bakunin appeals to anti-German sentiment supposedly shared by all true Slavs:

“Hatred for the Germans is the primary basis of Slav unity and mutual understanding among the Slavs. It is so strong, so deeply engraved in the heart of every Slav, that I am even now convinced, Sire, that sooner or later, in some way or another, no matter how political relationships in Europe are defined, the Slavs will throw off the German yoke, and the time will come when there will be no Prussian or Austrian or Turkish Slavs....

“You, Sire, know how deep and powerful are the sympathies of the Slavs toward the mighty Russian Tsardom upon whose support and assistance they have relied, and to what extent the Austrian government and the Germans in general have feared and do fear Russian Pan-Slavism!”

The basic program put forward in the “Confession”—a federation of free Slavic peoples—is thus the same as that of the 1848 *Appeal*, only now to be achieved with the aid of the tsarist autocracy rather than by its overthrow.

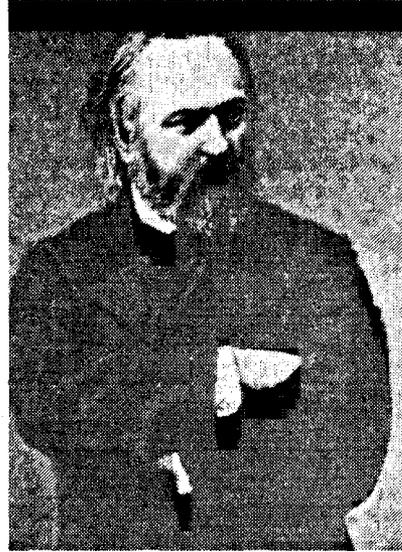
The “Confession” should not be dismissed as the aberrant act of a desperate man having no relationship to Bakuninist anarchism as a doctrine or a movement. As we have seen, a central premise of anarchism was that there existed a *universal morality* transcending class divisions and conflict. From Bakunin’s standpoint, it was just as possible to win the Tsar of all the Russias to a program of national and social liberation as to win an intellectually inclined nobleman, a worker or a peasant. And, in fact, a decade after writing his “Confession,” when he had escaped from Russia and was safely domiciled in London, Bakunin *again appealed to the Tsar* to lead the Slavic national liberation movement! In an 1862 pamphlet, *The People’s Cause: Romanov, Pugachev, or Pestel*, he stated:

“We should most gladly of all follow Romanov, if Romanov could and would transform himself from a Petersburg Emperor into a National Tsar.... We would follow him because he *alone* could carry out and complete a great, peaceful revolution without shedding one drop of Russian or Slav blood.” [emphasis in original]

While Nicholas I judged Bakunin’s “Confession” to be a “very curious and instructive” document, he decided to keep its author in the harsh confines of the Peter and Paul Fortress. It was not until 1857 that Bakunin, largely through the intervention of his family, was released from prison and banished to Siberia. A few years later he escaped from there, made his way across the Pacific and ended up in London, where he became part of Alexander Herzen’s circle. At that time Bakunin’s politics were still a leftist—but virulently anti-German—version of pan-Slavic nationalism. In a letter to his sister-in-law in 1862, he wrote: “I am busy

solely with the Polish, the Russian, and the pan-Slav cause, and am preaching, systematically and with fervent conviction, hatred of the Germans” (quoted in E. H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin* [1937]).

Bakunin’s career as a left pan-Slavic nationalist came to an end with the defeat of the Polish national uprising against the tsarist autocracy in 1863. He tried to reach Poland so he could personally join in the fighting but ended up stranded in Sweden. He and Herzen put out literature calling on Russian



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Alexander Herzen, Bakunin’s close colleague, was the founder of Russian populism, a doctrine of peasant-based socialism.

democrats to support the Poles and appealing to Russian soldiers not to fire on their Polish brothers. At the same time, Bakunin was highly critical of the aristocratic leaders of the Polish rebellion for opposing an agrarian revolution. His disillusionment with Polish nationalism led him to abandon pan-Slavism as well. So Bakunin turned to greener pastures and accordingly devised a new political doctrine.

Birth of the Anarchist Movement

In 1864, Bakunin went to Italy where he became part of the circle around Princess Zoe Obolonsky, a wealthy Russian noblewoman who supported radical causes. It was through the largesse of this Russian princess that Bakunin was able to form his first secret society. Its initial recruits were mainly declassed intellectuals who had been involved in the Italian nationalist movement but had become disillusioned with the conservative, unified Italian bourgeois state arising from the Risorgimento. When Princess Obolonsky moved to Switzerland a few years later, Bakunin followed his patroness there, and he would remain in the Alpine republic, with occasional forays abroad, until his death in 1876.

It was during his Italian sojourn that Bakuninist anarchism originated both as a doctrine and movement. In calling for a revolution in the name of anarchism, Bakunin looked to the *same social strata*—only now located in southern Europe—to which he had previously appealed in the name of democratic pan-Slavism: declassed intellectuals like himself, impoverished artisans and other urban plebeian elements, poor peasants and rural laborers. The 1866 *Revolutionary Catechism*, written for the International Brotherhood, is a clear and cogent statement of Bakunin’s program. His subsequent writings are in large measure an elaboration and

defense of the positions outlined in this seminal document. The *Catechism* asserts what would become the basic negative principle of anarchism: "the radical dissolution of the centralized, aggressive, authoritarian State, including its military, bureaucratic, governmental, administrative, judicial, and legislative institutions" (reproduced in Dolgoff, *Bakunin on Anarchy*). This document also states the basic positive element of the anarchist program: "The *internal reorganization* of each country on the basis of the *absolute freedom of individuals, of the productive associations, and of the communes*" (emphasis in original). These autonomous communes would freely federate into autonomous provinces which, in turn, would freely federate into autonomous nations.

The society projected by Bakunin is in many ways an attractive one. Unlike the reactionary bigot Proudhon, Bakunin's views on social questions were genuinely libertarian (except for a strong dose of anti-Semitism). He was a believer in sexual freedom and equality: "Religious and civil marriage to be replaced by free marriage. Adult men and women have the right to unite and separate as they please, nor has society the right to hinder their union or to force them to maintain it." Bakunin also supported the rights of children against tyrannical and abusive parents, an unusually progressive attitude at the time. As for the aged: "The old, sick, and infirm will enjoy all political and social rights and be bountifully supported at the expense of society." At the end of the day, the communist and anarchist visions of what constitutes a good society converge. The difference—and it is *the* difference—is how to get there.

A careful and critical reading of the *Revolutionary Catechism* in this regard reveals obvious contradictions. Bakunin, whose own nature was highly combative, was not so naive as to think that relations between provinces and nations would always be free of conflict. He therefore projected an international tribunal with considerable powers:

"The International Tribunal shall have no other function than to settle, without appeal, all disputes between nations and their respective provinces....

"No federated nation shall make war against another federated country. If there is war and the International Tribunal has pronounced its decision, the aggressor must submit. If this doesn't occur, the other federated nations will sever relations with it and, in case of attack by the aggressor, unite to repel invasion."

An international body which has the power to sanction military action against an "aggressor" nation is in fact a *global super-state*, whatever Bakunin chose to call it, which clearly would possess an organized military force to "repel invasion."

The fundamental contradiction in the *Revolutionary Catechism* and of Bakuninist anarchism in general is between its advocacy of economic equality on a worldwide scale and extreme political decentralization. Even in the 1860s, vast inequalities separated the different regions of Europe, not to speak of the rest of the world. Bakunin's program called for every commune to provide free education for all children. Very good. But how could the children of illiterate peasants in southern Italy or Spain receive the quality of education provided for the children of skilled craftsmen in the relatively prosperous cities of Switzerland or western Germany? Raising living standards in Spain to approach those of Switzerland would require a massive reallocation of world resources

toward the less developed countries, which is scarcely consistent with local autonomy and decentralization.

Obviously, some communes and provinces would have far higher living standards than others due to differences in natural resource endowment, industrial development, the cultural level of population, etc. Yet none of Bakunin's numerous writings on anarchist federalism addresses this question. How, for example, will the terms of trade be determined between communes, provinces and nations which export agricultural produce and those which export manufactured goods? Through market competition? Bakunin would have rejected this out of hand. By the decisions of an international tribunal? Then how would such decisions be enforced?

Had the question of overcoming economic inequalities between regions been posed to Bakunin and his followers like Kropotkin, they undoubtedly would have responded: the wealthier communes, provinces and nations will *voluntarily* share their resources with the poorer ones. "Man," prescribed Bakunin, "should wish the freedom, morality, and humanity of all men in the interest of his own humanity, his own morality, and his personal freedom" (*The Knouto-German Empire and the Social Revolution* [1871]). Despite the militant atheism of Bakunin, Kropotkin & Co., classical anarchism was at bottom a secular form of Christian millennialism. On the morrow of the revolution, mankind would undergo a moral regeneration and henceforth live according to the precept: love thy neighbor as thyself. This idealist vision underlay the political conflict between Bakuninist anarchism and the scientific socialism of Marx and Engels, which expresses the interests of the modern industrial proletariat.

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Part 3: The Fight in the First International

Mikhail Bakunin's precursor Proudhon and his successor Kropotkin were primarily theorists who sought to further the goals of anarchism through enlightening literature. Bakunin, however, was by temperament a political adventurer, whose activities therefore were often at variance with and sometimes in outright opposition to his avowed "anti-authoritarian" principles.

This is obviously so in the case of his secret societies. Here it should be emphasized that these "organizations" were to a large extent literally fantastic. Most of the legions of agents Bakunin claimed for the International Alliance of Socialist Democracy, the secret network he set up in the mid-1860s, existed only in his mind. But whether imaginary or semi-real, the declared purpose of these organizations was *the conspiratorial manipulation of the mass movement*. This is stated quite clearly in Bakunin's letter (July 1870) to his French follower Albert Richard:

"We must bring forth anarchy, and in the midst of the popular tempest, we must be the invisible pilots guiding the Revolution, not by any kind of overt power but the collective dictatorship of all our allies [members of the International Alliance], a dictatorship without tricks, without official titles, without official rights, and therefore all the more powerful, as it does not carry the trappings of power. This is the only dictatorship I will accept, but in order to act, it must first be created, it must be prepared and organized in advance, for it will not come into being by itself, neither by discussions, nor by theoretical disputations, nor by mass propaganda meetings...."

"If you will build this collective and invisible power you will triumph; the well-directed revolution will succeed. Otherwise, it will not!"

—reproduced in Sam Dolgoff, ed.,
Bakunin on Anarchy (1971)

It takes real *chutzpah* for present-day anarchists, who claim Bakunin as their forebear, to condemn the Leninist conception of a revolutionary vanguard party as elitist and anti-democratic. Unlike Bakunin's shadowy Alliance, the Bolshevik Party's program and aims were well-publicized and known to working people throughout the Russian empire. In addition to producing newspapers, journals and factory leaflets, and organizing study circles and workers'

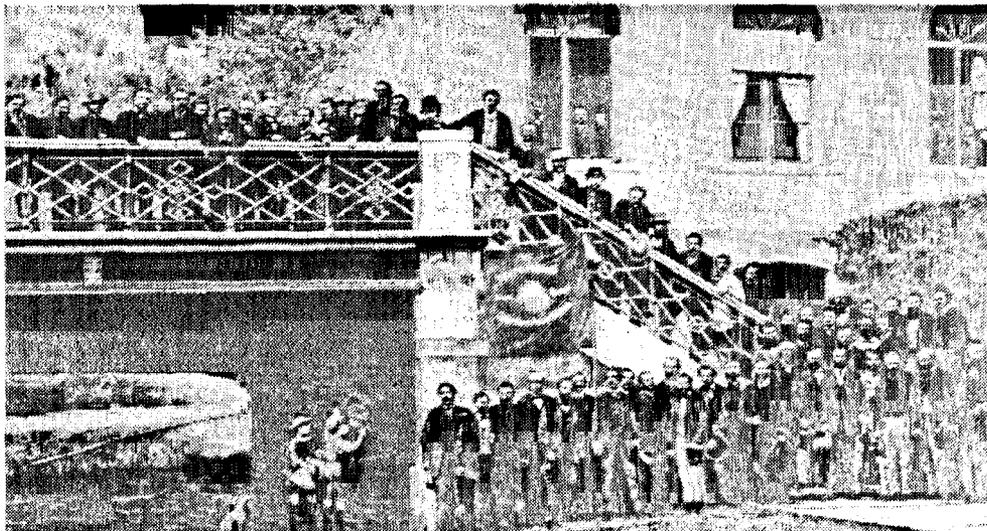
discussion clubs, the Bolsheviks used the electoral arena to propagandize for their revolutionary politics, running candidates for the tsarist Duma (parliament). The party was in form and practice internally democratic. On occasion, Lenin found himself in a minority on an important question in the Bolshevik Central Committee or at party congresses.

But Bakunin could never be outvoted in his various organizations since these had no rules and no policymaking bodies. Here is how the British historian E.H. Carr described the Alliance: "It had no list of members, no agreed rules or programme (since Bakunin's numerous drafts were all made on his own responsibility), no officers, no subscriptions, and no regular meetings" (*Michael Bakunin* [1937]). The contemporary American anarchist Sam Dolgoff concurs: "Bakunin's secret organizations were actually quite informal fraternities of loosely organized individuals and groups connected by personal contact and correspondence." This is a description of an organization *run by a clique* in which rank-and-file members have no means to determine its leadership and policies.

Bakunin Joins the First International

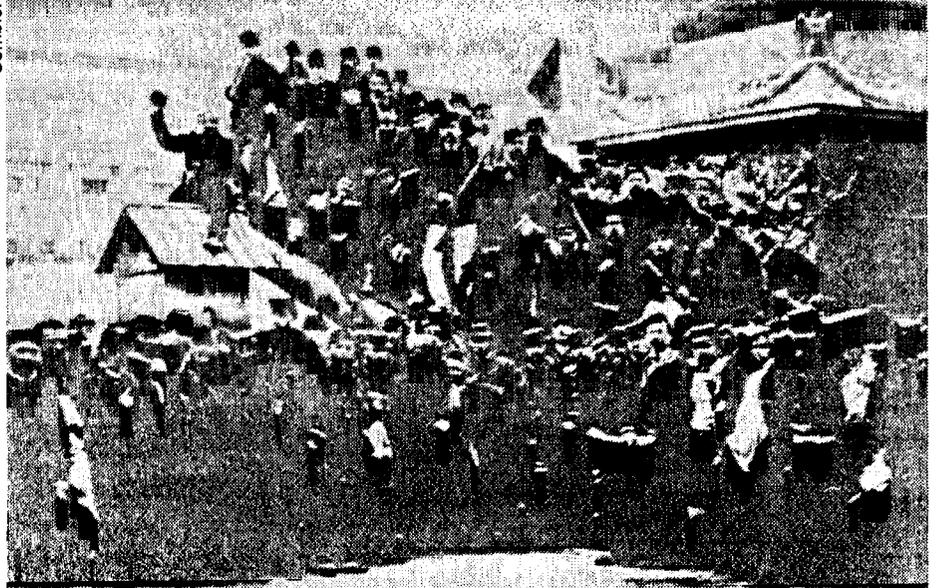
The current image of Bakunin is that of the wild radical of the European left of his day, who defied the bourgeois order and bourgeois respectability. The reality was very different. Bakunin's conversion from pan-Slav nationalism to anarchism in the mid-1860s did not immediately lessen his penchant for *class collaboration*. When the International Workingmen's Association (the First International) was formed in 1864, Marx personally invited Bakunin to participate. But the soon-to-be anarchist leader disdained to do so and instead involved himself in Italian petty-bourgeois nationalist circles.

When Bakunin, now an anarchist, returned to the Europe-wide political stage, he did so not in the workers movement but in the bourgeois liberal milieu. In 1867, he joined the Geneva-based League of Peace and Freedom. As the name connotes, this was a liberal pacifist organization launched by progressive bourgeois notables such as John Stuart Mill and



Political adventurer Mikhail Bakunin joined the First International at its 1868 Congress in Basel, Switzerland. In his previous 25 years as a self-styled revolutionary, Bakunin had never involved himself in the struggle of labor against capital.

March 1871 uprising of the Paris National Guard, largely composed of working men, ushered in the Paris Commune. Karl Marx hailed the Commune as first "working-class government."



John Bright in England, Victor Hugo in France and Giuseppe Garibaldi in Italy. Its immediate purpose was to head off the movement toward war between Louis Napoleon's France and Bismarck's Prussia. More generally, the League—which Marx derided as "peace windbags"—was an attempt by bourgeois liberals to counter the growing influence of the workers' International in the European left.

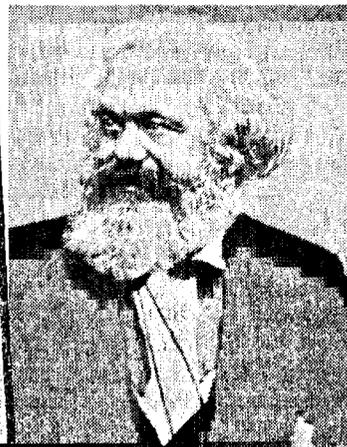
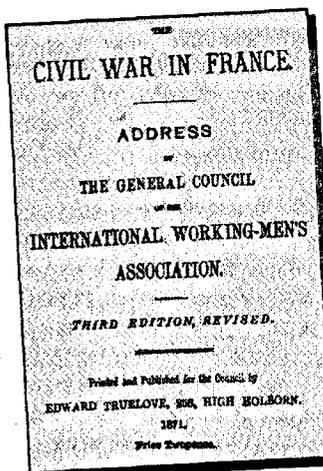
It is typical of Bakunin that having proclaimed as a paramount principle the "radical dissolution" of the state, he then turned around and joined an organization whose main programmatic demand was for a (bourgeois) United States of Europe! It was only when the liberal notables and literati of the League predictably rejected Bakunin's program of anarchist federalism that in 1868 he finally joined the International Workingmen's Association. Here it's worth pointing out that in his previous 25 years as a self-professed revolutionary, Bakunin had never been involved with the working class or expressed any particular concern for its struggle against capitalist exploitation.

From the outset Bakunin aimed to displace Marx as the leading figure in the International, but he proceeded with tactical caution. Writing to Alexander Herzen in 1869, he explained: "If I started an open war against Marx now, three quarters of the International would turn against me, and I should find myself slipping down an inclined plane" (quoted in Boris Nicolaievsky and Otto Mänchen-Helfen, *Karl Marx: Man and Fighter* [1936]). Yet just a few years later Bakunin was able to win enough support to disrupt the International.

To explain this development it is necessary to consider the International *before* Bakunin joined it. The International Workingmen's Association was launched by British trade-union leaders, centrally those of the London building trades, whose primary concern was to prevent their strikes from being broken by the importation of scabs or scab products from continental Europe. The British union leaders were not socialists in any sense but rather radical democrats who supported the bourgeois Liberal Party of William Gladstone and John Bright. They were also prepared to support not only economic struggles by workers in the continental Europe of Louis Napoleon and Bismarck but struggles for democratic rights such as freedom of the press and a sovereign parliament based on universal manhood suffrage.

Marx quickly became the preeminent figure in the London-based General Council of the International because he was able to define a *consensus* between the left-liberal British trade unionists and the various continental radicals—socialists, communists, French Proudhonists. The Provisional Rules of the International, written by Marx, simply stated its aims as "the protection, advancement, and complete emancipation of the working classes." How, concretely, the complete emancipation of the working classes was to be brought about was deliberately left an open question. After the demise of the International, Engels described its original character in a letter (12 September 1874) to his German-American colleague Friedrich Sorge:

"It belonged to the period of the Second Empire [of Louis Napoleon in France], when the oppression throughout Europe prescribed unity and abstention from all internal controversy for the workers' movement, then just reawakening. It was the moment when the common, cosmopolitan interests of the proletariat could come to the fore.... German communism did not



John Mayall

Karl Marx's impassioned defense of the Commune in *The Civil War in France* made him target of Europe-wide anti-communist witchhunt. In the aftermath of the Commune, the First International disintegrated into warring factions.

yet exist as a workers' party, Proudhonism was too weak to be able to insist on its own particular fads, Bakunin's new trash did not yet exist even in his own head, and even the leaders of the English *Trade-Unions* thought they could enter the movement on the basis of the programme laid down in the Preamble of the Rules."

These heterogeneous forces could work together under Marx's skillful guidance as long as the International's main activity involved support to local economic struggles, raising money for striking workers, organizing campaigns against scabbing, etc. But when the question of proletarian revolution was posed pointblank by the 1871 Paris Commune, the International disintegrated in a witches' sabbath of factional frenzy.

The Split in the International

The defeat of France at the hands of Bismarck's Prussia in 1870 led to the fall of Louis Napoleon and shattered the French army. As the Prussian army laid siege to Paris, the French ruling class moved to rebuild an effective state apparatus. Elections based on universal male suffrage resulted in a victory for the parties of the right due to their support by the peasantry, which was still under the influence of the local Catholic clergy. Paris, however, remained a stronghold of the left which was growing amid the economic dislocations and privations caused by the German siege. The principal military force in the French capital was the National Guard, largely composed of working men. Fearful of the radical Parisian masses, the new right-wing government of Adolphe Thiers established itself in the suburb of Versailles, just outside of Paris.

When Thiers ordered the National Guard to surrender its artillery to the regular army, the Guard insurrected and took over the city. Thus was born the Paris Commune of March-May 1871. Its leadership consisted of radical democrats (old-fashioned Jacobins), the followers of Auguste Blanqui (the Jacobin communist advocate of a dictatorship of a revolutionary minority drawn from plebeian elements), and the Proudhonists. These divisions within the Commune's

leadership along with the overriding task of military defense prevented the Communal government from undertaking the socialization of the city's economy. Nonetheless, Marx saw that the Commune was the first historical experience of the *political rule of the working class*: "It was essentially a working-class government, the product of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of Labour" (*The Civil War in France* [April-May 1871]).

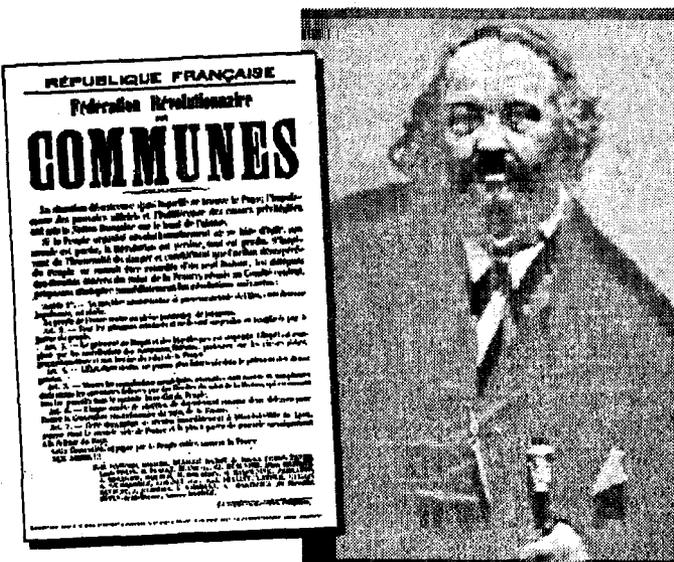
The French army's suppression of the Commune, massacring 20,000 people, was followed by a Europe-wide red scare and anti-communist witchhunt. Marx, whose impassioned defense of the Commune, *The Civil War in France*, was an official statement of the International, became the personal focus of the anti-communist frenzy. Hitherto Marx had been a relatively little-known figure outside of left-wing circles. But now he was denounced by government ministers and the bourgeois press as the "red terrorist Doctor," who supposedly commanded legions of fanatical revolutionaries from Madrid to St. Petersburg. As Marx wrote (18 June 1871) to his friend Ludwig Kugelmann: "It [*The Civil War in France*] is making the devil of a noise and I have the honour to be *at this moment the best calumniated and most menaced man of London*. That really does one good after a tedious twenty years' idyll in the backwoods" (emphasis in original).

However, Marx's newfound notoriety gravely weakened his position in the International. Two prominent British trade-union leaders resigned in protest against the General Council's defense of the Commune; several others quietly drifted out of the organization. Those British unionists who remained in the International distanced themselves from Marx by forming a separate English regional council independent of the General Council. A number of leading figures in the International who did solidarize with the Paris Commune, such as the eclectic Belgian socialist César de Paepe, nonetheless resented Marx's new public image as the supreme leader of the European left. Thus, Bakunin's campaign to weaken Marx's authority in the International received support from politically diverse forces extending well beyond his own anarchist followers.

The question remains: why did the decomposition of the First International coincide with the rapid growth of the anarchist movement, a movement which had scarcely existed a few years earlier? The answer lies on two levels: the uneven effect of industrialization on the different regions of Europe and the political climate in the immediate aftermath of the Paris Commune.

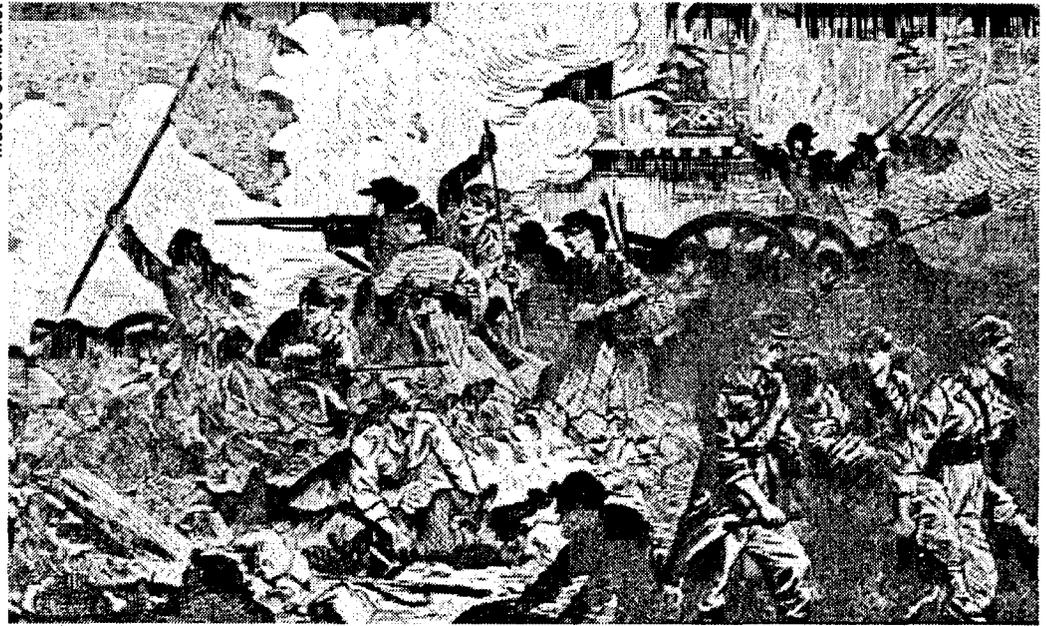
The split in the First International was marked by a clear geographical divide. Marx's main bases of support lay in the most developed capitalist countries—Britain, Germany and among German American immigrants in the United States. Bakunin's followers were concentrated in economically backward countries—Italy, Spain and the French-speaking regions of Switzerland.

Bakunin's vision of a social order based on autonomous communes had little attraction or even meaning for a London construction worker or a German immigrant working in a factory in New York City or Philadelphia. In Italy and Spain, however, the urban economy was still dominated by small-scale artisanal production, the very existence of which was threatened by the spread of industrialization. Bakunin's



Radio Times Hulton

Proclamation issued by Bakunin during an attempted coup in Lyon, France in October 1870, declaring state abolished. Rebellion was suppressed within hours.



Women Communards defend the Paris barricades in May 1871. Bourgeois government of Adolphe Thiers massacred 20,000 Parisians in crushing the "red Commune."

initial base of support in the International came from watchmakers in the Jura region of Switzerland. These skilled craftsmen, most of whom worked in their own homes, were facing an influx of cheap watches from British and American factories. For Swiss watchmakers in this period, the Bakuninist program of autonomous communes meant above all trade protectionism against industrial competition. A current student of the fight in the First International has emphasized that Bakuninism "spread, chiefly in those countries—Spain, southern Italy, parts of France and Switzerland—where large numbers of newly restive peasants, domestic workers and artisans, all of them threatened in various ways by what seemed to them to be the 'leap in the dark' of capitalism (which held out the certain prospect only of proletarianization), were gaining a new political voice" (Paul Thomas, *Karl Marx and the Anarchists* [1980]).

In his own way, Bakunin recognized that his anarchist program had little attraction for the industrial proletariat in the advanced capitalist countries, whom he disdained as bourgeoisified. After the collapse of the International, he wrote:

"Nowhere are there more favorable conditions for Social Revolution than in Italy. There does not exist in Italy, as in most other European countries, a special category of relatively affluent workers, earning higher wages, boasting of the literary capacities, and so impregnated by a variety of bourgeois prejudices that, excepting income, they differ in no way from the bourgeoisie."

—*Statism and Anarchy* (1873)

In addition to these basic socio-economic factors, the growth of anarchism was conditioned by the political climate prevailing in the aftermath of the Paris Commune. While Marx saw in the Commune a model for future social revolutions, he was under no illusion that the final battle between labor and capital was at hand. Indeed, the fate of the Commune had been sealed by its isolation. As the affronted reactionary government prepared to strangle the insurgent Parisian proletariat, an attempt in Marseilles to establish a "red commune" was quickly and easily smashed by Thiers. And the white terror following the suppression of the Paris Commune broke the power of the left in France for a decade. Furthermore, the Europe-wide anti-communist witchhunt seri-

ously weakened the left wing of the workers movement in Britain, then the dominant capitalist country in the world. Marx insisted that a socialist revolution anywhere in Europe would require *years of preparatory work*, building up mass trade unions and workers parties in the course of struggles for economic gains, social reforms and democratic rights.

Bakunin, by contrast, appealed to the *impatience* of many leftist radicals. With the fall of Louis Napoleon at the hands of the Prussian army in 1870, Bakunin staged an almost comical attempt at a coup in the city of Lyon, which was put down the same day. After the defeat of the Commune, he played on the desire within the left for vengeance against the bourgeoisie which had applauded the massacre of the Communards. Anarchist militants in Barcelona and Naples wanted to emulate the Paris Commune or at least give the propertied classes a good scare. The British social-democratic historian G.D.H. Cole described the mood of Bakunin's following:

"It now became for them a matter not of a general European revolution but of seizing every opportunity that occurred anywhere for revolutionary action, almost regardless of the prospects of success—for they held to the idea that every rising was part of a process of revolutionary education of the masses and was accordingly a step toward the desired end of utterly uprooting the existing social structure."

—*Socialist Thought: Marxism and Anarchism 1850-1890* (1954)

Marx's Answer to the Bakuninists

The fight between Marx and Bakunin was *not*, however, posed in terms of having the International adopt the principles and program of scientific socialism or, alternatively, of anarchism. Both protagonists maintained that the International should continue to be a broad, inclusive body open to all class-conscious workers whether English left-liberals, German communists or Italian anarchists. Hence the fight was conducted on narrow organizational grounds which only tangentially touched on the basic differences between Marxism and anarchism.

Marx held no official position in the International other than that of corresponding secretary for Germany. His

authority rested on his de facto leadership of the General Council which issued the International's policy statements and programmatic documents, recognized new sections, adjudicated disputes between and sometimes within sections, etc. The Bakuninists therefore concentrated their efforts on stripping the General Council of its powers, reducing it to a "simple office for correspondence and statistics."

By way of theoretical justification, they held that the structure of the International should prefigure that of the anarchist society of the future. Just as such a society would be a free federation of autonomous communes without any central government, so the International should be a free federation of autonomous sections with no central leading body. The main Bakuninist factional statement, the *Sonvillers Circular* (November 1871), argued:

"How can you expect an egalitarian and a free society to emerge from an authoritarian organization? It is impossible. The International, embryo of future human society, must be from this moment the faithful image of our principles of liberty and federation, and reject from its midst any principle leading to authority and dictatorship."

—quoted in James Joll, *The Anarchists* (1964)

This is a concept of social organization corresponding to a petty bourgeoisie of property owners and would-be property owners, even where disguised under the watchwords of cooperativism and collectivism.

Marx and Engels responded that the purpose of the International was to bring about the overthrow of the existing bourgeois order. Such a *combat organization of the working class* must necessarily have a different internal structure and character than a future classless and stateless society in which social relations are harmonious. They pointed out that the Paris Commune, which the anarchists, too, held up as a model for social revolution, was *highly militarized* in order to defend itself against the hostile bourgeois government in Versailles. But in the future society envisioned by both communists and anarchists, there would be no armed forces, no police, no bodies of organized violence of any kind. Marx and Engels regarded anarchy, i.e., the disappearance of the state, as an end goal of the communist movement but certainly not a means of getting there:

"All socialists see anarchy as the following programme: once the aim of the proletarian movement, i.e., abolition of classes, is attained, the power of the State, which serves to keep the great majority of producers in bondage to a very small exploiter minority, disappears, and the functions of government become simple administrative functions. The [Bakuninist] Alliance reverses the whole process. It proclaims anarchy in the proletarian ranks as the most infallible means of breaking the powerful concentration of social and political forces in the hands of the exploiters. Under this pretext, it asks the International, at a time when the old world is seeking a way of crushing it, to replace its organization with anarchy."

—*Fictitious Splits in the International* (March 1872)

The showdown between Marx's supporters and the anarchists took place at the International congress held in the fall of 1872 in The Hague, capital of the Netherlands (see Hans Gerth, ed., *The First International Minutes of the Hague Congress of 1872 with Related Documents* [University of Wisconsin Press, 1958]). Of the six days allotted for this gathering, three were spent resolving disputes over the delegates' credentials. This alone indicates an organization in an advanced state of disintegration. Marx had a working majority at this congress in large part due to the support of the French Blanquists who were in exile in London. While

Bakunin was expelled from the International for financial chicanery, Marx recognized that the organization was no longer viable and had, in fact, played out its historic role. In a surprise move at the end of the congress, Engels proposed that the seat of the General Council be transferred from London to New York City. With many anarchists voting in favor, the motion carried, signaling the self-dissolution of the International Workingmen's Association as an umbrella organization for working-class militants and leftist intellectuals.

Marx vs. Bakunin on Post-Revolutionary Society

It was paradoxical but understandable that the most serious polemical exchange between Bakunin and Marx on the organization of post-revolutionary society took place after the collapse of the International rather than during their fight for its leadership. In 1873, Bakunin wrote, in Russian, a major work, *Statism and Anarchy*, which contained a section attacking Marx's concept of the proletarian dictatorship. A few years later, in the course of teaching himself Russian, Marx read this book and wrote extensive notes on it. These notes both defend his own conceptions against Bakunin's confused criticisms and indicate the basic fallacy of the anarchist worldview.

Bakunin and Marx posed the fundamental difference between them in a different way. The former concentrated his fire on the concept of a workers state or revolutionary dictatorship, which he regarded as but a cover for the Marxists' lust for political power. "The leaders of the Communist party, meaning Mr. Marx and his friends," he asserted, "will concentrate all administrative power in their own strong hands." Marx pointed out that underlying the differences with the anarchists over the question of political and military power in the post-revolutionary situation was Bakunin's *idealist* conception of social change. This was expressed in Bakunin's notion that any and every exploited class could effect a socialist revolution and that a classless and stateless society could be established under any, even the most primitive, economic conditions. Marx wrote:

"A radical social revolution is bound up with definite historical conditions of economic development; these are its premisses. It is only possible, therefore, where alongside capitalist production the industrial proletariat accounts for at least a significant portion of the mass of the people.... He [Bakunin] understands absolutely nothing of social revolution, only its political rhetoric; its economic conditions simply do not exist for him. Now since all previous economic formations, whether developed or undeveloped, have entailed the enslavement of the worker (whether as wage labourer, peasant, etc.), he imagines that *radical revolution* is equally possible in all these formations. What is more, he wants the European social revolution, whose economic basis is capitalist production, to be carried out on the level of the Russian or Slav agricultural and pastoral peoples.... *Willpower*, not economic conditions, is the basis of his social revolution." [emphasis in original]

—"Notes on Bakunin's *Statism and Anarchy*"
(February 1877)

Bakunin's argument against the proletarian dictatorship is basically a version of the old liberal canard that power corrupts:

"What does it mean that the proletariat will be elevated to a ruling class? Is it possible for the whole proletariat to stand at the head of the government? There are forty million Germans. Can all forty million be members of the government? In such a case, 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...."

“Ultimately, from whatever point of view we look at this question, we come always to the same sad conclusion, the rule of the great masses of the people by a privileged minority. The Marxists say that this minority will consist of workers. Yes, possibly of former workers, who, as soon as they become the rulers or the representatives of the people, will cease to be workers and will look down on the plain working masses from the governing heights of the State; they will no longer represent the people, but only themselves and their claims to rulership over the people. Those who doubt this know very little about human nature.

“These elected representatives, say the Marxists, will be dedicated and learned socialists. The expressions ‘learned socialist,’ ‘scientific socialism,’ etc., which continuously appear in the speeches of the followers of Lassalle and Marx, prove that the pseudo-*People’s State* will be nothing but a despotic control of the populace by a new and not at all numerous aristocracy of real and pseudoscientists.”

—*Statism and Anarchy*

Engels, writing to the German workers leader August Bebel in March 1875, repudiated any notion that he and Marx stood for a “people’s state.” In this letter, which preceded Marx’s famous “Critique of the Gotha Program,” Engels wrote:

“The ‘*people’s state*’ has been flung in our teeth *ad nauseam* by the anarchists, although Marx’s anti-Proudhon piece and after it the *Communist Manifesto* declare outright that, with the introduction of the socialist order of society, the state will dissolve of itself and disappear. Now, since the state is merely a transitional institution of which use is made in the struggle, in the revolution, to keep down one’s enemies by force, it is utter nonsense to speak of a free people’s state; so long as the proletariat still *makes use* of the state, it makes use of it, not for the purpose of freedom, but of keeping down its enemies and, as soon as there can be any question of freedom, the state as such ceases to exist.”

Engels further maintained that “the Commune...had ceased to be a state in the true sense of the term.” As Lenin later elaborated in his fundamental work, *The State and Revolution* (1917): “The Commune *was ceasing* to be a state since it had to suppress, not the majority of the population, but a minority (the exploiters). It had smashed the bourgeois state machine. In place of a *special* coercive force the population itself came on the scene.”

To Bakunin’s rhetorical question about the entire proletariat standing at the head of the government, Marx responded:

“In a Trades Union, for example, does the entire union form its executive committee?” Marx saw the trade-union movement within capitalist society as prefiguring in important respects the future workers state. Many decades later, Trotsky would describe Stalin’s Russia as analogous to a highly bureaucratized trade union with state power. Bakunin’s arguments against a workers state could logically be applied against trade unions as well. If the elected officials of a workers government, even if themselves former workers, must inevitably become corrupt and despotic, why would this not also be true of the elected officials of the trade unions? Here one should recall that the original theorist of anarchism, Joseph-Pierre Proudhon, was *against* trade unions.

Anarchism and Stalinism

Given the experience of Stalinism in the former Soviet Union and also in “Communist” China, leftist youth reading the Bakunin/Marx exchange today might well conclude that Bakunin, whatever his other failings, was more prescient than Marx about the danger of bureaucracy in post-revolutionary societies. However, such a way of approaching the question is liberal idealism, and totally ahistorical. The rise and consolidation of a privileged bureaucracy in post-revolutionary Russia was the direct reflection of the ebbing of the world revolutionary tide and expressed itself in the Stalinists’ anti-Bolshevik program of coexistence on the international plane with the reactionary old order. Analogously for a trade union, it is not the *union’s* power which promotes corrupt bureaucratism, but the pressure of the powerful capitalist ruling class and its state.

Marx assumed that socialist revolutions would first take place in the advanced capitalist countries of West Europe—Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Holland. The resulting workers states would perforce not have to organize militarily and economically to defend themselves against hostile and more powerful capitalist states. And more fundamentally, socialist governments in West Europe could rapidly increase the level of economic productivity through the rational application of the most advanced available technology.

But the course of history didn’t conform to these projections. Instead, proletarian revolution occurred first not in the most advanced capitalist countries but in what Lenin called the “weakest link” in the European imperialist system. By the beginning of the 20th century, a significant industrial proletariat had developed in tsarist Russia alongside the huge, backward peasant sector still subject to feudal-derived forms of exploitation. This combined and uneven development was a key reason why proletarian revolution—the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917—succeeded in Russia.

However, Lenin, Trotsky and the other Bolshevik leaders sought to spread the Russian October on a world scale, recognizing that this alone would provide the economic resources for the socialist transformation of Russia. In November 1917, Nikolai Bukharin, one of the leading Bolshevik theorists, wrote: “The victory of the Western proletariat will make it possible to heal in a planned way the economic wounds of Russia with highly developed West European techniques. The economic backwardness of Russia will be offset by the high technical level of Europe” (quoted in C. Abramsky, ed., *Essays in Honour of E. H. Carr* [1974]).

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How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled



For Socialist Revolution to Sweep Away Yeltsin Counterrevolution!

hostile and more economically advanced capitalist states—*confirmed* the basic premises of historical materialism. As early as 1920, Lenin warned that the new Communist officials were being contaminated by the values and attitudes of the old tsarist officials. And in the mid-1920s, Leon Trotsky declared political war on the bureaucratization of the Communist Party and Soviet government whose supreme leader would be J. V. Stalin.

Anarchism and Stalinism are conventionally viewed as representing the extreme opposite poles of the left. Yet the basic premises of Bakuninist anarchism are similar to that of the Stalinist dogma of “socialism in one country” and especially to the Maoist notion of peasant-based socialism. Bakunin located the vanguard of the social revolution in the most backward countries of southern and eastern Europe, such as Italy and Russia, where in the 1860s-1870s the industrial proletariat scarcely existed at all. “If the workers of the West delay too long,” he declaimed in 1869, “it will be the Russian peasant who will set them an example” (quoted in Joll, *The Anarchists*).

It is no wonder that Bakunin is hailed by contemporary anarchists like the American historian Paul Avrich as a “prophet” of the Maoist and Guevarist conception of an “alliance of estranged intellectuals with the dispossessed masses in guerrilla-style warfare” (preface to *Bakunin on Anarchy*). This peasant-based guerrillaism led at best to the creation of bureaucratically deformed workers states in economically isolated and backward countries like China, Vietnam and Cuba.

It is true that Bakunin—never prone to theoretical consistency—also argued in the 1866 *Revolutionary Catechism* that an isolated social revolution in a single country could not succeed in the face of “the world counterrevolution and the conspiracy of kings, clergy, nobility, and the bourgeoisie, based on enormous budgets, on permanent armies.” Characteristically, Bakunin’s argument at the time for world revolution is based on *military, not economic* grounds. But Stalin,

too, maintained that only imperialist military intervention could prevent Soviet Russia from building “socialism” with its own self-sufficient resources.

Against this, Trotsky wrote: “To the extent that productivity of labor and the productivity of a social system as a whole are measured on the market by the correlation of prices, it is not so much military intervention as the intervention of cheaper capitalist commodities that constitutes perhaps the greatest immediate menace to Soviet economy” (*The Third International After Lenin* [1928]). The central theme of Marx’s polemic against Bakuninist anarchism in the 1870s and of Trotsky’s opposition to Stalinist doctrine of “socialism in one country” is the same: the establishment of a classless and stateless society in which all members can freely develop their full potential must be based on a level of economic productivity far higher than even the most advanced capitalism.

Both Bakunin and Stalin divorced socialist consciousness from the overcoming of economic scarcity. “The Russian people,” according to the author of *Statism and Anarchy*, “are socialist by instinct and revolutionary by nature.” During the 1930s, the Stalin regime proclaimed that a “new socialist man” had emerged in Soviet Russia, one who had overcome individualism and egoism and who totally identified with the collective well-being of the working people.

In pointing to the important elements in common to anarchism and Stalinism as ideologies, we of course also recognize the fundamental difference between Bakunin and Stalin as historical figures. Stalin was a psychopathic mass murderer who served the interests of a parasitic, corrupt, cynical and fundamentally conservative bureaucratic caste sitting atop and strangling a workers state. Mikhail Bakunin, with all his faults, genuinely aspired to an egalitarian and humane society whose members would live free and productive lives. Nonetheless, the “triumph of the will” idealism which lies at the core of the anarchist outlook is also a key component of Stalinist bureaucratic commandism.

Part 4: Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Pre-World War I Era

Both the Marxist and anarchist movements originated in the mid-19th century when the emergence of industrial capitalism was radically altering the social, economic, political and national structure of continental Europe. The overwhelming majority of wage laborers were still artisans working in small shops, many with realistic aspirations to become petty proprietors. The five French representatives to the founding conference of the International Workingmen’s Association (First International) in 1864 were a cabinet maker, a bookbinder, an engraver, a maker of musical instruments and a machinist in a lace factory.

At the political level, the new bourgeois order in much of Europe was still encrusted in monarchical regimes derived from the feudal past. Bakunin’s first anarchist followers were former Italian radical nationalists who had recently fought arms in hand against Habsburg Austria and the local Italian principalities such as the Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. When a Marxist-led workers party was first formed in Germany in the late 1860s, King (soon to be Kaiser) Wilhelm I and his minister Otto von Bismarck ruled the coun-

try with an iron hand. Wilhelm Liebknecht, August Bebel and

their comrades did not know from one day to the next whether they would be thrown into prison.

Over the next decades industrial capitalism, propelled by its enormous leap in productivity, spread throughout West and Central Europe. Cities like Berlin, Vienna and Milan, which had numbered fewer than 100,000 inhabitants during the Revolutions of 1848, grew into large metropolises with extensive working-class districts. A rapidly growing factory proletariat became the social basis for mass trade unions and workers parties. Parliamentary bodies with large socialist fractions claiming to speak for the working class became a key element in the European bourgeois political order. These developments necessarily had a profound effect on *both* the Marxist and anarchist movements. What scientific socialism and anarchism meant to leftist militants in the period of the First International (1864-72) was quite different from the way these terms would come to be understood by the time of the Second International (1889-1914).

Anarchism originated in Latin Europe as a radical protest

movement of impoverished artisans and downtrodden rural laborers (the latter in southern Italy and Spain) against the devastating effects of nascent industrial capitalism on these social classes. However, with the development of a large factory proletariat in this region, a section of the anarchist movement and various dissident socialists developed a distinct political doctrine and movement called syndicalism. By the turn of the century, syndicalism had become the dominant current in the trade-union movement in France and Spain and an important tendency in the Italian trade unions. An indigenous American version of syndicalism, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), also emerged in the decade before the First World War.

The 1906 Charter of Amiens of the French *Confédération Générale du Travail* (General Confederation of Labor—CGT), which was regarded as a basic declaration of syndicalist principles, stated: “The trade union, which is today a fighting organization, will in the future be an organization for production and distribution, and the basis of social reorganization.” The latter-day British anarchist George Woodcock defined the syndicalist program as “the industrial manifestation of anarchism,” ascribing to economic collectives the role in future society which Proudhon had attributed to individual producers (or cooperatives) and Bakunin to autonomous communes:

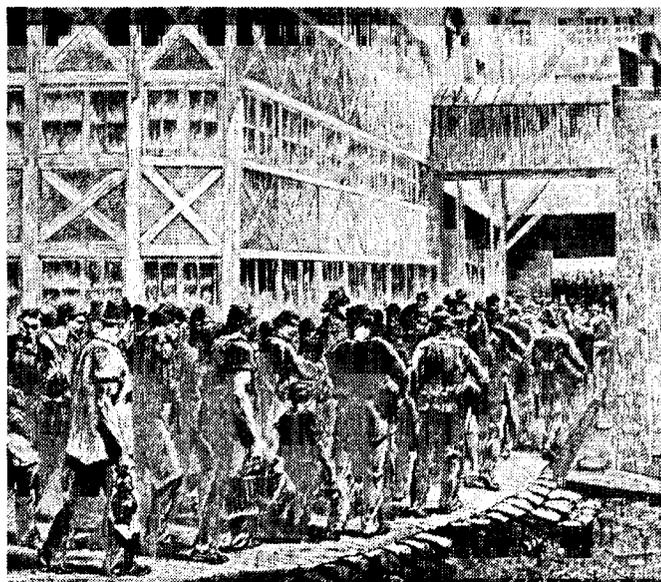
“The syndicate, on the other hand, is based on the organization of the workers by industry at the place of work. The workers of each factory or depot or farm are an autonomous unit, who govern their own affairs and who make all the decisions as to the work they will do. These units are joined federally in a syndicate which serves to coordinate the actions of the workers in each industry. The federal organization has no authority over the workers in any branch, and cannot impose a veto on action like a trade union executive.”

—George Woodcock, *Railways and Society* (1943),
 excerpted in Woodcock, ed., *The Anarchist Reader*
 (1977)

The doctrine and movement expressed in the French CGT’s Charter of Amiens is often called “anarcho-syndicalism” in both leftist and bourgeois literature. This term has validity in the sense that syndicalism was influenced by the anarchist movement and shared a number of its basic ideological premises. Many, though by no means all, syndicalists considered themselves anarchists. Nonetheless, anarchism and syndicalism were different and, to a certain degree, *rival* movements. Errico Malatesta, one of the original Italian Bakuninists, saw “syndicalism becoming a new doctrine” and “threatening the very existence of anarchism.” From the other side, Pierre Monatte, a leading French syndicalist, commented sharply in 1907: “As to the anarchists, their revolutionism has taken superb retreat in the ivory tower of philosophic speculation.”

From Marx’s Communism to Kautsky’s Social Democracy

Just as the French CGT of Monatte and Léon Jouhaux was very different from Bakunin’s International Alliance for Socialist Democracy, so the German Social Democracy of Bebel and Karl Kautsky in the early years of this century was very different from the movement inspired and led by Marx and Engels in the 1870s. During Marx’s lifetime, no one identified him with parliamentary reformism. Becoming for the first time a well-known public figure in the aftermath of the 1871 Paris Commune, he was branded by European governments and the bourgeois press as the “red terrorist



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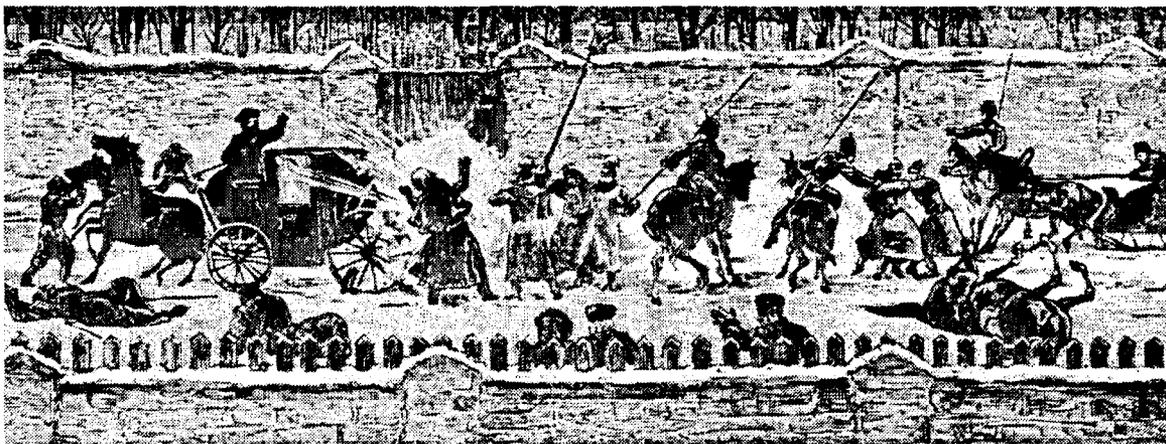
Workers leaving Paris factory, 1870. Rapid growth of industrial proletariat in late 19th century created social basis for mass Social Democratic and syndicalist movements in Europe.

Doctor.” But in opposition to the adventurism of Bakunin’s Italian and Spanish followers, Marx did insist that the working class had to *prepare* for a successful revolution through struggles for democratic rights, economic gains and social reforms.

As against the anarchists, Marx argued that, where possible, revolutionary socialists should utilize parliamentary elections and representation to agitate for their program. An excellent example of this was the conduct of Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel in the Reichstag of the North German Confederation during the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian War. They refused to vote for war credits and subsequently defended the Paris Commune and led the opposition to the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine by the newly formed German Second Reich. For their defiance of Kaiser Wilhelm’s state, the Marxist leaders of the nascent German workers movement were indicted and imprisoned for high treason.

As against the followers of Proudhon and Bakunin, Marx maintained that the workers movement should demand and support measures by capitalist governments beneficial to their interests, such as abolition of child labor. Marx and Engels never put forward the notion that *socialism* could be brought about through incremental reforms of the capitalist economy, and no one would have thought at the time of attributing such a conception to them. Of course, all kinds of positions were later put forward as “Marxism” by reformists habituated to the prosperity and apparent stability of West European bourgeois society.

In projecting a Europe-wide socialist revolution, Marx and Engels thought in terms of *years* not decades. For example, in the late 1870s the Russian autocracy was shaken by the emergence of a revolutionary populist movement mobilizing a large section of educated youth. There was a widespread expectation throughout Europe that Russia was on the verge of a radical democratic revolution, fueled by a mass peasant revolt, analogous to the Great French Revolution of 1789. Marx and Engels believed that the



Assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 by Russian populist Narodniks.

overthrow of tsarist autocracy—the gendarme of European reaction—could be the beginning of a Europe-wide socialist revolution. The 1882 preface to a new Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*—Marx and Engels’ last joint work before the former’s death the following year—stated that the Russian Revolution might become “the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West.”

However, the assassination of Tsar Alexander II by revolutionary populists in 1881 was followed by the reactionary restabilization of Russian absolutism for the rest of the decade. This in turn strengthened the bourgeois order in the Europe of the Second German Reich, Third French Republic and late Victorian England. Under these conditions, the prospect of proletarian revolution became increasingly abstract and projected ever further into the future for many socialists, including those who considered themselves adherents of Marxist doctrines.

This development was reflected by the change in the conventional designation of the Marxist movement from Communist to Social Democratic. Late 19th century Social Democracy was characterized by the concept of a *minimum* program of democratic rights and social and economic reforms sharply separated in time from the *maximum* program, i.e., the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system. The foremost exponent of this theoretical schema was Karl Kautsky, the recognized spokesman for “orthodox” Marxism following Engels’ death in 1895. As Trotsky later wrote in an obituary when Kautsky died in 1938:

“The revolutionary side of Marxism had changed into an indefinite, in any case, a distant perspective. The struggle for reforms and propaganda was on the order of the day. Kautsky occupied himself with commenting upon and justifying the policy of reform from the point of view of the revolutionary perspective. It was taken for granted that with the change of the objective conditions, Kautsky would know how to arm the party with other methods. That was not the case. The appearance of an epoch of great crises and of great shocks revealed the fundamentally reformist character of the [German] Social Democracy and of its theoretician Kautsky.”

—Leon Trotsky, “Karl Kautsky” in *Writings* (1938-39)

The terms of debate between anarchists and those claiming to stand in the Marxist tradition were quite different in the earlier period. Bakunin had denounced German Communists for aspiring to a revolutionary dictatorship; his successors denounced German Social Democrats for parliamentary reformism. The French revolutionary syndicalist Pierre Monatte dismissed the “orthodox” Marxist leader Jules Guesde (who was, ironically, a former Bakuninist) for

espousing a “revolutionism” that was “no more than verbal or, even worse, electoral and parliamentary.”

There was, however, an increasingly important exception to the identification of pre-1914 Social Democracy with parliamentary reformism: the Marxist movement in the Russian empire, including Poland. All Russian radicals—both populists and Marxists—recognized that the *overthrow of the tsarist autocracy* was a necessary precondition for democratic freedoms, representative government and social progress. The various populist and Marxist factions in the Russian empire differed sharply over the course of the coming revolution and what would happen afterward, but not that a revolution was coming.

The 1903 founding program of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party—supported by both future Bolsheviks and future Mensheviks—declared “as its immediate political task the overthrow of the tsarist autocracy and its replacement by a democratic republic.” Even more significantly, the Russian party was the *only Social Democratic party in the world* to incorporate the “dictatorship of the proletariat” into its official maximum program as necessary “to suppress any resistance on the part of the exploiters.” Thus, in the early years of the 20th century Marxism meant something quite different in Russia and Poland than in Germany or France.

A quarter century after Bakunin’s death in 1876, the movement he had launched was divided between anarchists and syndicalists. And the anarchists themselves were a heterogeneous lot, ranging from pure propagandists like Kropotkin to terrorist practitioners of the “propaganda of the deed.” At the same time, the “Marxist” Social Democratic parties were increasingly rent into right, center and left factions, with the revolutionary Marxists concentrated in the Russian empire and the Balkans. It would take an imperialist world war and a workers revolution in Russia to overcome false lines of division (and clarify real ones) in the left and proletarian movements internationally.

Kropotkin: A Left “Social Darwinist”

We have emphasized that the basic premise of classic anarchism was the supposed existence of a natural moral order prescribing social solidarity among all people. This concept found its purest expression in the writings of Peter Kropotkin, the foremost spokesman for anarchism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Kropotkin’s best-known work was titled *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, with the

first two chapters devoted to "Mutual Aid Among Animals."

Peter Kropotkin was born in 1842 into the upper level of the Russian aristocracy and as a youth was a member of the Corps of Pages directly attached to the tsar. This particular tsarist page was distinguished by his intellectual curiosity and social conscience. When, like all young Russian noblemen, he had to serve as a junior officer in the army, he chose an obscure Cossack regiment in Siberia far removed from the luxurious life of a courtier. The reports he wrote of his travels in this wild region were later published and secured for Kropotkin a scholarly reputation as an expert on the geography of eastern Siberia. Increasingly alienated from the social and political order of the Russian absolutist state, Kropotkin quit the army in his mid-20s and entered St. Petersburg University to study the sciences.

In 1872, Kropotkin visited West Europe for the first time and there encountered the Bakuninist movement in Switzerland. The disaffected young Russian nobleman was immediately won to anarchism, a cause and movement to which he would devote the rest of his life. To understand Kropotkin's anarchism, it is important to distinguish the Swiss Bakuninists, who influenced him, from the Italian and Spanish Bakuninists. The Swiss were educated, skilled craftsmen—mainly watchmakers—who thought the anarchist program offered a means of preserving the traditional artisan community against the predations of industrial capitalism. For them, social revolution was to be brought about primarily through enlightening propaganda. The Italian and Spanish Bakuninist movement consisted largely of declassed intellectuals, rural laborers and lumpen elements for whom anarchism meant insurrectionary violence against their hated rulers in the here and now.

When Kropotkin returned to Russia, he threw himself into the burgeoning revolutionary populist movement among the young intelligentsia. Like most of his comrades, he was imprisoned but two years later managed to escape abroad with the aid of friends in the upper echelons of the Russian bureaucracy. Kropotkin soon became a leading figure in the anarchist movement in Switzerland and France. As a result of his involvement in a militant strike of silk workers in Lyon, in the early 1880s the French government sentenced him to three years in prison.

Upon his release, Kropotkin—now in his mid-40s—settled in Britain where he would live for the next three decades, writing his major works on anarchism, most of them in English. Despite and partly because of his stature as the leading theoretician of anarchism, Kropotkin gained acceptance into "respectable" British intellectual circles. Thus, he contributed the section on anarchism for the 1910 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. He frequently attended meetings of the Royal Geographical Society where he conspicuously refused to rise and drink to the health of Queen Victoria. Yet Kropotkin's friendly relations with liberal British intellectuals would over time have an effect on the émigré Russian radical. With the outbreak of World War I, Kropotkin became an ardent champion of His Royal Majesty's government, and its ally tsarist Russia, against Germany.

Kropotkin's immersion in British bourgeois intellectual circles also shaped the development—or rather, evolution—of his own anarchist doctrines. The most "advanced," fashionable school of triumphalist bourgeois ideology in late Victorian England was Social Darwinism. T.H. Huxley,

Herbert Spencer and their reactionary cothinkers vulgarized and distorted Darwin's theory of evolution through natural selection to *justify* capitalist competition and imperialist conquest. The "survival of the fittest" was held up as the prime law of evolutionary progress whether among insects, rodents or the human inhabitants of contemporary Europe. The bankruptcy of small, family-owned businesses or farms was likened to the extinction of species of birds or mammals which had failed to adapt to a changing natural environment. For Huxley and Spencer, a worker who became a foreman—or especially a successful industrialist—was analogous to a strong male tiger besting a weaker rival in fighting to mate with a tigress.

Kropotkin accepted the basic premise of Social Darwinism but gave the doctrine a leftward twist. He, too, believed that human society was governed by immutable laws applicable to all living creatures and that all individual members of mankind should act to further the interests of the *homo sapiens* species. However, Kropotkin maintained that cooperation, not competition between individuals and groups, was the main mechanism for evolutionary progress. Whereas Huxley, Spencer & Co. argued that the lower classes had to accept their lot for the future progress of the human race, Kropotkin appealed to wealthy capitalists to make sacrifices for the general well-being.

In the early 1890s, Kropotkin wrote a series of polemical

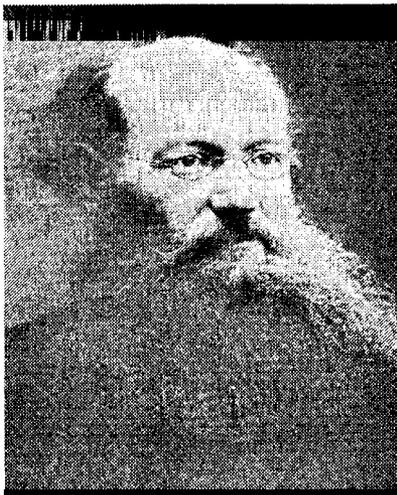


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Amsterdam Congress of the Second (Socialist) International, 1904, passed resolution condemning participation in bourgeois governments. But reformist currents exemplified by German Social Democrat Eduard Bernstein (right) continued to grow in influence.

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Peter Kropotkin, foremost anarchist spokesman and theoretician of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

articles against T.H. Huxley in a scientific journal, which were later published as the book *Mutual Aid* (1902), the main conclusion being:

"In the animal world we have seen that the vast majority of species live in societies, and that they find in association the best arms for the struggle for life: understood, of course, in its wide Darwinian sense—not as a struggle for the sheer means of existence, but as a struggle against all natural conditions unfavourable to the species. The animal species in which individual struggle has been reduced to its narrowest limits, and the practice of mutual aid has attained the greatest development are invariably the most numerous, the most prosperous and the most open to further progress....

"In the practice of mutual aid, which we can retrace to the earliest beginnings of evolution, we thus find the positive and undoubted origin of our ethical conceptions; and we can affirm that in the ethical progress of man, mutual support—not mutual struggle, has had the leading part. In its wide extension, even at the present time, we also see the best guarantee of a still loftier evolution of our race."

The views here expressed were by no means peculiar to Kropotkin but were a *central element* of anarchist doctrine at the time. Thus Errico Malatesta's 1891 pamphlet, *Anarchy*, written as a basic exposition of this social and political philosophy, states: "The principle of *each for himself*, which is the war of all against all, arose in the course of history to complicate, to sidetrack and paralyse the war of all against nature for the greatest wellbeing of mankind which can be completely successful only by being based on the principle of *all for one and one for all*" [emphasis in original].

We have emphasized that anarchism as an ideology is intrinsically *class collaborationist* because it posits that all people have common interests and values based on the natural order of things. In *Mutual Aid*, Kropotkin explicitly appeals to wealthy capitalists not to alienate themselves from the rest of the human community:

"Men who have acquired wealth very often do not find in it the expected satisfaction.... The conscience of human solidarity begins to tell; and, although society life is so arranged as to stifle that feeling by thousands of artful means, it often gets the upper hand; and then they try to find an outcome for that deeply human need by giving their fortune, or their forces, to something which, in their opinion, will promote general welfare."

Here anarchism degenerates into the promotion of bourgeois philanthropy.

Kropotkin's Social Darwinist version of anarchism would today be a historical curiosity except that in recent years a substantially similar doctrine and movement has emerged in

the form of "green" radicalism. From a "green" standpoint, the directors of the World Bank, steel workers in the German Ruhr and landless peasants in India are considered co-equal members of the human race whose behavior should be guided by the future well-being of the human (and other) species.

The ideological affinity between classical anarchism and eco-radicalism is personified by the American academic Murray Bookchin. During the heyday of New Left radicalism in the 1960s-early '70s, he was an exponent of "post-scarcity anarchism," who fashionably appealed to youth "whose lives are frustrated by consumerism, suburbia, the mass media, the family, school, the supermarket and the prevailing system of repressed sexuality." In recent years, Bookchin has become a guru of "green" radicalism espousing a "philosophy of social ecology," which is essentially identical to Kropotkin's "mutual aid" anarchism:

"I speak of humanity's ability to reason, to foresee, to will and to act insightfully on behalf of directiveness within nature and enhance nature's own development. It is also an insult to nature to separate these subjective attributes from nature, to deal with them as though they did not emerge out of evolutionary development and are not implicitly part of nature in a deeper sense than the 'law of fang and claw' that we so flipantly impute to natural evolution as a metaphor for the 'cruelty' and 'harshness' of that evolutionary process....

"Social ecology, by definition, takes on the responsibility of evoking, elaborating, and giving an ethical content to the natural core of society and humanity."

—Murray Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology* (1990)

Since the members of the American FBI, the French riot police and the Salvadoran death squads are also part of humanity, they can presumably be converted to the "philosophy of social ecology" as readily as other members of our species. So ironically, anarchism—which presents itself as uncompromisingly hostile to any and all states—is consistent with notions that the cadres of the capitalist state can be won to the cause of social liberation.

Anarcho-Terrorism: "Propaganda of the Deed"

Elsewhere, anarchists had other forms of consciousness-raising in mind. The original Bakuninist movement in the early 1870s appealed to the impatience of leftist militants who wanted to fight the final battle against the ruling powers then and there. The movement was strongest in Spain and southern Italy, where there existed opportunities for insurrectionary activity not available elsewhere in Europe. Spain was wracked by a series of low-level civil wars between various republican and monarchist factions of the bourgeoisie and landowners. And despite their "anti-political" and "anti-state" stance, the Spanish Bakuninists often ended up in local republican councils together with bourgeois liberals. In Italy, the propertied classes had not yet cohered a strong, centralized state apparatus in the aftermath of the wars of the Risorgimento which unified the country. Italian Bakuninists, prominent among them the young Errico Malatesta, were thus able to engage for a time in rural guerrilla warfare in the peasant villages of Calabria.

With the increasing stabilization of the European bourgeois order in the last decades of the 19th century, Bakuninist insurrectionism gave way to anarcho-terrorism, a desperate ideology consistent with individual violent acts which were supposed to inspire the downtrodden masses. In the

1880s-'90s, anarchists assassinated a president of France, a president of the United States, a king of Italy, a prime minister of Spain, an empress of Austro-Hungary and a number of lesser personages. In 1886, one Charles Gallo threw a bottle of sulfuric acid from the gallery of the Paris Bourse onto a group of stockbrokers and their clerks. He followed this up with three revolver shots without, however, hitting anyone. At his trial Gallo shouted: "Long live revolution! Long live anarchism! Death to the bourgeois judiciary! Bunch of idiots!" He explained to the jury that in throwing acid onto the floor of the stock exchange, he was carrying out "an act of propaganda by the deed for anarchist doctrine" (quoted in James Joll, *The Anarchists* [1964]).

Malatesta's pamphlet *Anarchy* asserts that "in the present state of mankind, when the vast majority of people, oppressed by poverty and stupefied by superstition, stagnate in a state of humiliation, the fate of humanity depends on the action of a relatively small number of individuals." The "propaganda of the deed" was an extreme form of the basic anarchist tenet that the actions of a small number of individ-



Radio Times Hulton

Errico Malatesta, one of the original Italian Bakuninists and lifelong anarchist, was an honorable fighter for the downtrodden.

uals were necessary to inspire and encourage the spirit of revolt among the stagnant majority. The assassination of a French president or Spanish prime minister was viewed as an exemplary insurrection, supposedly demonstrating the vulnerability of the state to revolutionary violence.

Naturally, the bourgeoisie did not appreciate this at all. The wild-eyed, bomb-throwing anarchist became a stereotypical figure in popular political culture and was used to justify bourgeois repression. The British social-democratic historian G.D.H. Cole has argued: "Such persons tended, in the 1880s and 1890s, to profess Anarchist opinions, though their Anarchism had only a little in common with that of such men as Kropotkin" (*Socialist Thought: Marxism and Anarchism, 1850-1890* [1954]). While Kropotkin and Malatesta in their later years did not encourage terrorism, they never repudiated it nor did they denounce its practitioners. With their confusion of the system with its symbols and agents, of the disease with the symptoms, and their belief in flamboyant minority "action," the anarchist propagandists appeal to impressionist political impulses which are far from a thing of the remote past. For instance, elements of

the New Left of the 1960s partook deeply of the spirit of symbolic terrorism although practiced more vicariously and even "non-violently."

What exactly did "the propaganda of the deed" mean? How were such deeds supposed to further the anarchist cause? In 1879, the first issue of *Le Révolté* edited by Kropotkin, called for: "Permanent revolt by word of mouth, in writing, by the dagger, the rifle, dynamite.... Everything is good for us which falls outside legality." For the anarchists, the main enemy was the state, followed by the church. Here it's important to keep in mind that the movement originated and was centered in Latin Europe, where the Roman Catholic church was still the state religion. The anarchists saw their main task as one of overcoming, by any and all means, the masses' traditional respect for authority—government officials, police, judges, priests and bishops.

During the Spanish Revolution and Civil War of the mid-1930s, large numbers of churches were burned and many priests and other clerics were killed (estimates range from several hundred to several thousand). An anarchist youth manifesto exulted: "For the Revolution to be a fact, we must demolish the three pillars of reaction: the church, the army, and capitalism. The church has already been brought to account. The temples have been destroyed by fire and the ecclesiastical crows who were unable to escape have been taken care of by the people" (*Tierra y Libertad* [Barcelona], 13 August 1936). At the same time, there are a number of reports of columns of the anarchist militia stopping the burning of churches. While revolutions, particularly against semi-feudal conditions, are often marked by an explosion of rage at the oppressors, the effect of the attacks on churches in Spain was to outrage Catholic believers and accordingly strengthen the forces of Francoist reaction.

The struggle against religion is not primarily one of dispelling superstitions but of getting rid of a social system which drives people to despair. As the young Marx wrote when he was developing a *materialist* understanding of society:

"Religious distress is at the same time the *expression* of real distress and also the *protest* against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people.

"To abolish religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is to demand their *real* happiness. The demand to give up illusions about the existing state of affairs is the *demand to give up a state of affairs which needs illusions*" [emphasis in original].

—Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law" (1843-44)

We communists seek to eliminate the conditions of impoverishment, oppression and social degradation which cause men and women to kneel before priests and pray to shrines.

The existence of state and church does not derive from nor depend on the subjective attitudes of the masses. These are central institutions in all societies based on the extraction of surplus labor from the direct producers by a property-owning class. We communists seek to educate the working people—through struggle as well as propaganda and agitation—that the state apparatus (the army, police, judiciary, etc.) in capitalist countries is an agency enforcing their exploitation by the bankers, industrialists, landowners, etc. To the extent that the exploited classes understand the real nature of the bourgeois state, what is posed is not the assassination of government officials but proletarian revolution.

Part 5: The Syndicalists

The early years of this century saw the rise of syndicalism, especially in Latin Europe. The Confédération Générale du Travail (General Confederation of Labor—CGT) became the dominant workers organization in France. The Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labor—CNT), formed by anarcho-syndicalists in Barcelona in 1911, soon became the strongest trade-union formation in Spain and was hegemonic in Catalonia, the country's most industrialized region. The Unione Sindacale Italiana was a sizable formation occupying a position to the left of the main Italian trade-union federation, which was led by reformist socialists. In the United States, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was a major factor on the American left in the decade before World War I.

The rise of syndicalism in this period was in part a reaction to the parliamentary reformism prevalent among the parties of the Second (Socialist) International, and partly (especially in France) it developed and was defined against the anarchist propagandism best represented in this period by Peter Kropotkin. Addressing an international anarchist congress in Amsterdam in 1907, the prominent French syndicalist Pierre Monatte explained that a decade before, “a number of anarchists, realizing at last that philosophy is not enough to make a revolution, entered into a working-class movement” (in George Woodcock, ed., *The Anarchist Reader* [1977]).

The original Bakuninist movement of the early 1870s envisioned an imminent Europe-wide revolution which

would usher in a new liberated world without classes and without states. However, by the mid-1880s no serious

and intelligent leftist in Europe considered social revolution to be a near-term prospect anywhere on the continent. Anarchist militants therefore asked themselves: what is the main obstacle to social revolution and how could this be overcome? They arrived at two basically different answers (leaving aside the anarcho-terrorist fringe).

Kropotkin, Errico Malatesta, Elisée Reclus and their co-thinkers maintained that the masses did not understand and so did not support the principles and program of anarchism. They therefore devoted themselves to expounding and defending anarchist doctrine in books and pamphlets, speeches and meetings of small propaganda groups. The theorists of syndicalism—Fernand Pelloutier, Emile Pouget, Monatte and others—argued that the main obstacle to social revolution lay in the organizational weakness of the anarchist movement and the disorganization of the working class in general. They therefore devoted themselves to organizing and striving for leadership of a mass trade-union movement.

The strength of syndicalism lay in its understanding that the organized industrial working class was the central agency for overthrowing the capitalist system. As the leaders of the American IWW stated bluntly: “anarchism denies the class struggle, while the I.W.W. teaches it.” Many syndicalist militants—Monatte and Alfred Rosmer in France, Andrés Nin and Joaquín Maurín in Spain, James P. Cannon and William Z. Foster in the U.S.—would become leading figures in the Communist International of Lenin and Trotsky. In this sense, pre-1914 syndicalism occupied an intermediate position between classic anarchism and contemporary communism.

The main weakness of syndicalism lay in its tendency to place the organization of the working class *above its political consciousness*. The fact that a trade union has an avowedly revolutionary leadership and formal program is not in itself sufficient to make it a revolutionary organization *in practice*. The revolutionary syndicalists, in order to maintain their positions as official union leaders, were under constant pressure to adapt their policies to the backward prejudices of the ranks, above all national chauvinism. Thus with the outbreak of World War I, the central leadership of the French CGT around Léon Jouhaux helped mobilize the working class on behalf of the French imperialist state. Jouhaux ended his career as a front man for the American CIA in building an anti-Communist union movement in France after World War II. In this sense, pre-1914 syndicalism occupied an intermediate position between classic anarchism and contemporary trade-union reformism.

Pre-1914 Syndicalism: The French CGT

There were a number of factors—economic, political and ideological—which underlay the rise of syndicalism in the French workers movement in this period. The relatively slow pace of industrialization in France perpetuated many small workshops, especially in the luxury trades such as silk, lace, china and jewelry. In part due to this, the French union movement developed on a geographical basis rather than along industrial or craft lines. A key institution was the local *Bourse du Travail* which combined the roles of a labor

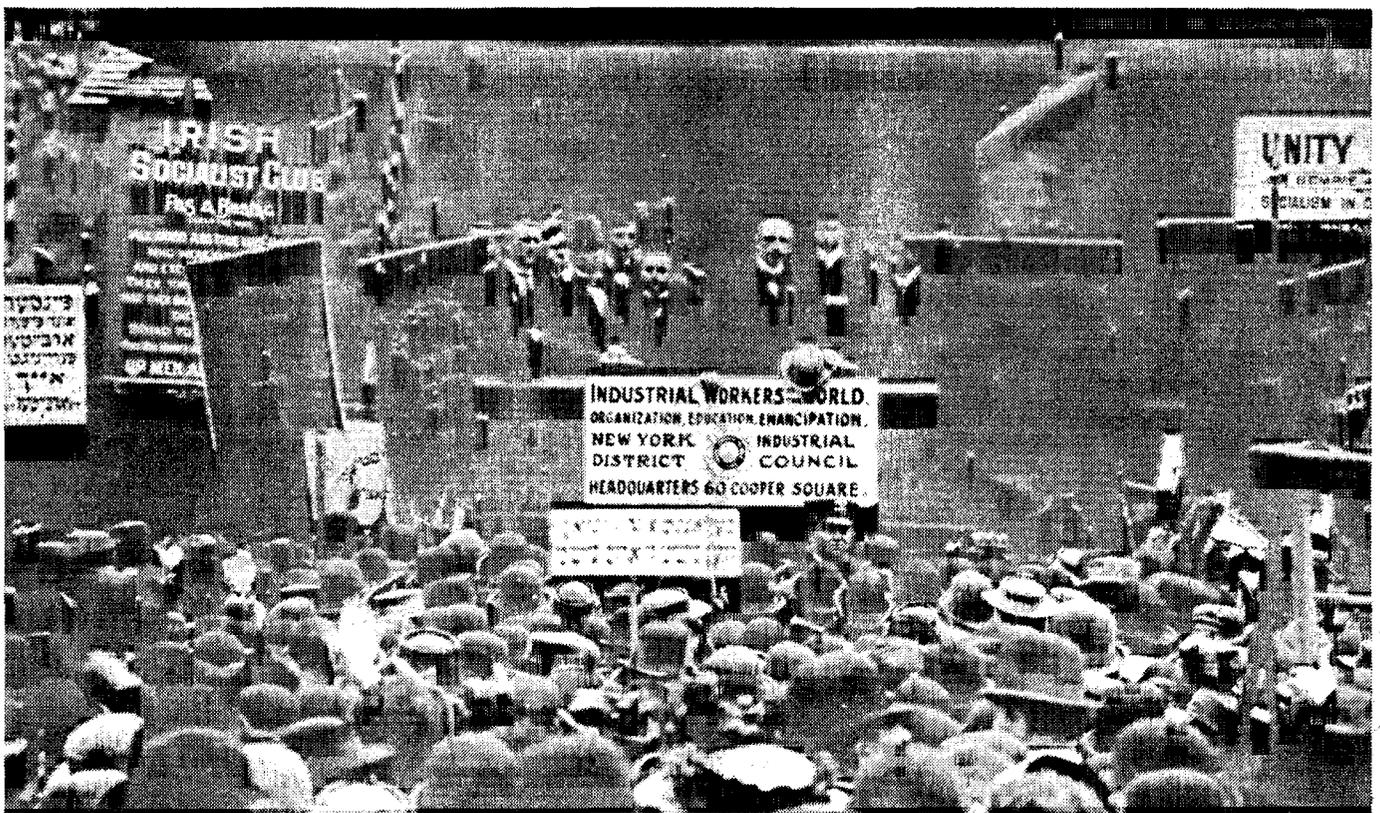


Musée Social

French syndicalist workers meet in 1909 under the banner of *La Vie Ouvrière* (Workers Life), edited by Pierre Monatte (inset). Monatte later became a leading figure in early French Communist Party and Third International.

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Mass meeting in New York City of the Industrial Workers of the World. Revolutionary syndicalists of the IWW wrote a heroic chapter in the history of the American labor movement.

exchange (the literal meaning of the term), a workers' social and cultural club and, later, a centralized union body. Most major strikes were citywide, involving the entire working-class community. Hence French anarchists like Pouget could easily transform the old Bakuninist program of a society based on autonomous communes into one based on autonomous local unions representing the working-class community.

At the political level, French syndicalism was conditioned by the multiplicity of socialist parties in that country. During the last quarter of the 19th century unitary, mass social-democratic parties claiming to represent the entire working class developed in Belgium, Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Scandinavian countries. It was therefore natural for the union movement in these countries to be closely affiliated with these parties. In France, however, during the 1890s there were half a dozen sizable socialist parties competing with one another and constantly splitting and combining.

Any effective trade union (*syndicat*) therefore had to embrace not only workers but also organizers and officials adhering to different political tendencies. When the CGT was formed in 1895, its leadership included prominent anarchists like Pouget, avowedly reformist socialists (Possibilists) and old-style Jacobin communists (Blanquists). The independence of the unions from political parties was initially an empirical adaptation to peculiar French conditions and only subsequently was enshrined in syndicalist doctrine. In other words, the *syndicats* came before syndicalism.

The founding father of French syndicalism is generally considered to be Fernand Pelloutier. Born into a well-to-do family, Pelloutier was a university-educated intellectual who rapidly progressed from bourgeois radicalism to reformist

socialism to the official Marxist Parti Ouvrier Français (French Workers Party) of Jules Guesde and Paul Lafargue (Marx's son-in-law). But he soon became disillusioned with parliamentary maneuvering and the factionalism between the Parti Ouvrier and its rivals. Pelloutier then turned to the local *Bourses du Travail* and organized these into a national federation, which by the turn of the century had become the largest labor organization in France. After Pelloutier died of tuberculosis in 1901 at the age of 33, his memory was revered by many French workers.

Pelloutier aimed to free the French workers movement from *both* "the parliamentary doctors, who have taught that any social transformation is subordinated to the conquest of political power," and "the revolutionary doctors, who have taught that no socialist effort is possible before the redeeming cataclysm" (Fernand Pelloutier, *Histoire des bourses du travail* [1901]). The "revolutionary doctors" gibe was mainly directed at the Blanquists, the leading advocates of "to the barricades" insurrectionism who, even more so than the Marxists, were popularly identified with the Paris Commune of 1871. Pelloutier and his fellow syndicalists were offering the French workers a path to socialist transformation supposedly avoiding the risk of another "bloody week" of May 1871, when the army massacred 20,000 people in crushing the "Red Commune."

But if a social revolution could not be brought about through parliamentary means and insurrection was supposedly ruled out, what was left? The revolutionary syndicalists answered: the general strike. The leading intellectual exponent of French syndicalism, Georges Sorel, in his famous 1908 *Reflections on Violence*, wrote of the general strike as



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1910 poster shows striking French workers, waving red flag of socialism and black flag of anarchism, confronting the army.

embodying “the war undertaken by socialism against modern society. The syndicalists solve this problem perfectly, by concentrating the whole of socialism in the drama of the general strike....” The CGT’s 1906 Charter of Amiens declared that the organization “prepares for the complete emancipation which can be achieved only by expropriating the capitalist class. It endorses the general strike as a means of action to that end” (reproduced in Val R. Lorwin, *The French Labor Movement* [1966]).

While socialists, both Marxist and non-Marxist, have propagated and led political and economic general strikes, the syndicalists identified the general strike with the revolution, posing it as an alternative to insurrection. The syndicalists argued that a strike in one city or industry could be broken by government repression with striking workers replaced by scabs protected by the police or, in some cases, by soldiers. But how could the army run all the major railway lines, unload vital imports from the docks, distribute food to thousands of shops in the major cities and towns, etc.? If all workers walked out at the same time, it was maintained, the economy would collapse and the bourgeoisie would be rendered powerless.

But, one might argue, what if the government threatened to arrest or even shoot down the striking workers? A decade earlier Engels had pointed out in a letter (3 November 1893) to Karl Kautsky, “the political strike must either prove victorious immediately by the threat alone (as in Belgium, where the army was very shaky), or it must end in a colossal fiasco, or, finally, directly *lead to the barricades*” (emphasis in original). Engels’ view of the dynamics of a revolution was borne out by the Russian Revolution of 1905, which began with a series of mass strikes. It soon became apparent that only an insurrection could overthrow the tsarist autoc-

racy. As V.I. Lenin wrote, “Over the heads of the organisations, the mass proletarian struggle developed from a strike to an uprising. This is the greatest historic gain the Russian revolution achieved in December 1905” (“Lessons of the Moscow Uprising,” August 1906).

Although the suppression of the Paris Commune was well within living memory, the CGT syndicalists implicitly assumed that the French bourgeoisie had become “too civilized” to again resort to mass terror against the working class in defense of its property. For all the denunciations of parliamentarism, syndicalist doctrine in its own way rested on illusions in bourgeois democracy.

Furthermore, a precondition for a revolutionary general strike was the organization of the large majority of workers into the syndicalist-led union movement. Syndicalist strategy therefore implied the social revolution was a relatively *long-term* prospect. Pelloutier’s basic message was that the workers had to “pursue more actively, more methodically, and more persistently the work of moral, administrative and technical education necessary to make viable a society of free men.” When this was written in 1901, only 10 percent of French workers were in any kind of trade-union formation. A decade later only one in six industrial workers were unionized and one in ten were in the CGT. Even at the height of their power and influence, the French syndicalists did not have the organizational capacity to carry out their maximal program of a general strike to “expropriate the capitalist class.”

As previously noted, French syndicalism developed in part as a result of the existence of several competing socialist parties. However, in 1905 the main socialist factions got together and formed the French Section of the Workers International (SFIO), conventionally called the Socialist party. The CGT syndicalists thus had to define their relationship to a party which claimed to be the political representative of the entire working class. The response was the 1906 Charter of Amiens, a declaration of trade-union independence from *all* political parties, regardless of their character. The subsequent relationship between the CGT and SFIO was one of peaceful coexistence—sometimes chilly, sometimes warm—with a tacit understanding of a division of labor.

To the parliamentarism of the Socialist party, the CGT syndicalists counterposed “direct action.” What this term meant concretely was stated in Emile Pouget’s 1905 *Le Syndicat*:

“If the improvement they demand is a matter of government action, the unions pursue the aim by mass pressures on the public authorities, not by trying to get favorably minded deputies into parliament. If the improvement sought must be wrested directly from the capitalist...their means are varied, although always following the principle of direct action. Depending on the situation, they use the strike, sabotage, the boycott, the union label.”

Here it should be emphasized that “direct action” was basically regarded and motivated as a more effective means than parliamentary pressure in winning concessions from the capitalists and government.

Some of the struggles undertaken by the CGT disturbed and potentially threatened the bourgeois order, notably the 1910 railway strike, which the government quickly crushed by inducting the striking workers into the army and militarizing the railways. However, all CGT strikes and other industrial actions had as their immediate and direct aim gaining higher wages, shorter hours or better conditions from the



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Left and right faces of syndicalism: Anarchist militant Emile Pouget (left) became a leader of the French syndicalist movement, advocating "direct action." In 1914, French CGT leader Léon Jouhaux supported French bourgeoisie in imperialist slaughter of World War I.

employer. The French revolutionary syndicalists did not engage in strikes—even protest strikes—for political aims, thereby avoiding challenging the authority of the government at this level. In practice, the CGT functioned in a way not fundamentally different than the British Trades Union Congress whose leaders did not at the time even claim to be socialists, much less revolutionaries.

The CGT's "Anti-Militarism" and August 1914

The ascendancy of syndicalism in the French workers movement coincided with the looming threat of a Europe-wide imperialist war which finally exploded in 1914. Therefore "anti-militarism" was a key element of French syndicalist doctrine, with the CGT's 1908 congress in Marseille adopting the following resolution:

"The Congress repeats the formula of the [First] International: 'The workingmen have no fatherland;' and adds:

"That whereas, consequently, every war is but an outrage against the workingmen; that it is a bloody and terrible means of diverting them from their demands, the Congress declares it necessary, from the international point of view, to enlighten the workingmen, in order that in case of war they may reply to the declaration of a war by a declaration of a revolutionary general strike."

—reproduced in Louis Levine, *The Labor Movement in France* (1912)

These were fine words but they turned out to be just that...words. When the moment of truth came in August 1914, the CGT did nothing. No call for a general strike, not even an antiwar demonstration. A number of CGT leaders, notably the general secretary Léon Jouhaux, immediately announced their support for the war and subsequently col-

laborated closely with the bourgeois government in mobilizing the working class for the four-year-long imperialist slaughter. Those syndicalist militants like Pierre Monatte and Alfred Rosmer who remained true to the principles of proletarian internationalism found themselves an isolated minority in an organization in which only yesterday they had been respected leading figures.

In hindsight, the CGT's collapse with the outbreak of war was prefigured by its entire history. During the 1905 Morocco crisis—an interimperialist squabble for influence in North Africa—everyone in France thought war with Germany could break out at any moment as, indeed, it could have. Yet during this and subsequent international crises, the CGT leaders did no more than call demonstrations, issue manifestos, etc. There was no move to organize protest strikes. When in 1913 the French government extended the length of compulsory military service from two to three years, the CGT leaders considered but rejected calling a general strike against this measure, which was broadly unpopular.

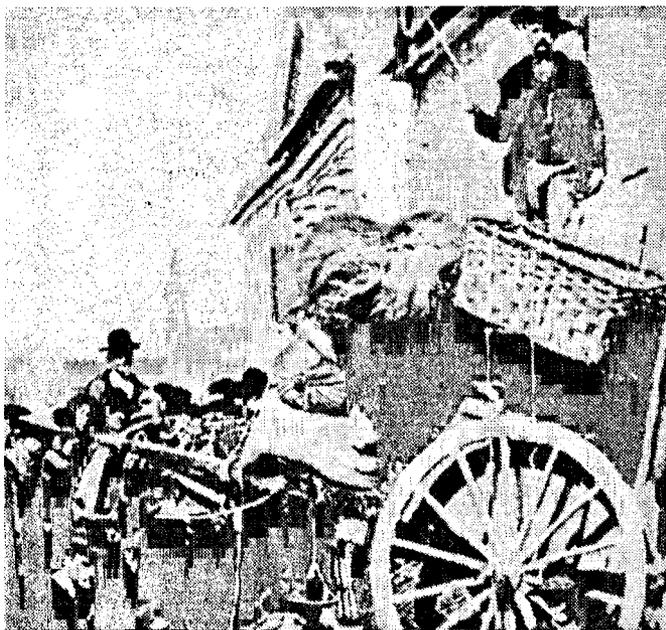
Furthermore, the CGT's "anti-militarism" was defined almost exclusively as opposition to the looming war with Germany. French syndicalists were little concerned with the role of the French army in enforcing the colonial enslavement of the peoples of Africa, the Near East and Indochina. In 1911, French troops suppressed an uprising in Morocco against the local monarchical client regime, and the following year Morocco was formally made into a French protectorate. In action, the CGT leadership was effectively indifferent to such colonial conquests by the French imperialist state.

Why did the revolutionary syndicalists limit the "direct action" they advocated to the sphere of economic relations between labor and capital? One undoubted factor is that syndicalist militants were well aware that many workers in the CGT, probably most, were imbued with national chauvinist prejudices to some extent. If, for example, the CGT leaders had called a mass demonstration or a one-day protest strike against French military intervention in Morocco, they would have encountered significant rightist opposition in their own ranks, perhaps even leading to a split.

The French syndicalists organized and led a labor organization primarily on the basis of *militant trade unionism*. The French syndicalists never really prepared the workers they led and influenced for a decisive confrontation with the bourgeois state but rather increasingly adapted to the political consciousness of their base. As Trotsky later wrote in his 1929 article, "Communism and Syndicalism": "The epigones of syndicalism would have one believe that the trade unions are sufficient by themselves. Theoretically, this means nothing, but in practice it means the dissolution of the revolutionary vanguard into the backward masses, that is, the trade unions."

Italian and Spanish Syndicalism

The French syndicalist movement was both the seedbed of European syndicalism and its most moderate expression. Exported to Italy and Spain, the doctrines of revolutionary syndicalism took on more radical expressions. There, calls for general strikes were carried out, more than once. Yet there also, the syndicalist movement collapsed when faced with the ultimate tests of war and revolution. For while this current initially represented a revolt against reformist



A. Mondadori

Agricultural laborers, key component of the Italian syndicalist movement, on strike in 1907.

parliamentary socialism and coalitionism with the bourgeoisie, it was unable to generate a program and theory capable of politically defeating the reformists and carrying out socialist revolution. Worse yet, facing this dead end, sections of the syndicalist movement evolved in the direction of imperialist nationalism, in particular fascism, symbolized by Mussolini.

In Italy, the syndicalist movement originated in the Socialist Party (PSI), and was originally led by men who considered themselves orthodox Marxists. The first organ of Italian revolutionary syndicalism was the paper *Avanguardia Socialista*, founded in 1902 by Marxist theorist Antonio Labriola. Italian Communist leader Antonio Gramsci later described early Italian syndicalism as “the instinctive, elemental, primitive but healthy expression of working-class reaction against a bloc with the bourgeoisie and for a bloc with the peasants” (from his essay on *La questione meridionale* [The Southern Question], 1926). At a regional conference of the PSI in Brescia in 1904, the syndicalist current passed a motion declaring:

“Reaffirming the permanently and intransigently revolutionary character of proletarian action, which is against the bourgeois state, the Congress declares that the transformation of the political organization of the proletarian class into a mainly parliamentary, opportunist, constitutionalist and monarchist possibilist party is a degeneration of the socialist spirit.

“It therefore rejects, as inconsistent with the principle of the class struggle and the true essence of the proletarian conquest of public power, alliance with the bourgeoisie, whether through participation by party members in any monarchical or republican government or through support of any sort to a government of the bourgeois class.”

Labriola and his supporters were incessantly propagandizing for a general strike. Barely five months after the Brescia motion was passed, and weeks after the Amsterdam Congress of the Second International rejected the applicability of the general strike, in September 1904 such a strike swept through Italy in protest against the government’s violent repression of workers’ demonstrations. For five days the peninsula was

shaken by a vast national mobilization, yet the workers’ action never went beyond a giant protest to a struggle for power. Again, from May to July 1908, the syndicalists carried out another major strike, of agricultural workers in the region of Parma, which is depicted in Bernardo Bertolucci’s epic film *1900*. Facing brutal repression by the army, including use of cavalry and legions of strikebreakers, after a running three-day battle the strike was broken.

One of the constant themes of syndicalist propaganda was that of an anti-militarist “general strike against war.” In Italy, there was an attempt to carry this out, in September 1911, against the Italian colonial war of conquest in Libya. However, while it was (tepidly) supported by the PSI and the CGL labor federation, the strike failed to change anything. Moreover, it was undercut by the fact that important syndicalist leaders (including Labriola) *supported* the Libyan war. In seeking to combine syndicalism and nationalism, they were following the example of Georges Sorel, who in this same period was collaborating with the reactionary nationalist-monarchist Action Française movement.

On the eve of the imperialist world war, a nationwide general strike broke out in response to the shooting of anti-militarist syndicalist demonstrators in Ancona. During the “Red Week” of 7-14 June 1914, many syndicalists thought the moment had come for the general revolt they had preached for so long to bring down the government, the monarchy and the rule of the bourgeoisie. Yet lacking a plan of action for decisive revolutionary struggle and a steered leadership to carry it out, the strike soon petered out.

In Spain, meanwhile, the syndicalists also grew to be a substantial force. The founding of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo in 1911 represented a convergence of the anarchist and syndicalist currents. Within a month of the CNT’s founding, it had endorsed a general strike and was outlawed by the government. As Spain remained neutral throughout the war, the syndicalists’ call for a “general strike against war” remained purely abstract. But as the imperialist powers became exhausted, and workers were inspired by the overthrow of the tsar in Russia, a revolutionary opportunity presented itself in Spain in August 1917.

The anarcho-syndicalist CNT had been pushing for months for an unlimited national general strike, and mass pressure forced the Socialist-led UGT labor federation to join in planning for the strike. Meanwhile, the Republican bourgeoisie and Catalan regionalists were agitating for the overthrow of the monarchy, counting on support in the army. When the strike was finally called, rather than launching a fight for social revolution, its objective was restricted to helping the liberal bourgeoisie seize power. As a result of this limited goal, the working class did not mobilize uniformly, and after a week of bloody repression the strike was extinguished. As would once again occur in 1936-37 during the Spanish Civil War, the anarchists became the tail of bourgeois forces.

The IWW: Revolutionary Syndicalism in the United States

In the United States during the decade before the First World War, a syndicalist movement—the Industrial Workers of the World—came into being that was significantly different than its counterparts in Latin Europe. The particular and in some ways unique nature of the IWW was rooted in

the development of the American economy and its effect on the character and political consciousness of the working class.

The working class in the U.S. was largely formed through successive waves of immigration from different European countries. This produced an industrial proletariat riven by deepgoing ethnic divisions and antagonisms, for example, between native-born workers of Anglo-Saxon Protestant stock and Irish, Italian and East European Catholic immigrants. These ethnic divisions, skillfully manipulated by the American ruling class, prevented not only the formation of a mass workers party such as developed in Europe in this period but also the unionization of the mass of the industrial proletariat, especially non-English-speaking immigrants. By the turn of the century, only 5 percent of workers in the U.S. were organized at all, and these on a craft-union basis in the openly pro-capitalist American Federation of Labor (AFL).

The Industrial Workers of the World was formed in 1905 as a broad front of the American left. The founding leadership consisted of revolutionary syndicalists such as William



Wayne State University

**IWW general secretary
Vincent St. John,
outstanding
American
workers leader.**

Trautmann and Vincent St. John, the “orthodox” Marxist Daniel De Leon and his followers, and the militant trade unionists of the Western Federation of Miners. The launching of the IWW was enthusiastically supported by Eugene V. Debs, the most popular, even revered, figure in the American socialist movement of the day.

As against the conservative, job-trusting AFL, the IWW actively sought to organize unskilled workers across ethnic/racial lines, including such oppressed layers as immigrant agricultural laborers. Confronting murderous anti-union terror by company strikebreakers as well as government repression in the form of anti-labor laws and deportations of foreign-born organizers and activists, the IWW wrote a heroic chapter in American labor history.

The leaders and militants of the IWW—which adopted as its slogan “One Big Union”—expected in a relatively short time to organize the mass of industrial workers, win over most of the membership of the AFL and reduce the remaining right-wing craft unions to an insignificant element in the American labor movement. The IWW press carried frequent reports on the struggles and activities of the French CGT under the heading: “Le Syndicalisme in France is Industrialism in America. Its principles are substantially those of the I.W.W. in America” (quoted in Philip S. Foner, *The Industrial*

Workers of the World, 1905-1917 [1965]). Yet the American syndicalists were not able to emulate the organizational success of their French cothinkers. The reasons lay in the very different political consciousness of the working class in the two countries. Most French workers wanted socialism in some form and thought it natural to join a union whose ultimate aim was “complete emancipation...by expropriating the capitalist class.”

Not so American workers. During strikes most of the workers involved joined the IWW but left just as quickly when normal, workaday life returned. The IWW became in fact an organization of revolutionary militants in the form of a broad-based union movement although this was in no way the conscious program or intent of its syndicalist leaders. James P. Cannon was a young IWW roving organizer who later became a founding member of the American Communist Party and subsequently the principal leader of American Trotskyism. Looking back at the IWW in the 1950s, Cannon explained its dual and contradictory nature:

“The IWW announced itself as an all-inclusive union; and any worker ready for organization on an everyday union basis was invited to join, regardless of his views and opinions on any other question. In a number of instances, in times of organization campaigns and strikes in separate localities, such all-inclusive membership was attained, if only for brief periods. But that did not prevent the IWW agitators from preaching the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism in every strike meeting....

“The IWW at all times, even during strikes embracing masses of church-going, ordinarily conservative workers, acted as an organization of revolutionists. The ‘real IWW’s,’ the year-round activists, were nicknamed Wobblies—just when and why nobody knows—and the criterion of the Wobbly was his stand on the principle of the class struggle and its revolutionary goal; and his readiness to commit his whole life to it.

“In truth, the IWW in its time of glory was neither a union nor a party in the full meaning of these terms, but something of both, with some parts missing.”

—“The IWW: The Great Anticipation” in *The First Ten Years of American Communism* (1962)

As it became clear that the IWW was not going to displace the AFL as the main labor organization in the U.S., much less become “one big union,” the Wobblies increasingly saw themselves as a “militant minority” setting an example for the more backward mass of workers. The existence of an avowedly revolutionary union movement competing with pro-capitalist unions, which *initially* was regarded as an unfortunate and transitory condition, evolved into a political principle. The program of revolutionary dual unionism thus became a central tenet of the American far left in the period immediately before and during World War I.

The Wobblies took a militantly antiwar line when in 1917 U.S. imperialism entered the European conflict (a clear indication that the IWW was a very different kind of organization than the French CGT despite the shared syndicalist doctrines). The U.S. government, mobilizing popular chauvinism, effectively destroyed the IWW through massive police repression abetted by extralegal vigilantism. Frank Little, a Native American Indian IWW organizer in the copper mines, was lynched in 1917 in Butte, Montana. In 1918, thousands of IWW-organized Mexican miners in Arizona and New Mexico were loaded onto railroad cars and dumped in the desert. At the same time, the war-generated economic boom led to a substantial growth in the AFL unions, and a wave of worker militancy swept through these unions in the immediate postwar period.

Nonetheless, former IWW militants and sympathizers such as John Reed, who constituted an important part of the early American Communist cadre and leadership, opposed in principle working in the pro-capitalist AFL unions even though these now constituted almost the totality of organized labor in the United States. One of the major disputes in the formative period of the Communist International was over the question of revolutionary dual unionism in the United States and elsewhere. Lenin's 1920 pamphlet, "*Left-Wing Communism—An Infantile Disorder*," addressed this doctrine:

"This ridiculous 'theory' that Communists should not work in reactionary trade unions reveals with the utmost clarity the frivolous attitude of the 'Left' Communists towards the question of influencing the 'masses,' and their misuse of clamor about the 'masses.' If you want to help the 'masses,' and win the sympathy and support of the 'masses,' you should not fear difficulties, or pinpricks, chicanery, insults and persecution from the 'leaders' (who, being opportunists and social-chauvinists, are in most cases directly or indirectly connected with the bourgeoisie and the police), but must absolutely *work wherever the masses are to be found.*" [emphasis in original]

The Trade-Union Question: Anarchism, Syndicalism and Leninism

At an anarchist conference in 1907, the old Italian Bakuninist Errico Malatesta warned against what he saw as the dangers of syndicalism for the anarchist movement:

"One cannot deny that syndicalist action involves us in certain perils. The greatest of these perils undoubtedly lies in the acceptance by the militant of office in the syndicates, particularly when it is paid office. Let us take it as a general rule: the anarchist who becomes a permanent and paid official in a syndicate is lost to propaganda, lost to anarchism! Henceforward he is under obligation to those who pay him and, since these are not all anarchists, the salaried official—placed between his conscience and his interest—must either follow his conscience and lose his position, or follow his interest—and then, goodbye to anarchism!"

—reproduced as "Syndicalism: A Critique," in George Woodcock, ed., *The Anarchist Reader*

Malatesta therefore insisted that anarchist militants, whether in the trade unions or outside them, should limit themselves to explaining and defending the principles and program of anarchism. When the vast majority of working people were won to the anarchist vision of the future...then, *voilà*, the revolution.

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Wobbly leader "Big Bill" Haywood (right) in Moscow, 1922, with former IWW organizer James P. Cannon who later became the founding leader of American Trotskyism.

In light of the subsequent course of the French CGT, Malatesta's concern that syndicalist militants would abandon their revolutionary principles in order to keep their union posts was certainly valid. But the old Bakuninist's preventative cure for the bureaucratic degeneration of revolutionaries is, however, as bad as the disease. For revolutionaries to refuse in principle to ever become trade-union officials is to cede the leadership of the mass economic organizations of the working class to opportunists (hardened and otherwise), reformists (overt and covert) and even reactionaries. This will ensure that there will never be a proletarian revolution and that the trade unions will not even serve the best interests of the workers within the framework of capitalism. A precondition for a socialist revolution is a strong workers movement, with mass trade unions, factory committees, etc. The key is the leadership of a revolutionary vanguard party.

During the First World War, the Russian Bolsheviks denounced the treachery and overall wretchedness of social-democratic parliamentarians and trade-union and party officials just as harshly as did the anarchists, if not more so. But they did not therefore conclude that the workers should do without mass trade unions and political parties. As the Bolshevik leader Gregory Zinoviev wrote in 1916 in *The War and the Crisis of Socialism*:

"At the time of the crisis over the war, the labor bureaucracy played the role of a reactionary factor.... But that does not mean the labor movement will be able to get along without a big organizational apparatus; without an entire spectrum of people devoted especially to serve the proletarian organization. We do not want to go back to the time when the labor movement was so weak that it could get along without its own employees and functionaries, but to go forward to the time when the labor movement will be something different, in which the strong movement of the proletariat will subordinate the stratum of functionaries to itself, in which routine will be destroyed, bureaucratic corrosion wiped out; which will bring new men to the surface, infuse them with fighting courage, fill them with a new spirit."

—excerpted in *New International* [New York City], March-June 1942

A Leninist party is a counterweight to the inevitable pressures on revolutionary militants fighting for leadership in

mass organizations. Unlike a union or factory committee, membership in and support for a political party is based on accepting its program and agreeing with its underlying principles. In arguing for the need for a separate party of the revolutionary proletarian vanguard, Lenin stressed that there are different levels of consciousness in the working class. Many workers have reformist illusions and are imbued with national chauvinism, racism and other manifestations of social reaction, from religiosity and the desire to open a small shop to wife-beating. Through its press, demonstrations and other actions, through intervening in and fighting for leadership of social protest movements of the oppressed—and, when appropriate, participating in parliamentary and other elections—a communist party can attract and organize those workers who support the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system, *differentiating* them from those workers who have not gone beyond militant trade unionism.

Here one can contrast the pre-1914 French syndicalists with the Russian Bolsheviks in the same period. The anti-parliamentarism of the CGT leadership actually prevented French workers from facing a clear-cut choice between revolutionary and reformist politics. Instead class-conscious French workers led compartmentalized lives: they were syn-

dicalists in economic struggles against the employer and socialists when it came to electing parliamentary deputies or local government officials. Furthermore, the French Socialist party contained both openly reformist and ostensibly Marxist factions.

The political topology of the Russian workers movement in the decade before the First World War was entirely different. There the organization of revolutionary militants (the Bolshevik Party) was clearly differentiated from both the trade unions, factory committees, etc. and the reformist/centrist socialists (the Mensheviks). A Russian worker who actively and directly supported the Bolsheviks (e.g., distributing the party's illegal literature) was motivated by a higher level of political consciousness than one who simply voted for a Bolshevik fellow worker to head up a strike committee. The Bolsheviks also ran candidates (a number of whom won) in elections to the workers' section of the tsarist Duma (parliament), opposing not only the liberal and reactionary parties but the populist Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks. The Bolsheviks organized the *revolutionary vanguard* of the Russian working class, later enabling them to lead the first successful proletarian revolution in world history in October 1917.

Part 6: 1914-1918: Imperialist War and the Realignment of the Left

A famous American tale by the early 19th-century writer

Washington Irving tells of "Rip van Winkle." Rip, a ne'er-do-well villager in New York's Hudson River Valley, drinks a magic brew shortly before the American War of Independence and sleeps for the next 20 years. He awakens in a strange and totally unanticipated political world. Having fallen asleep as a subject of King George III of England, he now finds himself a citizen of a new republic, the United States of America, with a president named George Washington, someone he had never heard of before.

If a left-wing Rip van Winkle in Europe or North America had fallen asleep in 1913 and woken up ten years later, he too would have found the political world utterly unknown and totally unexpected. He would have seen former anarchist and syndicalist militants now joined together with erstwhile left-wing Social Democrats (Marxists) in a new international movement calling itself Communist, a term not widely used on the left for half a century before then. Other lead-

ing prewar anarcho-syndicalists would be found allied with so-

cialist parliamentarians against the Communists. He would find that anarchism and syndicalism simply no longer existed as significant tendencies. At the same time, those parties still calling themselves Social Democratic had openly repudiated proletarian revolution in favor of class collaboration and nationalist militarism, and in many cases had ministers in various European capitalist governments.

In France before 1914, the syndicalist Confédération Générale du Travail (General Confederation of Labor—CGT) had been the dominant labor organization. Now there existed two rival trade-union federations, one affiliated with the Communists, the other with the reformist Socialist party. In Italy, the homeland of the Bakuninist movement in the 1860s and '70s, anarchism had been marginalized and the newly formed Communist Party was hegemonic on the far left. In the United States before World War I, the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World had been the most



Bolshevik parliamentary deputies exiled to Siberia for carrying out agitation against World War I, which slaughtered millions of workers. Right: Manifesto of 1915 Zimmerwald antiwar conference, drafted by Leon Trotsky.





Imperial War Museum, London

World War I, 1917; German soldiers slaughtered on the battlefield.

important organization to the left of the Socialist Party. But by the early 1920s, both the Socialist Party and the IWW had become empty shells: all the vital, combative, forward-looking elements of the American left had regrouped into the Communist International of Lenin and Trotsky.

Only in Spain did the anarchists and syndicalists continue to represent a major component of the workers movement into the 1920s. This Iberian exceptionalism derived in large part from the fact that Spain was not a combatant in the first imperialist world war. Hence the Spanish left did not experience the wrenching struggles between social-chauvinists and internationalists which dominated working-class politics elsewhere in Europe and also in North America.

Pre-1914 Social Democracy, anarchism and syndicalism died on the battlefields of Tannenberg and the Somme, Verdun and Caporetto along with millions of European youth. Despite their differences, the foremost "orthodox" Marxist, Karl Kautsky, the leading anarchist Peter Kropotkin and the French syndicalist founder Fernand Pelloutier shared certain

basic premises. All were shaped by the stability of the European bourgeois order, the steady growth of the workers movement and the relative democratic freedoms available to them at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. The leaders and theoreticians of the main currents of Social Democracy, anarchism and syndicalism believed the era of violent revolutions and counterrevolutions in West and Central Europe lay in the past. They all looked forward to the establishment of a just, egalitarian and humane society by essentially "civilized" means supported or at least accepted by all reasonable men of good will.

This rosy vision of orderly social revolution was blown to smithereens by the guns of August 1914. In the first volume of his insightful biography of Trotsky, *The Prophet Armed* (1954), the Polish Marxist historian Isaac Deutscher explained how future Communists were forged in the charnel house that had become Europe:

"The slaughter of the next few years, in which millions of people laid down their lives to wrest a few yards of land from the enemy, taught them to despise and hate the humanitarian façades and shams of the European body politic. They concluded that if civilized governments in pursuit of their national power-politics found it possible to exterminate millions of people and to maim scores of millions, then it was surely the Socialists' duty to shrink from no sacrifice in the struggle for a new social order that would free mankind from such folly. The old order was giving them a lesson in ruthlessness. The 'Gothic lace-work' of European civilization had been torn to pieces and was being trampled into the mud and blood of the trenches."

The Trauma of August 1914

The full-scale European war which broke out in August 1914 had been anticipated and feared on the left. Almost three decades earlier, Friedrich Engels had predicted with startling precision:

"The only war left for Prussia-Germany to wage will be a world war, a world war, moreover, of an extent and violence hitherto unimagined. Eight to ten million soldiers will be at each others' throats and in the process they will strip Europe barer than a swarm of locusts. The depredations of the Thirty Years' War compressed into three to four years and extended over the entire continent; famine, disease, the universal lapse into barbarism...."

—Introduction to Sigismund Borkheim's pamphlet, *In Memory of the German Blood-and-Thunder Patriots, 1806-1807* (1887)



W.W. Norton & Co. photos

Traitorous leaders of Social Democracy like Friedrich Ebert (left) helped mobilize young German workers for fratricidal slaughter.



In the following years, the issue of militarism and how to struggle against it became a dominant concern in the Second (Socialist) International, one which increasingly demarcated its left and right wings. A resolution on militarism adopted at the International's 1907 Congress in Stuttgart, Germany concluded with an amendment proposed by Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and the Russian Menshevik leader Julius Martov:

"If a war threatens to break out, it is the duty of the working class and of its parliamentary representatives in the countries involved, supported by the consolidating activity of the International [Socialist] Bureau, to exert every effort to prevent the outbreak of war by means they consider most effective....

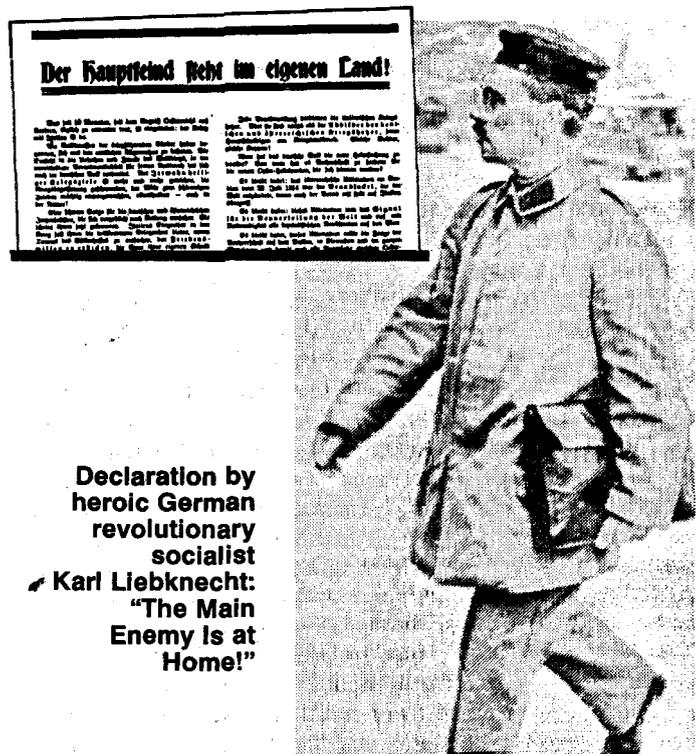
"Should war break out nonetheless, it is their duty to intervene in favor of its speedy termination and to do all in their power to utilize the economic and political crisis caused by the war to rouse the peoples and thereby to hasten the abolition of capitalist class rule."

The German Social Democracy (SPD) in this period was generally regarded as a model of a Marxist-led workers party and the central core of the international socialist movement. Hence, when on 4 August 1914 the Social Democratic fraction in the German Reichstag (parliament) voted for war credits, the effect on revolutionary Marxists the world over was traumatic. Luxemburg suffered a nervous collapse in reaction to the wave of national chauvinism which swept the German social-democratic workers movement. Lenin at first refused to believe the report of the Reichstag vote in the SPD's organ, *Vorwärts*, dismissing that issue as a forgery by the Kaiser's government. In his autobiography, *My Life* (1930), Trotsky recounts his feelings at the time:

"The telegram telling of the capitulation of the German Social Democracy shocked me even more than the declaration of war, in spite of the fact that I was far from a naive idealizing of German socialism.... I did not expect the official leaders of the International, in case of war, to prove themselves capable of serious revolutionary initiative. At the same time, I could not even admit the idea that the Social Democracy would simply cower on its belly before a nationalist militarism."

What the German Social Democracy was for Marxists before 1914, the French Confédération Générale du Travail was for syndicalists and many anarchists: the strongest and most respected workers organization internationally representing their doctrine and tradition. For example, in 1913 the American IWW journal *Solidarity* published a translation of the pamphlet "French Syndicalism" by CGT general secretary Léon Jouhaux. Year after year, the French syndicalist leaders had solemnly proclaimed that they would respond to a declaration of war with a revolutionary general strike. But when war was in fact declared, they immediately joined the "union sacrée" in defense of the French capitalist state, with Jouhaux preaching "hatred of German imperialism" as he spoke for "those who are going off to war."

Peter Kropotkin's support for Britain, France and Russia against the Central Powers came as probably an even greater shock to anarchist militants than the German Social Democrats' infamous vote for war credits was to Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky. Kropotkin had hitherto been regarded as a man of unimpeachable revolutionary integrity and idealism, not only by anarchists but also by many non-anarchist leftists. Born into the upper echelons of the Russian nobility, he had been living in exile in England for three decades when the war broke out. The proponent of the solidarity of the human community at once became indistin-



**Declaration by heroic German revolutionary socialist
Karl Liebknecht:
"The Main Enemy Is at Home!"**

Dietz Verlag

guishable from the most rabid British or French chauvinist. Even a highly sympathetic biography acknowledges that "all Kropotkin did, like any militarist, was to talk of bigger and better cannons, to exhort his friends to 'defend themselves like wild beasts,' and to repeat the current exaggerated atrocity stories of the Germans 'fighting like devils and trampling on all the rules of humanity'" (George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Anarchist Prince* [1950]). The old Russian populist and anarchist now defended the tsarist imperial state with the lame argument that the military alliance with Britain and France would result in a "strengthening of the liberalizing forces in Russia."

Kropotkin's pro-war views were by no means an individual aberration within the anarchist movement. The leading intellectual lights of the anarchist movement in France—Jean Grave, Charles Malato, Paul Reclus—came to the defense of their "own" capitalist state. The Austrian anarchist scholar Max Nettlau, a recognized authority on Bakunin's life and writings, likewise supported the war, in his case on the side of the Central Powers—Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany and the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian empire.

Men and women who had worked closely together for years, even decades, became bitter political enemies overnight. Lenin denounced Kautsky, whom he had previously respected as the outstanding contemporary Marxist theoretician, as a "consummate hypocrite and a past master in the art of prostituting Marxism." The veteran Italian Bakuninist Errico Malatesta now branded Kropotkin, his "old and beloved friend," as a "government anarchist." French syndicalist leader Alphonse Merrheim, as Lenin recounted in an article on the 1915 Zimmerwald antiwar conference, bitterly declared: "The party, Jouhaux, and the government are three heads beneath the same cap" (Robert Wohl, *French Communism in the Making, 1914-1924* [1966]).

Antiwar socialists, syndicalists and anarchists found they had far more in common with one another than with their

former comrades and cothinkers turned chauvinists and militarists. The realignment of the left manifested itself most clearly in France, where all tendencies in the socialist, syndicalist and anarchist movements were well represented.

Before 1914 the two main poles of the French workers movement had been the "orthodox" Marxist faction of Jules Guesde in the Socialist party and the syndicalist CGT, with the eclectic socialist Jean Jaurès acting as an intermediary between the two. Jaurès was assassinated by a right-wing royalist fanatic on the eve of the war. Guesde and Jouhaux became twin pillars of the *union sacrée*: the "Marxist" socialist as minister without portfolio in the "Cabinet of National Defense," the syndicalist union leader as a "commissioner of the nation."

The relatively small number of French leftists who opposed the war organized themselves around the Committee for the Resumption of International Relations. The core and best-known figures in this group were revolutionary syndicalists—Alphonse Merrheim, Pierre Monatte and Alfred Rosmer—who were joined by dissident socialists and anarchists, some of them fresh from the trenches. Leon Trotsky, in exile in France until his expulsion from the country in 1916, played an important and in a sense leading role in organizing and directing these antiwar militants. Also centrally involved was another Russian émigré revolutionary, Salomon Lozovsky, at the time a wayward right Bolshevik, who later became head of the trade-union international affiliated with the Communist International. The French left-syndicalists' international sympathies were deepened by their close collaboration with the two Russians, which brought them into contact with a kind of Marxism then unknown in West Europe. One French veteran of the Committee later recalled how Trotsky and Lozovsky "talked of making a revolution as if they meant it."

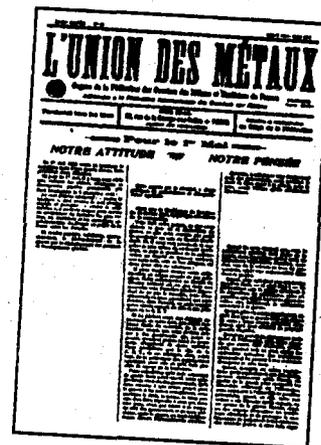
To be sure, the differences between Marxian socialism, syndicalism and anarchism remained valid and important in terms of how to organize society after the overthrow of the capitalist system. But it made no sense to debate this question with men who, in close and direct collaboration with the bourgeoisie, were actively supporting their own capitalist states. The fundamental dividing line between revolutionaries and reformists, between internationalists and social-chauvinists, superseded the prewar categories of socialism, syndicalism and anarchism.

Behind Social-Patriotism

The formation of the Communist International in 1919, under the profound impact of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution, culminated the realignment of the left which had begun in August 1914. The development of the Zimmerwald anti-militarist movement was especially a direct precursor of the Comintern. However, by no means all of the antiwar leftists of 1914 joined the Communist International. For example, the Russian Menshevik Julius Martov, who considered himself an "orthodox" Marxist, the French syndicalist Alphonse Merrheim and the Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta all came out against the war and denounced the chauvinism and militarism of their erstwhile cothinkers. Yet all three would oppose the Communist International and instead respectively seek to revive (though without success) the Social Democratic, syndicalist and anarchist movements as they had existed before 1914. After the war, Martov and



Musée Social



French revolutionary syndicalist Alfred Rosmer conducted antiwar agitation in the paper of the metal workers union (white spaces show government censorship).

Merrheim would reunite with the main currents of Social Democracy and chauvinist syndicalism.

Why had the principal organizations of the working class, whether led by purported Marxists (Germany) or syndicalists (France), betrayed their declared principles and supported their own capitalist states in the European imperialist war? Why were men like Kropotkin, who had devoted their entire lives to the cause of social revolution, suffering imprisonment and exile for their beliefs, now defending the very regimes that had persecuted them and their comrades? Was the collapse into social-chauvinism rooted in the nature of the pre-1914 Social Democratic, syndicalist and anarchist movements? The way in which these questions were answered would in large part determine which antiwar leftists became Communists and which did not.

Like all important and complex historical developments, the social-patriotism which engulfed the European left with the outbreak of the First World War had many causes operating at different levels. At one level, social-patriotism represented the bureaucratization of the workers movement in West and Central Europe, which had increasingly manifested itself in strong opportunist tendencies. As Lenin wrote in March 1915:

"Certain strata of the working class (the bureaucracy of the labor movement and the labor aristocracy, who get a fraction of the profits from the exploitation of the colonies and from the privileged position of their 'fatherlands' in the world market), as well as petty-bourgeois sympathizers within the socialist parties, have proved the social mainstay of these [opportunist] tendencies and channels of bourgeois influence over the proletariat."

—"The Conference of the RSDLP Groups Abroad"

The difference between reformism and revolutionary leadership is not the fight for reforms, but the acceptance—"for now"—of capitalism. Reformists therefore seek to collaborate with their "own" bourgeoisie, especially with the much-looked-for "progressive wing" (a category which already by 1914 had little significance, above all in the imperialist countries). As the bourgeoisie is by its nature national in scope, the idea of a "national interest" between us and "our" bosses is a crucial underpinning of the whole reformist endeavor.

The material root of reformism is the social divisions within the working class: the privileged outlook of the so-

called "aristocracy of labor" which—under conditions in which the working class is not united for revolutionary aims—feels its immediate interests counterposed to those of the minorities, the youth, the unskilled, not to mention the oppressed colonial masses. This relatively better-off layer of the exploited is the social basis for the labor bureaucracy.

The leadership of the German trade unions had long been the core social base of the SPD right wing. The union leaders consistently and effectively opposed the campaign of the SPD left led by Rosa Luxemburg to organize mass strikes against the anti-democratic suffrage laws in Prussia. Some SPD rightists, notably Gustav Noske, were so open and vocal in their defense of German imperialist interests that they were taken to task for this by the party's immensely respected founding father, August Bebel (who died in 1913).

The bureaucratization of the French syndicalist movement was less developed than that of German Social Democracy and the division between its left and right wings not as clear-cut or longstanding. The founding fathers of the CGT such as Pelloutier and the former anarchist militant Emile Pouget were genuinely dedicated to the emancipation of the working class. However, their "children" inherited a going concern which had come to play an important and accepted role in the economic and political life of the French Third Republic.

The second generation of CGT leaders was personified by Léon Jouhaux, who became the organization's general secretary in 1909 at the age of 30. By then the CGT leadership was busy negotiating wage agreements with employers' associations and discussing legislation with Socialist parliamentarians. Even before the war, Jouhaux showed a strong inclination to abandon or water down the union movement's revolutionary traditions in order to expand its influence. Taken to task by some anarchists for lack of militancy, the Jouhaux leadership responded in 1913:

"We strongly reaffirm our right, in accord with the whole of organized labor, to modify our forms of recruitment and of propaganda in line with the modifications introduced in the domain of industry by our adversaries. In our opinion, a movement which failed to take account of the transformations going on about it and froze in a fixed attitude would be a movement without life, without influence, without future."

—quoted in Val R. Lorwin, *The French Labor Movement* (1966)

One can say of Jouhaux as of Noske that the war simply provided the perfect opportunity to realize their deeply rooted opportunist appetites.

If some Social Democratic and syndicalist leaders sup-

ported the war to further their careers, others did so out of political, and in some cases personal, cowardice. That is, they capitulated before the wave of chauvinist hysteria which engulfed the masses in August 1914. After the war Merrheim, who was then moving to the right, sought to explain away the CGT's collapse by shifting the burden of responsibility from the leadership to the ranks. If the syndicalist leaders had attempted to resist the war mobilization, he contended, "the working class...would not have left to the police the job of shooting us; they would have shot us themselves" (quoted in *French Communism in the Making*).

Merrheim was here confusing, deliberately, two different questions. One is whether the syndicalist leaders should have opposed the war; the other is how they should have acted on the basis of that opposition. Obviously, there was no question of attempting the oft-threatened general strike against the war mobilization. Even a small protest demonstration might have been adventurist in the conditions of August 1914. The principled and effective course of action for revolutionaries was to carry out antiwar propaganda and agitation in the factories and the army under conditions of illegality, even in the face of imprisonment.

Here the difference between the French syndicalists and the Russian Bolsheviks is strikingly clear. In Russia, too, the outbreak of war produced impassioned support for the government on the part of the masses, including the industrial working class. In his *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932), Trotsky recounts: "The revolutionary ideas were barely kept glowing in small and hushed circles. In the factories in those days nobody dared to call himself 'Bolshevik' for fear not only of arrest, but of a beating from the backward workers."

Nonetheless, the Bolshevik Party was militantly opposed to the war and this was generally known throughout the Russian empire. The Bolshevik deputies in the Duma (the important parliamentary body set up by the tsarist autocracy) voted against the war credits and were duly sent to exile in Siberia. In the factories, the small and hushed circles of Bolsheviks grew larger and more vocal as the initial patriotic fervor gave way to war-weariness and hostility to the tsarist regime. Precisely because the Bolsheviks had courageously opposed the social-patriotism of the masses in 1914, three years later they were able to lead the mass of workers in socialist revolution, replacing the Romanov autocracy and the bourgeois liberal government of Aleksandr Kerensky with a government of workers and peasants councils (soviets).

Russian and Austrian soldiers fraternizing at the front in 1917. Increasing war-weariness led to radicalization of European masses.



Social-patriotism cannot be fully or adequately explained by the careerist ambitions and/or political cowardice of various leading figures in the workers movement. The large majority of worker militants in West and Central Europe—heads of local unions, shop stewards, secretaries of socialist party branches—strongly supported the war while still regarding themselves as good socialists or good syndicalists. German Social Democrats saw themselves defending their organizations—and therefore the future of socialism in Germany—against tsarist Russian imperialism. French socialists and syndicalists believed they were defending the future social revolution in France against the imperialism of Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany. The ideological root cause of social-patriotism in the First World War lay in the essentially *national* conception of social revolution prevalent in all major tendencies of the European workers movement.

Polemicalizing against Stalin's doctrine of "socialism in one country" as applied to Soviet Russia in the 1920s, Trotsky observed that pre-1914 German Social Democracy had also believed in socialism in one country:

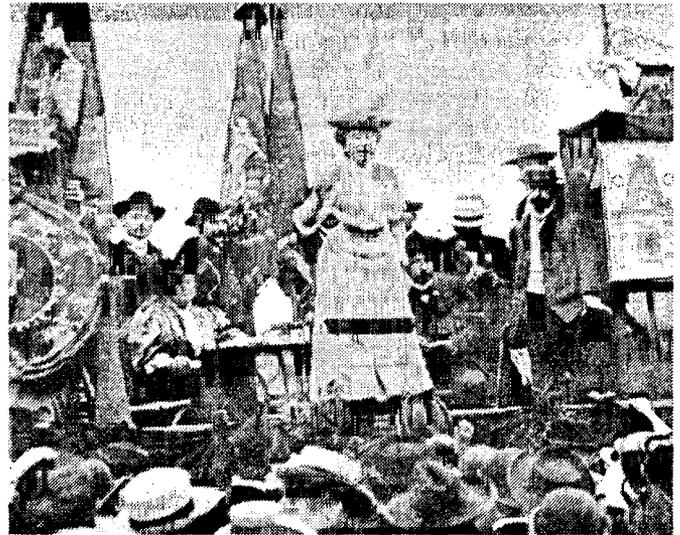
"The patriotism of the German social democrats began as a legitimate patriotism to their own party, the most powerful party of the Second International. On the basis of the highly developed German technology and the superior organizational qualities of the German people, the German social democracy prepared to build its 'own' socialist society. If we leave aside the hardened bureaucrats, careerists, parliamentary sharpers, and political crooks in general, the social-patriotism of the rank and file social democrat was derived precisely from the belief in building German socialism. It is impossible to think that hundreds of thousands of rank and file social democrats (let alone the millions of rank and file workers) wanted to defend the Hohenzollerns [ruling dynasty] or the bourgeoisie. No. They wanted to protect German industry, the German railways and highways, German technology and culture, and especially the organizations of the German working class, as the 'necessary and sufficient' national prerequisites for socialism."

—*The Third International After Lenin* (1928)

Exactly the same could be said of French nationalism and the French syndicalists. Indeed, the syndicalists were even more explicit in espousing a nationally self-sufficient workers revolution. The CGT's 1906 Charter of Amiens declared: "The trade union, which is today a fighting organization, will in the future be an organization for production and distribution, and the basis for social reorganization." Neither in this statement of basic principles nor in any other programmatic document did the French syndicalists project that such a social reorganization would or should be on a Europe-wide and ultimately worldwide basis. Nor did they consider how long a social revolution in France could survive if the rest of Europe, centrally Germany, remained capitalist.

The emphasis on decentralization and local autonomy central to anarchist and syndicalist doctrine made these movements prone to national forms of organization. The Socialist International, founded in 1889, was a federation of national parties. An attempt in 1907 to form a rival anarchist international was stillborn. The syndicalist movement—numbering tens of thousands of militants in various countries in this period—had no international body at all.

What "proletarian internationalism" meant in the syndicalist movement was mutual support among workers organizations that were essentially national in character. The leaders of the French CGT were ever willing to defend, through financial contributions and publicity, Italian or American syndicalist militants who were being persecuted by their



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Revolutionary Marxist Rosa Luxemburg, shown speaking in 1907, denounced growing conservatism of German Social Democratic Party leaders even before the war.

own bourgeois states. But it would have been unthinkable for French syndicalists that the leaders of *Unione Sindacale Italiana* or the American IWW should have a decisive say in determining the program and policies of the French workers movement. And of course the reverse was just as true.

The *contradiction* in French syndicalism between its anti-militarism and hostility to imperialism on the one hand and its nationally limited concept of social revolution on the other was exploded by the First World War. Some leading syndicalists like Monatte and Rosmer moved forward to Communist internationalism; others such as Jouhaux and eventually Merrheim moved backward to trade-union reformism.

Kropotkin and Anarcho-Chauvinism

The material pressures underlying social-patriotism in the mass workers organizations were not applicable to the anarchist movement, made up as it was of relatively small groups of adherents to this philosophy. Kropotkin, Jean Grave, Max Nettlau and the other pro-war anarchists were not motivated by bureaucratic careerism, nor were they confronted with pervasive chauvinist prejudices among their rank-and-file supporters. Quite the contrary. The large majority of anarchists were appalled by the bellicosity of Kropotkin and his co-thinkers.

They were also greatly puzzled by it. Errico Malatesta accused his old comrade of a kind of political amnesia: "Kropotkin seems to have forgotten the antagonism of the classes, the necessity of economic emancipation, and all the anarchist teachings" (quoted in *The Anarchist Prince*). A group of Russian anarchists in Switzerland found the support by prominent anarchists to the Western imperialist states and their tsarist allies to be "totally incomprehensible." Many non-anarchist leftists voiced similar views, among them Lenin, who had respected Kropotkin's idealism. When Kropotkin died in 1921, having returned to Russia from England, Lenin commented to Alfred Rosmer: "It's a pity that at the end of his life there was an inexplicable

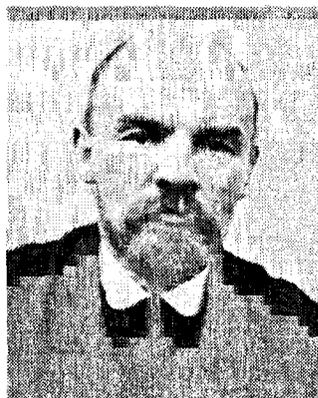
lapse into chauvinism" (quoted in *Lenin's Moscow* [1971]).

So where did the phenomenon of anarcho-chauvinism come from? As we have previously indicated, by the 1890s the anarchist movement, launched by Mikhail Bakunin a generation earlier, had divided into two main currents. The propagandists, best represented by Kropotkin, devoted themselves to expounding the principles of anarchism in books and pamphlets, public talks and educational classes. The syndicalists concentrated their efforts on organizing and building trade unions.

Once it became clear that anarchists like Kropotkin, Elisée Reclus and his son Paul, Jean Grave and Max Nettlau neither advocated nor practiced individual terrorism, they gained a certain acceptance in bourgeois intellectual circles. The anarchist propagandists thus came to inhabit the world of universities, academic journals and scholarly societies. Their day-to-day lives were indistinguishable from the bourgeois intellectuals with whom they constantly interacted and engaged in "civilized" debate over social and political theory.

Kropotkin's home in the London suburb of Bromley became a salon for "progressive" representatives of the European intelligentsia like the Anglo-Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw and Danish literary critic Georg Brandes. The Kropotkin who regularly attended meetings of the posh Royal Geographical Society was a far cry from the young radical agitator who worked among artisans and factory workers in Switzerland and France and declared, "Everything is good for us that falls outside legality."

The anarchists dogmatically maintained that any leftist militant who became a parliamentary deputy or salaried trade-union official would inevitably abandon his principles and accommodate himself to the bourgeois order. Yet leading anarchist intellectuals were in their own way corrupted and co-opted into bourgeois society. They had replaced social struggle in the streets, factories and rural villages with academic debate. Like Social Democratic parliamentarians and syndicalist union officials, Kropotkin and other prominent anarchist propagandists became habituated to the "liberal" bourgeois order in West and Central Europe in the era before World War I. Hence they defended their "own" capi-



B.D. Vigilev



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Lenin and Trotsky became leaders of the left wing of the international workers movement during World War I.

talist states which they had come to accept, albeit not in a fully conscious way, as guardians of their political freedom and intellectual respectability.

A significant exception was Errico Malatesta, who remained involved with the workers movement in his native Italy, where he and his comrades often operated under conditions of illegality. At one point Malatesta was convicted of belonging to a "seditious association" and imprisoned on the island of Lampedusa but managed to escape and make his way back to London. This veteran Bakuninist—the last of the footloose revolutionary adventurers of mid-19th century Europe—was increasingly critical of the literary and peaceable direction which the anarchist movement was taking. He wrote in 1906:

"It seems to me today that the anarchists have let themselves fall into the opposite fault to the violent excesses. We now need rather to react against a certain tendency to compromise and a quiet life which is displayed in our circle. It is more necessary now to revive the languishing revolutionary ardor, the spirit of sacrifice, the love of risk."

—quoted in James Joll, *The Anarchists* (1964)

But a revival of revolutionary ardor and the spirit of self-sacrifice did not occur in the anarchist movement, which a decade later splintered under the impact of the First World War. Rather the revival of revolutionary ardor found its expression in the newly formed Communist International. The Bolshevik-led proletarian seizure of state power in Russia in October 1917 had an electrifying effect on advanced workers and radical leftists—not only in Europe and America but also in the colonial world, where militant workers, anti-colonial fighters, emancipated women and leftist intellectuals flocked to the banner of Communism.

The founding of the Communist International in 1919 not only polarized the Socialist parties, whose best elements sought to become Communists (while the worst would make a career of anti-Communism up to and including the physical liquidation of revolutionaries). It had a similarly fundamental effect on the anarchists and syndicalists: the revolutionary elements either rallied to the side of the October Revolution (e.g., Victor Serge, Alfred Rosmer and American IWW leader James P. Cannon, later the founder of American Trotskyism) or found themselves abruptly marginalized as footnotes to history, which was the fate of such once-promising organizations as the IWW or the Socialist Labour Party based in Scotland.

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Part 7: Red October and the Founding of the Communist International

Some time after the Bolshevik Revolution, Lenin ob-

served that of all the countries in West Europe the one which most resembled pre-1917 tsarist Russia was Spain. There, too, a decadent monarchical regime was propped up by a state church mired in medieval obscurantism. A large peasantry was brutally exploited by a landowning class derived from the old feudal nobility. There existed a raw, combative working class in good part made up of peasant youth who retained close ties to their families in the countryside. And like the tsarist "prison house of peoples," the Spanish state also contained within its boundaries large oppressed nationalities, the Basques and Catalans.

In Spain, and elsewhere in Latin Europe, the anarchists and syndicalists constituted a significant political tendency and were generally viewed as the left wing of the workers movement. In tsarist Russia, by contrast, the anarchists were a marginal current. There the revolutionary Marxists, i.e., Lenin's Bolsheviks, constituted a mass workers party based on the industrial proletariat and the central core of the radical left. The Russian anarchist movement consisted of many small, competing groups of declassed intellectuals with an admixture of lumpenproletarian elements. The organizational weakness of anarchism in Russia is all the more striking in that the two principal theoreticians of anarchism—Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin—were both émigré Russian radicals.

Even in periods of mass revolutionary upheaval, the Russian anarchists did not play an important role. Neither during the Revolution of 1905 nor in 1917 did any significant section of the workers or peasants follow the lead of the anarchists. In fact, in October 1917 and the ensuing Civil War, many Russian anarchists followed the lead of the Bolsheviks and loyally served under the Soviet government of Lenin and Trotsky.

Why did the anarchists play such an insignificant role in Russia? This question was addressed by Trotsky in discussing André Malraux's novel, *The Conquerors*, which sought to justify Stalin's disastrous policies toward the Chinese Revolution of the mid-1920s. In this novel, the Chinese anarchist agitator Hong is portrayed as a primitive revolutionary

hothead who does not understand the supposed need for

the working class to collaborate with the nationalist bourgeoisie. A character closely modeled on Mikhail Borodin, Moscow's chief agent in China at the time, opposes Hong. It is said in regard to the Moscow emissary that "all the Bolsheviks of his generation" were distinguished by the struggle against the anarchists. To this assertion, Trotsky responded:

"Historically it is false. Anarchism was unable to raise its head in Russia not because the Bolsheviks fought successfully against it but because they had first dug up the ground under its feet. Anarchism, if it does not live within the four walls of intellectuals' cafes and editorial offices, but has penetrated more deeply, translates the psychology of despair in the masses and signifies the political punishment for the deceptions of democracy and the treachery of opportunism. The boldness of Bolshevism in posing the revolutionary problems and in teaching their solution left no room for the development of anarchism."

—"The Strangled Revolution" (February 1931),
in *Leon Trotsky on China* (1976)

How Did Bolshevism Undercut Anarchism in Russia?

From its inception in 1903, the Bolshevik Party sought to organize the working class for the revolutionary overthrow of the tsarist autocracy independently of and, if necessary, against the policies of the liberal bourgeoisie. This was a central difference with the Mensheviks, whose policy was one of collaborating with the liberal bourgeoisie. During the Revolution of 1905 the only serious attempt at armed insurrection was undertaken by the Bolsheviks in Moscow in December of that momentous year. Georgi Plekhanov, the pre-eminent spokesman for "orthodox" Marxism in Russia, denounced the December uprising as adventurist and railed against "Bolshevik Bakuninism."

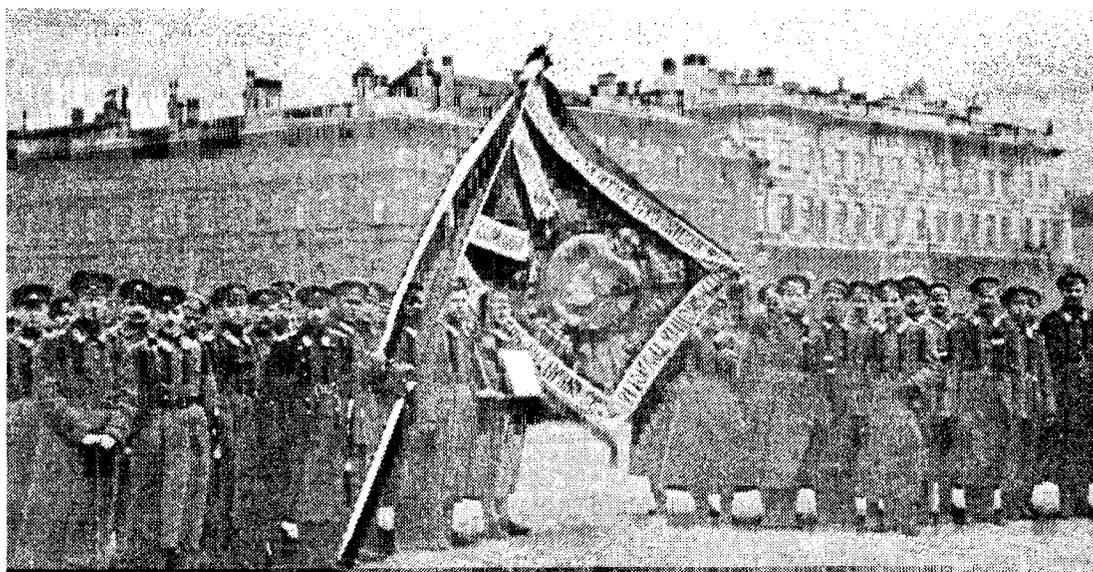
In his own way, Lenin later recognized that his party had attracted more than a few revolutionary militants who might otherwise have gone over to anarchism. He recounted that following the defeat of the 1905 Revolution, a faction of "Left" Bolsheviks emerged which, among other policies, insisted on boycotting elections to the tsarist Duma (parliament). This faction fight culminated in a split in 1908. Nonetheless, Lenin pointed out that among these "Lefts" there "were many splendid revolutionaries who subsequently were (and still are) commendable members of the Communist Party" ("*Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* [May 1920]):

Prior to 1917, Lenin did not believe that the overthrow of the tsarist autocracy could lead directly to a workers state and the expropriation of the capitalist class. Instead he envisioned a transitory radical-democratic regime expressed in the formula of "the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry." However, under the impact of World War I Lenin's views underwent a rapid development. Thus, following the overthrow of the tsar in February 1917, he called for a state of the "Paris Commune type" (i.e., a proletarian dictatorship) based on the abolition of the police, army and bureaucracy and the formation of a people's militia. This was premised on the perspective of spreading the



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At the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920, Trotsky defended an orientation toward winning over anarchist and syndicalist militants.



VAAP

On eve of October Revolution Putilov factory workers present to army regiment banner reading: "Long Live All-Russian Revolution as Prologue to Social Revolution in Europe."

revolution to the advanced capitalist countries of West Europe. Lenin's program and perspective, expressed in his "April Theses," were essentially similar to the concept of "permanent revolution" which Trotsky had advanced more than a decade before. In this way the basis was laid for the partnership between Lenin and Trotsky which led the first successful workers revolution in history.

When Lenin arrived in Russia from exile in April 1917 and called for "workers revolution," the Menshevik I. P. Goldenberg commented derisively: "Lenin has now made himself a candidate for one European throne that has been vacant for thirty years—the throne of Bakunin! Lenin's new words echo something old—the superannuated truths of primitive anarchism" (quoted in N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917: A Personal Record* [1984]). This view was shared by many anarchists who believed that Lenin had actually, though not yet formally, broken with Marxism and was moving toward their program. Thus one Gregory Raiva wrote in September 1917:

"From the standpoint of Marxism, of 'scientific socialism,' the most consistent Marxists are undoubtedly the Menshevik Social Democrats.... And it is entirely natural that the Social Democrats, cleaving to the views of Marx, should regard the present Russian Revolution as a bourgeois revolution. It is entirely natural that the Social Democratic Marxists should be consistently striving for a coalition, striving to establish ties with the *bourgeoisie*. For, according to the Marxist programme, the time for a social revolution has not yet arrived....

"It stands to reason that the Bolsheviks, as revolutionaries, are dearer and closer to us anarchists. For, in point of fact, their intransigent revolutionary position is due not to their rigid adherence to the teachings of Marx but to the fact that they have shed the scholasticism of their apostle and adopted a revolutionary—that is, an anti-Marxist—point of view....

"We rejoice that it is the Bolsheviks and not the Mensheviks who are everywhere on the rise. But we regret that the Bolsheviks have not yet shaken the dust of Marxism from their feet. The Bolsheviks are at the crossroads: Marxism or anarchism?"

—reproduced in Paul Avrich, ed., *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution* (1973)

From a present-day vantage point, the above view appears absurd. Yet in his own way, Raiva was registering an important development in the history of the international workers movement: Lenin's exposure of the *reformist falsification* of Marxism prevalent in the Second (Socialist) International

and expounded by its leading theoreticians such as Karl Kautsky and Plekhanov.

Lenin's *State and Revolution* and Its Impact

As we have seen, the collapse into chauvinism of the Second International—and especially the German Social Democracy—with the outbreak of World War I came as an unexpected shock to Lenin. This impelled him into a critical study of conventionally accepted Marxist doctrine as represented above all by Kautsky. In collaboration with other Bolsheviks schooled in economics, notably Nikolai Bukharin, Lenin studied the changes in the world economy underlying the war which had turned Europe into a slaughterhouse. His findings were summarized in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, published in 1916, which explained the material basis of the opportunist wing of the labor movement.

Lenin also made an exhaustive study of Marx and Engels' writings on the state. These included theoretically important letters to their followers, such as the German workers leader August Bebel, which were not published until *decades after* they were written and were therefore unknown to most—indeed, the large majority of—socialist (or anarchist and syndicalist) worker militants. Written in the summer of 1917, when Lenin had gone underground to avoid imprisonment by the bourgeois liberal regime of Aleksandr Kerensky, *State and Revolution* expounded a genuinely Marxist understanding of this question.

It was generally known that Marx and Engels maintained that the workers movement should fight for a democratic republic in those states ruled by monarchical or bonapartist regimes. As against the anarchists, they also advocated that socialist parties utilize parliamentary elections and representation to organize and register their support among the workers and other oppressed and exploited sections of society. However, the leaders and theoreticians of the Second International distorted these positions into a doctrine that a socialist society could and should be brought about through parliamentary means. As Lenin put it in *State and Revolution*: "The opportunists of modern Social-Democracy accepted the bourgeois political forms of a parliamentary, democratic state as the limit which cannot be overstepped; they broke their

foreheads praying before this idol, denouncing as Anarchism every attempt to *destroy* these forms.”

The reformists assumed that once a socialist party gained enough votes to secure a parliamentary majority, the ruling capitalist party or parties would peacefully turn over to it the government ministries. Some diehard reactionary generals, police chiefs, etc., might have to be removed from their posts, but the large majority of the officer corps, police force and state bureaucracy were expected to serve loyally under a socialist government as long as it had the sanction of a parliamentary majority.

As Lenin emphasized, the fundamental lesson which Marx and Engels drew from the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871 was that the working class could take political power only through *smashing* the existing bourgeois state machinery (police, army, prisons, courts, etc.). Indeed, the Parisian proletariat rose up against and was later suppressed by a bourgeois *parliamentary* government elected on the basis of universal male suffrage throughout France. Marx and Engels, the Proudhonists and Bakunin *all* strongly supported the Paris Commune and held it up as a *model* for social revolution in the future, however much they differed in assessing its nature and the historical lessons to be drawn therefrom. As Lenin stated: “Marx agrees with Proudhon in that they both stand for the ‘destruction’ of the contemporary state machinery. This common ground of Marxism with Anarchism (both with Proudhon and Bakunin) neither the opportunists nor the Kautskyists wish to see, for on this point they have themselves departed from Marxism.”

Today, the popular identification of democracy with parliamentarism is even more widespread and unchallenged than it was when Lenin wrote *State and Revolution*. It is therefore important to call attention to Lenin’s insistence that:

“The way out of parliamentarism is to be found, of course, not in the abolition of the representative institutions and the elective principle, but in the conversion of the representative institutions from mere ‘talking shops’ into working bodies....

“The venal and rotten parliamentarism of bourgeois society is replaced in the Commune by institutions in which freedom of opinion and discussion does not degenerate into deception, for the parliamentarians must themselves work, must themselves execute their own laws, must themselves verify their results in actual life, must themselves be directly responsible to their electorate.”

The best historical example of representative institutions of workers democracy are the soviets (councils) of workers’ deputies which were the main organizational base of the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Practically every time Marx and Engels wrote against or about anarchism, they emphasized that the disappearance of the state (i.e., a special apparatus of repression) is a central condition of communist society. Nor is the “withering away of the state” projected into the remote future. As Lenin noted in *State and Revolution*, from its inception a workers state (the dictatorship of the proletariat) is radically different from a bourgeois state or any past state based on the rule of a property-owning and exploiting class. Thus the police and standing army are replaced by a popular militia. There is no caste of professional government bureaucrats—rather, positions of administrative authority are filled by workers who are democratically elected. But this projection could be only partially realized by the Bolshevik regime, given the extreme poverty and imperialist encirclement of revolutionary Russia.

Where then does the basic difference between Marxism and anarchism on the state and revolution lie? Lenin answers this question quite precisely:

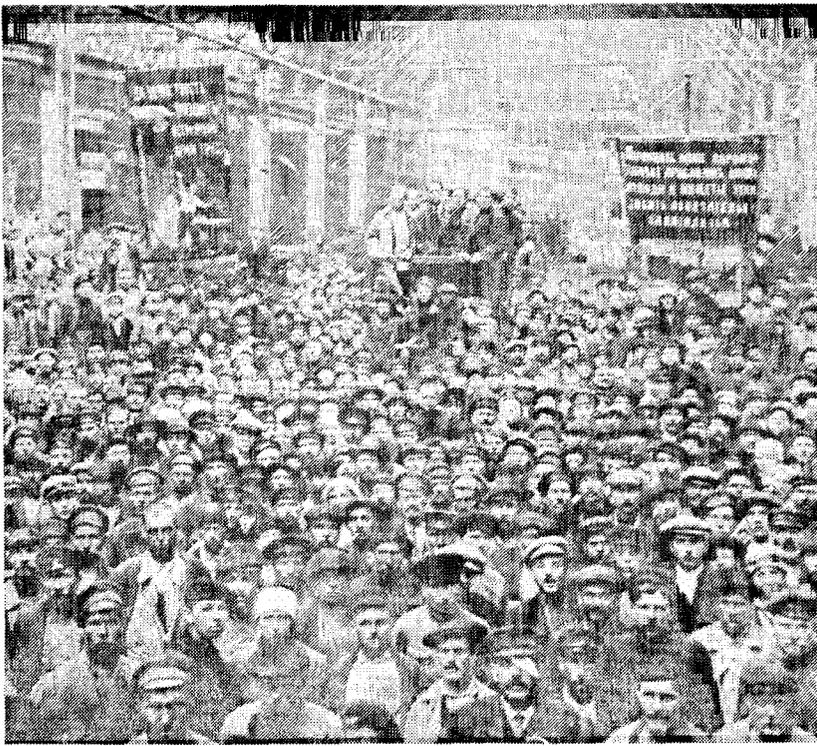
“Marx chooses the sharpest and clearest way of stating his position against the Anarchists: when they have cast off the yoke of the capitalists, ought the workers to ‘lay down arms,’ or ought they to use them against the capitalists in order to crush their resistance? But what is the systematic use of arms by one class against the other, if not a ‘transitional form’ of state?”

Though written shortly before the October Revolution, *State and Revolution* was not published in Russia until some months afterwards. And it was not accessible in the major West European languages (German, French, English, Italian) until late 1918 or 1919. Hence the impact of this book on the Western left was greatly enhanced by its author’s stature as the principal leader of the first successful proletarian revolution in history. Nonetheless, one should not overstate this factor. Anarchist and syndicalist militants were generally independent-minded types who were prone to view the Russian Revolution and the policies and doctrines of its leaders with a critical eye. It was the intrinsic content of *State and Revolution* more than the authority of the chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of Soviet Russia which



Der Spiegel photos

Right-wing paramilitary Freikorps (left) crushed 1919 Bavarian “Soviet Republic” in Munich, which was defended by workers militias. Leading anarchists and Communists were killed in aftermath.



Viktor Bulla

Workers' meeting of Putilov factory for re-election of Petrograd Soviet, 1920.

changed the attitude of many an anarchist and syndicalist toward Marxism. Alfred Rosmer, who began his revolutionary career as an anarchist, was then won to the cause of syndicalism and under the impact of the war and the Bolshevik Revolution became a leading figure in the French and international Communist movement, described Lenin's book as a "pleasant revelation" for anarchist and syndicalist militants.

Anarchism and the Experience of Revolution and Counterrevolution

While anarchists and syndicalists found Lenin's *State and Revolution* a pleasant revelation, there still remained the fundamental difference over the proletarian dictatorship. Many were won to this concept and program not primarily as a result of theoretical discussion and debate but on the basis of the actual experience of the Russian Revolution and, more generally, the revolutionary turbulence which engulfed Europe in the wake of the First World War.

The October insurrection and its immediate aftermath were relatively bloodless. However, the reactionary elements, centered around the ex-tsarist generals, retreated to the peripheral regions of the former tsarist empire where they organized counterrevolutionary armies known as Whites. From mid-1918 until 1920 a full-scale and savage civil war raged between the Red and White armies from the Baltic coast to eastern Siberia. The Whites were supported, armed and financed by the various imperialist powers (Germany, Britain, France, the United States, Japan) which moreover sent their own expeditionary forces into Soviet Russia. At the same time, the capitalist world sought to starve the fledgling workers state through an economic blockade.

Under the impact of these events, Russian anarchism fractured. During the bloody Civil War, anarchists ranged from

active pro-Soviet revolutionists to harmless utopians to anti-Communist terrorist criminals. Paul Avrich, a present-day, highly sympathetic historian of Russian anarchism, recounts: "The campaign of terrorism continued for many months, reaching a climax in September 1919, when a group of 'underground anarchists,' in league with Left SRs [Social Revolutionaries], bombed the Moscow headquarters of the Communist party, killing or wounding sixty-seven people" (*The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*). The most significant counterrevolutionary 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.

At the same time, as Avrich notes, there was "a small army of anarchists who took up weapons against the Whites during the Civil War." In August 1919, Lenin described these "Soviet anarchists," as they were called, as "our best comrades and friends." An outstanding example was Vladimir ("Bill") Shatov. As a young man Shatov had emigrated to the United States where he became an agitator for the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World. He returned to Russia right after the

February Revolution and threw himself into the workers movement in St. Petersburg (Petrograd). In October he was a member of the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet which, under Trotsky's leadership, organized the insurrection against the Kerensky government. During the Civil War, Shatov served as an officer in the Tenth Red Army and then as minister of transport in the Far Eastern Republic of Soviet Russia.

Shatov did not join the Communist Party and claimed continued adherence to the ideals of anarchism, while criticizing its naive attitude toward the harsh realities of social revolution. He explained his views to the Russian-American anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman after they had just arrived in Russia in 1920. According to Goldman's account:

"The Russian experience had taught him [Shatov] that we anarchists had been the romanticists of revolution, forgetful of the cost it would entail, the frightful price the enemies of the Revolution would exact, the fiendish methods they would resort to in order to destroy its gains. One cannot fight fire and sword with only logic and justice of one's ideal. The counter-revolutionists had combined to isolate and starve Russia, and the blockade was taking a frightful toll of human life. The [imperialist] intervention and the destruction in its wake, the numerous White attacks, costing oceans of blood, the hordes of [White generals] Denikin, Kolchak and Yudenich; their pogroms, bestial revenge, and the general havoc wrought had imposed on the Revolution a warfare that its most far-sighted exponents had never dreamed about."

—quoted in Avrich, *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution* (1973)

Here, Shatov was in fact rejecting a key aspect of anarchist dogma. His recognition that "we" had not foreseen "the frightful price the enemies of the Revolution would exact" went right to the heart of the anarchist worldview. The central theoretical premise of anarchism is the existence

of natural moral principles shared by all members of humanity. Addressing an international anarchist conference in 1907, the veteran Italian Bakuninist Errico Malatesta declared: "The anarchist revolution which we desire far exceeds the interests of a single class: it proposes the complete liberation of enslaved humanity, from the triple viewpoint, economic, political and moral" (reproduced as "Syndicalism: A Critique" in George Woodcock, ed., *The Anarchist Reader* [1977]). Anarchists implicitly assumed that after the revolution members of the old ruling class would either be converted to the libertarian outlook or would, at any rate, accede to the popular will and reconcile themselves to the new free and egalitarian society.

Additionally, most anarchists, with their parochial focus on decentralization and their disdain for scientific Marxist analysis of capitalism as a world system, did not bother themselves about the question of foreign military intervention against the country where revolution would first come to power. To be sure, there were exceptions. A few years before the war, two leading French syndicalists, Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget, wrote a book, *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution: Syndicalism and the Cooperative Commonwealth*, in the form of a fable of the future. After the syndicalists come to power through a revolutionary general strike, France is threatened with invasion by a coalition of bourgeois states led by Britain and Germany. But this threat is easily quashed by the invention and deployment of new, fantastically powerful weapons, which render impregnable the frontiers of the French cooperative commonwealth. Thus they resorted to science fiction to overcome the obvious problem with their vision of revolution.

Writing in late 1918, Lenin stated what had by then become a self-evident truth: "If the exploiters are defeated in one country only—and this, of course, is typical, since a simultaneous revolution in a number of countries is a rare exception—they *still* remain *stronger* than the exploited, for the international connections of the exploiters are enormous" (*The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*). A social revolution anywhere in Europe clearly entailed civil war and likely foreign military intervention. The main military forces which overthrew the Hungarian Soviet Republic in early 1919 were the Romanian and Czech armies, both supported by France and advised by French officers. Every-

one knew that a workers insurrection in Germany would immediately confront the Freikorps—well-organized and heavily armed right-wing paramilitary forces—and, if victorious, would then face the armies of the Western imperialist powers—France, Britain and, in reserve, the U.S.

Many anarchists and syndicalists therefore came to recognize the need for the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat as a result of life itself, often in the form of harrowing personal experience. A good example was the German anarchist and poet Erich Mühsam. In the spring of 1919, Mühsam and a number of fellow anarchists were centrally involved in the first phase of the so-called Bavarian Soviet Republic in Munich, which was crushed by the Freikorps. In the White terror which followed, Gustav Landauer, a well-known anarchist and pacifist intellectual, was beaten to death by the Freikorps fascists; Eugen Leviné and other leaders of the Bavarian Communists were executed by the counterrevolutionary regime. Mühsam escaped death but was sentenced to six years in prison. From prison, in late 1919 Mühsam appealed to his fellow anarchists:

"The theoretical and practical theses of Lenin on the accomplishment of the revolution and the communist tasks of the proletariat have provided a new basis for our action.... There are no more insurmountable obstacles to a unification of the whole revolutionary proletariat. It is true that the communist anarchists have had to yield on the most important point of disagreement between the two great tendencies of socialism. They have had to abandon Bakunin's negative attitude to the dictatorship of the proletariat and accept Marx's opinion on this point."

—quoted in Alfred Rosmer, *Lenin's Moscow* (1971)

And in this period tens of thousands of anarchist and syndicalist militants flocked into the parties of the newly formed Communist International.

Rise of Communism, Eclipse of Anarchism and Syndicalism

It was far from easy to bring about the unity of the revolutionary proletariat in the parties of the newly formed Communist International. Welding together former left Social Democrats and former anarchists and syndicalists into a politically homogeneous cadre would have been a difficult and conflict-ridden process in the best of circumstances. It was made far more difficult by the conditions of revolutionary (and counterrevolutionary) turmoil under which many Communist parties came into being. Membership in a Communist party could not simply be based on defense of Soviet Russia against the Whites and imperialists and on theoretical acceptance of the proletarian dictatorship as a transition to a classless and stateless society. There also had to be basic agreement on strategic tasks and tactics—for example, whether and how to engage in parliamentary elections, policies toward the reformist-led trade unions—which governed the party's day-to-day activities.

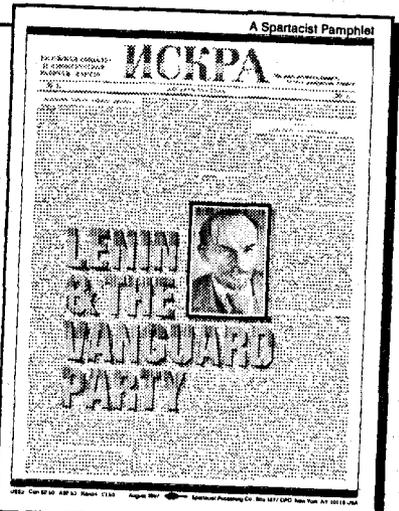
The question of recruiting and assimilating anarchist and syndicalist militants into the Communist International (Comintern) was discussed at its Second Congress, held in Moscow in July-August 1920. Opposition to this perspective was voiced by Paul Levi, a young lawyer who had become the principal leader of the German Communist Party (KPD) following the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht by the Freikorps in early 1919. Standing on the far right wing of the Communist movement, Levi argued that the overwhelming majority of workers in Central and

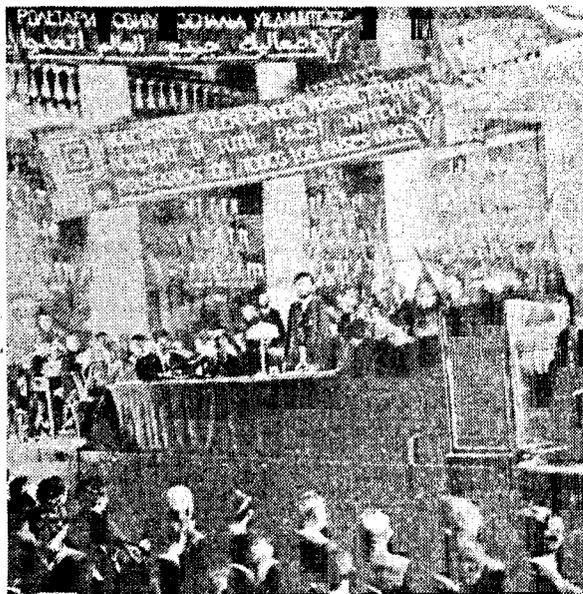
Lenin and the Vanguard Party

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Labor Herald



Workers Monthly

Left: Founding conference of Red International of Labor Unions, 1921. Executive Committee included former syndicalist leaders such as Tom Mann, William Z. Foster and Andrés Nin.

West Europe already understood the need for a party, dismissing the anarchists and syndicalists as an ultraleft fringe of no account.

To this, Trotsky responded that the Social Democrats, too, understood the need for a party—one which would contain and, if necessary, suppress the revolutionary impulses of the workers:

“Just because I know that the party is indispensable, and am very well aware of the value of the party, just because I see [the German Social Democrat] Scheidemann on the one side and, on the other, American or Spanish or French syndicalists who not only wish to fight against the bourgeoisie but who, unlike Scheidemann, really want to tear its head off—for this reason I say I prefer to discuss with these Spanish, American and French comrades in order to prove to them that the party is indispensable for the fulfillment of the historical mission which is placed upon them—the destruction of the bourgeoisie. I will try to prove this to them in a comradely way, on the basis of my own experience.”

—“Speech on Comrade Zinoviev’s Report on the Role of the Party,” in *The First Five Years of the Communist International* (1972)

Unfortunately, Levi’s approach toward anarchists and syndicalists moving toward Communism was very different. In late 1919, he had deliberately driven some tens of thousands of “lefts” out of the KPD, branding them as “putschists.” Many of these then formed their own party, the Communist Workers Party of Germany, an unstable amalgam of anarchist and Communist politics. Lenin personally intervened to heal this breach in the German Communist movement but did not succeed, in large measure due to Levi’s near-pathological hostility to anarchism and anarchists. Less than two years later, Levi provoked his own expulsion from the KPD and subsequently opposed international Communism from a social-democratic standpoint.

Despite their positive orientation toward anarchist and syndicalist militants, Lenin, Trotsky and the other Bolshevik leaders understood that the new Communist parties in the capitalist world could not be built on the basis of abstention from parliamentary politics and the mass trade unions. Nor could they long include in their ranks large minorities which advocated these policies. This would condemn the nascent Communist parties to political paralysis and permanent fac-

tionalism. The Bolshevik leaders sought to win over would-be Communists imbued with anarchist and syndicalist views and prejudices through comradely discussion and political persuasion, not organizational ultimatums.

The most important contribution to this discussion was Lenin’s pamphlet *“Left-Wing” Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, written in conjunction with the Second Comintern Congress and immediately made available in all major European languages. In arguing that Communists should intervene in parliamentary politics and work in mass trade unions led by Social Democratic reformists or even reactionaries, Lenin drew heavily on the experience of the Bolshevik Party in tsarist Russia. He pointed out that “Bolshevism took shape, developed and became steered in the long years of struggle against *petty-bourgeois revolutionism*, which smacks of anarchism, or borrows something from the latter.”

The views and positions which Lenin polemicized against were prevalent in the nascent American Communist movement. For example, revolutionary dual unionism, exemplified by the syndicalist IWW, was an unchallenged article of faith for the American radical left of the day. Among the leaders of the American Communist movement was a former organizer for the IWW, James P. Cannon, who would later become a founding leader of American Trotskyism. Looking back in the 1950s, Cannon recounted:

“The traditional sectarianism of the Americans was expressed most glaringly in their attempt to construct revolutionary unions outside the existing labor movement; their refusal to fight for ‘immediate demands’ in the course of the class struggle for the socialist goal; and their strongly entrenched anti-parliamentarianism.... All that hodge-podge of ultra-radicalism was practically wiped out of the American movement in 1920-21 by Lenin. He did it, not by an administrative order backed up by police powers, but by the simple device of publishing a pamphlet called *‘Left-Wing’ Communism: An Infantile Disorder*.”

—*The First Ten Years of American Communism* (1962)

The effect of *“Left-Wing” Communism* was complementary to that of *State and Revolution*. The latter won many anarchists and syndicalists to the theoretical principles of the proletarian revolution; the former convinced them of the strategy and tactics necessary to translate these principles into effective practice.

Of course, Lenin's writings were not magical formulas which changed the minds of all left-wing activists overnight. Nor did the Bolshevik leaders demand instantaneous agreement among their supporters on all questions. At this time many anarchists and syndicalists ardently defended Soviet Russia against the imperialists, sympathized with the world Communist movement but still rejected the concept of a revolutionary vanguard party.

It was in large part to attract such militants that the Red International of Labor Unions, also known as the Profintern, was formed in mid-1920. Its chairman was Salomon Lozovsky, a dissident right Bolshevik who, while in France in 1914-17, had worked closely with revolutionary syndicalists like Pierre Monatte and Alfred Rosmer in organizing the antiwar left. The number two man in the Profintern was the young Andrés Nin, formerly a prominent militant in the anarcho-syndicalist Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) of Spain, the only mass workers organization in the world claiming the Bakuninist tradition. The Profintern's founding manifesto declared as its basic program "the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship, the creation of a world republic of Soviets, and a close and indestructible alliance between the communist parties and the trade unions." The manifesto concluded:

"The unions, like other workers' organizations, are not an end in themselves, but a means to an end. And therefore neither a split nor unity is an absolute. It is not necessary to split the unions, but it is necessary to expel from them the treacherous group of leaders who are making the unions into a plaything of the imperialists."

—reproduced in Jane Degras, ed., *The Communist International, 1919-1943: Documents*, Volume I (1971)

The formation of the Profintern split the syndicalist movement in many countries along clear left-right lines. In general, those syndicalist leaders who opposed affiliation with the Profintern abandoned any pretense at revolutionary politics and allied themselves with outright reformists and social-chauvinists. A good case in point was Alphonse Merrheim. Merrheim had been a protégé of Fernand Pelloutier, the founding theoretician of French syndicalism, and was head of the important metalworkers federation of the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT). As we have seen, with the outbreak of the First World War the central CGT leadership around its general secretary Léon Jouhaux (who became a "commissioner of the nation") helped mobilize the French working class for the imperialist slaughter. Merrheim opposed the war from a pacifist rather than a revolutionary perspective, and played a significant role in the antiwar Zimmerwald movement, where he occupied a centrist position.

In France, as in the rest of Europe, the immediate postwar period saw explosive class struggles (notably a nationwide railway strike in 1920) and a sharp leftward radicalization of the masses. The rapidly growing left wing of the CGT, led by Monatte, Rosmer and Fernand Loriot, demanded that the organization affiliate with the Profintern and this issue led to a split in 1921. In this factional struggle, Merrheim supported the arch-chauvinist Jouhaux against his own former comrades, revolutionary syndicalists who had become supporters of international Communism. Merrheim now opposed the world Communist movement in the name of the sovereignty of the French nation, denouncing Lenin for seeking to impose a "dictatorship on all parties, all nations."

Not all anarchists and syndicalists who rejected and opposed the Communist movement became, like Merrheim, labor lieutenants or apologists for their own imperialist bourgeoisie. The old Italian Bakuninist Errico Malatesta and veteran American syndicalist Vincent St. John, the principal and highly respected leader of the IWW, initially adopted an open-minded, wait-and-see attitude toward the Bolshevik Revolution. However, by the early 1920s their anti-Communist prejudices came to the fore and they turned strongly hostile to Soviet Russia and its international supporters. Men like Malatesta and St. John were too fixed in their thinking to be won to revolutionary Marxism as expounded and developed by Lenin and Trotsky. But they were also too fixed in their thinking and too principled to make common cause with right-wing labor bureaucrats and capitalist reactionaries under the banner of anti-Communism.

Malatesta and St. John were revolutionaries of the pre-1914 era—personally honorable and even heroic—whose doctrines and program had no meaning in the world issuing out of the European-wide imperialist war and the proletarian revolution in Russia. They were thereby condemned to sectarian irrelevance. The generation of young workers and leftist intellectuals whose hatred of the bourgeois order was formed amid the mud and blood of the battlefields, whose hope for a better future was inspired by Red October, rallied en masse to the Communist International.

Yet despite the wave of revolutionary ferment which engulfed Europe after the war, and the growth of mass Communist parties, the bourgeois order survived with the indispensable support of the reformist labor bureaucrats, both social-democratic and syndicalist. Soviet Russia, utterly devastated after seven years of imperialist war and civil war, remained isolated and encircled by hostile and more powerful imperialist states. Thus came to power the bureaucratic regime under J.V. Stalin, which usurped political power from the proletariat to implement its counterrevolutionary, anti-Bolshevik program of "socialism in one country," in the process murdering the leaders and cadres of the Old Bolsheviks. Yet it still required decades of Stalinist repression and lies eroding the socialist consciousness of the working class, and of systematic betrayal of revolutionary possibilities abroad, before the final surrender to capitalist counterrevolution destroyed the Soviet Union in 1991-92.

Anarchism vs. the Spanish Revolution

By the 1920s, the only country in the world where anarchism remained a significant movement was Spain. For that reason, the Spanish Revolution and Civil War of 1936-39 was a decisive historical test of anarchism. The consequence of anarchist hegemony among the militant workers of Spain was that proletarian revolution was strangled and the militant detachments of the working class were drowned in blood by bourgeois reaction. Indeed, for all their "revolutionary" posturing, the bureaucratic anarchist leaders of the CNT played the same role as the despised Social Democrats in Germany in 1919, whose treacherous coalition with the bourgeoisie to stave off workers revolution led them to front for the murder of revolutionaries like Rosa Luxemburg.

Beginning with the July 1936 military coup of Fascist general Francisco Franco, Spain entered into a revolutionary situation of *dual power*, between the popular-front bourgeois government of the "Republican Left" and the armed

workers militias who patrolled the streets, organized the war effort and undertook the disarming of the army and police. Workers collectives managed the factories and agricultural production was taken over by farm collectives. Bourgeois class rule in Spain survived principally because of the determination of the Stalinists and social democrats to uphold capitalist property relations.

The stronghold of proletarian dual power in Spain was the militant working class of Catalonia, where land seizures and attempts at workers control of industry had begun long before Franco's uprising. Franco's attempted takeover of Barcelona had been decisively smashed by the proletarian mobilization. But while workers militias controlled the streets of Barcelona, unified national organs of proletarian power like the Russian soviets never crystallized. The essential reason was the lack of a revolutionary party struggling to unite the working class for the seizure of state power, in opposition to the reformist traitors.

The Catalan government of Lluís Companys⁴ was entirely dependent on the leadership of the mass anarchist trade-union federation, the CNT. Companys invited the CNT-FAI (the anarchist union and party) and the centrist POUM to enter the Catalan government. And just like their more overtly reformist Stalinist and social-democratic counterparts elsewhere, the anarchist and centrist leaders in September 1936 jumped at the offer of ministerial portfolios! Only the entry of the CNT into the Catalan government

could have sufficiently strengthened Companys for a counter-revolutionary mobilization.

The crucial battle began on 3 May 1937 with the attempt by government riot police (led by the Stalinist Commissar of Public Order) to retake the Barcelona Telefónica (telephone exchange), the most prominent building in the city center which symbolized the seizure of industry and public services by workers committees. The Telefónica workers, predominantly loyal to the CNT, fought back fiercely. Word of the attack spread like wildfire: within hours barricades were up all over the city and by the first day, virtually all of Barcelona was in the hands of the workers. By nightfall, street-fighting had begun, as the popular-front government confronted the armed working masses.

The CNT-FAI maneuvered to negotiate the surrender of the Telefónica while issuing a leaflet exhorting the workers to lay down their arms. The militant CNT ranks were ill disposed to comply but, lacking organized leadership and in the face of the demoralizing treachery of their leaders, the workers drifted from the barricades. By May 6 the government had retaken control of the city. Reprisals were swift and bloody as police rampaged through the working-class districts.

The Barcelona May Days broke the back of the struggle against Franco. At the decisive moment, the anarchist leaders behaved like garden-variety reformist sellouts, serving as the last prop keeping Spanish bourgeois democracy afloat while crushing the workers. As Leon Trotsky explained:

"In opposing the *goal*, the conquest of power, the Anarchists could not in the end fail to oppose the *means*, the revolution. The leaders of the CNT and FAI not only helped the bourgeoisie hold on to the shadow of power in July 1936; they also helped it to reestablish bit by bit what it had lost at one stroke. In May 1937, they sabotaged the uprising of the workers and thereby saved the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Thus anarchism, which wished merely to be antipolitical, proved in reality to be antirevolutionary, and in the more critical moments—counterrevolutionary."

—"The Lessons of Spain: The Last Warning"
(December 1937)

Six decades after the betrayal of the Spanish Revolution by anarchists and Stalinists alike, Stalinism has been thoroughly discredited. Anarchism, on the other hand, has seen a certain revival in the recent period. This has been fostered by understandable disgust at the Stalinist perversion of the ideals of communism, demoralization in the face of the seeming stability of capitalism buoyed by the destruction of the USSR, and hatred of the reformist treachery of those who profess adherence to "socialism."

Anarchism, defeated by history, exposed in living class struggle and swept aside by the victory of authentic Marxism in October 1917, is again rearing its head. It would be a travesty if this false ideology—an extreme version of radical-democratic idealism—were permitted to deflect a new generation of would-be revolutionaries from the crucial task which remains before us: the building of a revolutionary leadership rooted in the proletariat, a Leninist vanguard party, the indispensable condition for decisive international victory of the workers and oppressed. We of the International Communist League are committed to this task of preparing for new Red Octobers throughout the world through winning young worker militants and leftist intellectuals to the program of proletarian revolution and the underlying principles of scientific socialism.

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